

## BARNSELEY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

**REPORT OF:** Executive Director Children's Services

**TITLE:** Great Childhoods Ambition: Free Bus Travel Pilot

<b>REPORT TO:</b>	<b>CABINET</b>
<b>Date of Meeting</b>	<b>02/04/2025</b>
<b>Cabinet Member Portfolio</b>	<b>Children's Services</b>
<b>Key Decision</b>	<b>No</b>
<b>Public or Private</b>	<b>Public</b>

### **Purpose of report**

The report seeks approval for developing and implementing a two-year free bus travel pilot for under 18s living in the Borough in collaboration with South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority (SYMCA).

### **Council Plan Priorities**

The proposal accords with all Council Priorities. Through a '*Healthy Barnsley*', a '*Learning Barnsley*' and a '*Growing Barnsley*', it will help enable all young people in the Borough including vulnerable and disadvantaged groups to live independent lives, through removing travel related barriers to accessing education, training and skills, thereby ensuring no young people are left behind, achieve their potential, maintain their overall wellbeing and enhance their life chances. It will also support a '*Sustainable Barnsley*' through encouraging young people to travel to school and college by bus thus reducing traffic at peak traffic times.

### **Recommendations**

That Cabinet:

- 1. Approve proceeding to the development and implementation of the two-year free bus travel pilot for under 18s living in the Borough**
- 2. Delegate responsibility to the Executive Director, Children's Services and Director of Finance to develop, in conjunction with SYMCA the business plan for the one-off investment of up to £5M over the next two financial years from the Council and note the investment secured from SYMCA of up to £1M**
- 3. Approve the receiving of further progress reports and an independent evaluation to assess the effectiveness of the pilot. This will then enable an evidence base for decision making on whether the continue the offer and/or roll out for all under 18s across South Yorkshire**

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1. We want Barnsley to be a place of possibilities for everyone. A place where children and young people from all backgrounds and starting points benefit from the opportunities that great childhoods can bring.
- 1.2. Our Great Childhoods Ambition Strategy (GCAS) will create a borough-wide, collaborative approach to ensure enriching experiences are available for children and young people to learn, grow and be inspired by the possibilities in Barnsley. The development of the GCAS focuses on five strategic priorities:

<b>GCAS Priority</b>	<b>Impact</b>
Belong	Children feel part of their community. We support them to have resilience and engage positively in their local area
Explore	All children have opportunities to explore and understand the wider world. We reduce barriers to developing cultural capital and special experiences in the arts, sports, and travel
Dream	Children are inspired to think big about their future. We provide opportunities to learn about a wide range of careers and experiences that ensure they are ready for the world of work
Grow	Children thrive and succeed as they grow up in Barnsley. We ensure they have opportunities to be healthy, confident and learn new things
Connect	Children and families have access to a connected and responsive system of support. We develop digital and systematic changes to the infrastructure around them to reduce barriers to access to support

- 1.3. A key enabler to achieving our GCAS is to address travel-related barriers for our children, young people, and their families. Barnsley will be Bold, Brave, and Innovative, through delivering a two-year pilot scheme with the potential for a wider roll out across the South Yorkshire region.
- 1.4. We have worked collaboratively with SYMCA colleagues, listening to their expert advice and knowledge to enable the drafting of this paper which assesses the suitability of different delivery model options.

## 2. PROPOSAL

- 2.1. The proposal is to offer free bus travel for all eligible children and young people under the age of 18 living in the Borough (the Scheme).
- 2.2. This means all bus journeys within South Yorkshire that start or finish in the Borough, between the hours of 7am – 9pm every day. The scope of the Scheme is in the table below:

Parameter	Description
Age	5 – 18 (the earlier of end of the academic year in which they turn 18 or 31 July 2027 <sup>1</sup> )
Route	Start or end in Barnsley for travel within South Yorkshire (e.g., Including travel to Meadowhall & back but not Meadowhall to Doncaster)
Start: Mon - Fri	7am
End: Mon – Fri	9pm
Weekends & Bank holidays	7am – 9pm
Barnsley LA School holidays	7am – 9pm
Travel type	Bus travel only
Pass fee	No charge for first pass
Replacement pass fee	Charge for replacement in line with SYMCA established processes
Pass type	Smartcard (physical card) only during pilot phase
Applications	Online and paper form

2.3. The Scheme is proposed go live on 1 August 2025 and the pilot will run for 2 years until 31 July 2027 (or the earlier of such time as the pilot is overtaken by a full roll out across South Yorkshire). It is proposed that there will be a process of ongoing assessment, measuring and monitoring of usage, cost and impact to enable overall decision making on the effectiveness and future viability of a South Yorkshire wide roll out.

2.4. It is proposed the Scheme will be commissioned by the Council and managed by SYMCA through their business as usual processes. A detailed and fully costed business plan setting out the roles and responsibilities of each organisation (including commitment to the critical path to achieve a 1 August go live date) will be developed to enable clarity for the partners, a robust delivery and will assess and address where necessary, the following risks and opportunities as a minimum:

- Demand & Financial impact (concessions costs): Anticipated under18s bus travel usage (demand) and cost modelling is being undertaken by SYMCA using established processes, assuming a range of between 0% – 100% increase on demand.
- Demand & Financial impact (capacity investment): Anticipated additional bus capacity to support the increased demand. Detailed cost modelling is being

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<sup>1</sup> 31 July 2027 being the end of the pilot.

prepared by SYMCA using established processes, assuming a demand increase of between 0% – 100%.

- Commuters: Demand and bus capacity modelling will be done with the expectation of maintaining commuter travel levels
- Risk of increased antisocial behaviour hotspots: The communications strategy will be designed with to include the Scheme expectations around the positive behaviours expected of card holders. The Council will also consider the deployment of additional wardens to promote safer communities.
- Safeguarding: The Council is imposing an end time of 9pm for the Scheme and we will consider safeguarding implications jointly with delivery and neighbourhood partners around children and young people travelling alone and/or in the evening.

### **3. IMPLICATIONS OF THE DECISION**

#### **3.1. Financial and Risk**

3.1.1. Representatives of the Section 151 Officer (Director of Finance) have been consulted on this proposal.

3.1.2. It is anticipated that there will be costs associated with increasing bus capacity, travel concessions (journeys), communications, pass technology development and distribution and evaluation. There is currently, up to £6M set aside for this Scheme:

3.1.2.1. The Council has provisionally set aside £5M

3.1.2.2. SYMCA has agreed further funding of up to £1M

3.1.3. A fully costed business case will now be prepared and subject to the usual governance processes. This will include detailed costings of the proposal, including concession charges and proactive plans for additional bus capacity in known hotspots and reactive demand management.

#### **3.2. Legal**

3.2.1. There are no legal implications associated with this report.

#### **3.3. Governance**

3.3.1. The decision in respect of this report is a decision of Cabinet by virtue of the Constitution 3c Part 2: Terms of Reference of the Cabinet and Arrangements for Delegated Decision Making by Cabinet paragraph 1, 1.1e which sets out *To approve, or approve variations to, strategies and policies, operational plans, programmes, and procedures, which are consistent with the budget and policy framework determined by the full Council* as the funding has been agreed in the budget approved on 27 February 2025.

#### **3.4. Equality**

3.4.1. A full Equality Impact Assessment of the proposals has been

undertaken and is appended to the report.

3.4.2. In summary the proposal is likely to have a net positive impact on children and families from low income households and will also benefit care-experienced young people.

### 3.5. Sustainability

3.5.1. Decision making wheel complete:



### 3.6. Employee

3.6.1. There are no plans to recruit additional Council resources to manage the free travel pilot, as the roll out of this will largely be delivered through existing business as usual processes within both the Council and SYMCA. Any additional SYMCA resources will be through their respective governance arrangements.

3.6.2. We have identified the potential need for additional temporary warden resources. That recruitment will be undertaken through the Council's standard recruitment processes and subject to the usual governance arrangements. Funding for such posts would be from the investment requested within this proposal.

### 3.7. Communications

3.7.1. The Scheme will be promoted extensively through education settings, our delivery partners, and the Council's media channels and networks.

## 4. CONSULTATION

4.1. The scope for the proposal has been assessed with the valuable help and input

of SYMCA colleagues. As the local transport authority, any transport concession scheme would require the Mayoral Combined Authority to work with the Council and bus network operators to negotiate and implement the proposed scheme.

4.2. The Council's Senior Management Team has also been consulted and has endorsed the proposal.

## **5. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

5.1. The primary alternative option to implementing free bus travel would be to do nothing and maintain the current travel concessions for young people. This would mean a missed opportunity to further embed the strategic priorities of the GCAS.

5.2. We considered a range of key parameters (incl. hours of operation, route, and demand capacity) to enable a successful roll out of the Scheme. Appendix 1 sets out the full scope of initial parameters, most of which are applicable for all delivery model options. The primary challenge and differential between the options is the Scheme's hours of operation. Barnsley's bus network is already nearing capacity at peak travel times.

## **6. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

6.1. Free bus travel would be a key enabler in helping children and young people Belong, Explore, Dream, Grow. Further it will enable them and their families to connect with vital services, activities and support across the Borough so they can experience an enriching and rewarding young life that will better prepare them for adulthood and citizenship.

6.2. The Proposal directly links to supporting the objective of breaking down travel related barriers to delivering on GCAS priorities (removing inequalities, improving attendance in school and college, enrichment activities, increasing independence etc). It also has a direct positive link to Barnsley 2030 through all strategic priorities:

6.3. Support's Barnsley's vision for our children and young people to be work and life ready through increased independence to access skills based training, college courses and higher education.

6.4. Being a universal offer (non means tested), the Proposal will have a positive financial impact for the increasing cohort of families in the Borough whose children are not eligible for zero fare passes but are struggling with the increases in cost of living.

6.5. This pilot will also provide an evidence base for South Yorkshire wide decision on whether to roll this out to all under18s within the Mayoral Combined Authority in the future.

## **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

7.1. If you would like to inspect background papers for this report, please email

[governance@barnsley.gov.uk](mailto:governance@barnsley.gov.uk) so that appropriate arrangements can be made

## 8. REPORT SIGN OFF

<b>Financial consultation &amp; sign off</b>	Senior Financial Services officer consulted and date  <b><i>K Knowles 5 Mar 2025</i></b>
<b>Legal consultation &amp; sign off</b>	Legal Services officer consulted and date  <b><i>Andrew Perriman 5 Mar 2025</i></b>

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**Date:** 4 March 2025