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<b>Report To:</b>	<b>Education and Communities Committee</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>7 May 2019</b>
<b>Report By:</b>	<b>Corporate Director Education, Communities and Organisational Development</b>	<b>Report No:</b>	<b>EDUCOM/57/19/GM</b>
<b>Contact Officer:</b>	<b>Grant McGovern Head of Inclusive Education, Culture and Communities</b>	<b>Contact No:</b>	<b>01475 712828</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Review of School Transport provision within Inverclyde</b>		

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## 1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to advise Members on the review of School Transport provision within Inverclyde and seek approval to communicate with parents and carers on a range of proposals for future implementation.

## 2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 Officers have undertaken a review of school transport to all secondary and primary schools within Inverclyde taking cognisance of the Council's current policy. In this regard Officers have worked alongside SPT to review transport arrangements. This includes the possibility of issuing bus passes for secondary school aged pupils who could access a service bus and providing a subsidised bus service for pupils where a service bus is not a viable option, which has been extensively adopted by other Authorities in the West of Scotland. This approach would assist in reducing costs and importantly making public bus provision more sustainable in the longer term. Members should be aware that transport contracts are managed for Inverclyde Council by Strathclyde Passenger Transport (SPT) through standard procurement and tendering procedures and awarded on a best value basis to private bus operators.
- 2.2 Inverclyde Council's policy on the provision of free school transport currently applies to those children and young people who live more than 1 mile from their catchment primary school and 2 miles for pupils attending secondary school. The distance is defined by a safe walking route and not a radius or direct line. This provision is significantly more generous than the statutory walking distance which is two miles for children less than 8 years-old and three miles for children aged 8 or over from a child's designated school.
- 2.3 In January 2017 a report was taken to the Education and Communities Committee on the outcome of the statutory consultation on the proposal to increase school transport eligibility for pupils to 2.5 miles in secondary schools and 1.5 miles in primary schools. At that time the decision was taken to maintain the status quo, including any existing interim travel arrangements. The interim provision is currently funded until June 2020 from the SEMP ..
- 2.4 The review has also involved examining the designation of safe walking routes to schools and the distance to the school from the point where the pupil's residence meets the common walkway/pavement to the main gate of the school. This has resulted in the opportunity to reduce the requirement for transport.
- 2.5 All schools within Inverclyde must have equal treatment in the provision of school transport,

otherwise the Council could be challenged in terms of meeting its public sector equality obligations as set out in [Section 1](#) of the Equality Act 2010. The proposals identified in this report ensure that the Council meets its equalities duties.

### **3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 It is recommended that Committee:

1. Approves officers holding a series of events to seek views on the introduction of bus passes for relevant pupils who qualify for free school transport
2. Approves the use of Global Information Measuring Systems to ensure the accurate measurement of safe routes to school including the adoption of the most appropriate access points to school premises.
3. Approves the transition arrangements proposed for schools currently operating outwith the Inverclyde policy for academic year 2019/20 and undertaking consultation with school communities to implement the proposed arrangements for 2020/21 all as outlined in paragraph 5.3.
4. Notes the application of the transport policy will be reviewed on an annual basis. This will include any changes to safe routes, use of public service routes and uptake of subsidised transport.
5. Refers the increased revenue costs from August 2020 to the Policy & Resources Committee for inclusion in the 2020/23 Revenue Budget process.

<b>Grant McGovern</b>
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<b>Education, Communities &amp; Organisational Development</b>

## **4.0 BACKGROUND**

- 4.1 The current practice adopted by Inverclyde is to provide school transport through the provision of private bus operators for all pupils which meet Inverclyde Council's current policy. Free school transport currently applies to those children and young people who live more than 1 mile from their catchment primary school and 2 miles for pupils attending secondary school. This provision is significantly more generous than that the statutory requirement of a 3 mile limit for children aged 8 years and over. School transport is not provided for those submitting a placing request to attend a school outwith their designated catchment area as outlined in Inverclyde's Placing Requests Policy (2017).
- 4.2 In January 2017 a report was taken to the Education and Communities Committee on the outcome of the statutory consultation on school transport. A statutory consultation had taken place to increase school transport eligibility for pupils to 2.5 miles in secondary schools and 1.5 miles in primary schools. At that time the decision was taken to maintain the status quo, including existing interim preferential travel arrangements for a number of schools. As part of the 2018/19 Budget it was agreed to fund the continuation of these interim arrangements until June 2020 from the SEMP model.
- 4.3 Inverclyde's policy on designation of safe walking routes to schools is based on advice given in the West of Scotland Guidelines. Inverclyde's policy also includes the requirement for appropriate lighting as part of the criteria for designation as a safe walking route. Inverclyde's current policy is to measure the distance to the school from the point where the pupil's residence meets the common walkway/pavement to the nearest identified pupil main entrance to the school grounds.

## **5.0 PROPOSALS**

- 5.1 Transport contracts are managed for Inverclyde Council by Strathclyde Passenger Transport (SPT) through standard procurement and tendering procedures and awarded on a best value basis to private bus operators. Where pupils are entitled to transport under the policy, issuing bus passes for public service routes rather than providing a contracted bus would be a cost effective solution. Inverclyde currently does not offer this option and is the only Council in the West not to do so and one of only 7 Councils across Scotland (Map attached as Appendix 1). It is understood that this option can be offered for all secondary schools. If pupils are entitled to transport and an appropriate public service route is not available then the Council would continue to provide contracted transport. It is proposed that Officers work with SPT to progress the implementation of bus passes for pupils, where appropriate and to communicate plans to parents/carers.
- 5.2 Inverclyde School Transport Team has until recently used an on-line mapping system to measure distance from home/school for the provision of free school transport. At those times when parents/carers appeal the decision not to grant school transport the Transport Team have accessed Inverclyde's Global Information System (GIS) supported by colleagues in the Safer Communities Service for more accurate measurements.

It is now proposed for various reasons, not least Inverclyde's legal responsibilities to equity of provision, that the Council policy will require that for all measurements for entitlement to free school transport to be completed taking cognisance of the following:

- Accuracy of measuring distances of safe walking routes through GIS on-line mapping systems;
- Upgrade of previously unsuitable walking routes or the provision of new safe walking routes;
- The design and refurbishment of schools that now provide alternative/multiple entrances.

### **5.3 Proposed transitional arrangements**

Whilst all schools with school transport requirements will be affected to some extent by the proposals in this paper, detailed below are schools with school transport provision which will be materially changed by the proposals in the report.:

- Inverkip Primary School – New footbridge provides closer access for pupils
- Clydeview Academy – New safe walking route provided
- Notre Dame High School – New upgraded safe walking routes provided
- St Columba’s High School – Opportunities for providing a subsidised bus

In recognition of the changes envisaged the following transition arrangements are proposed:

School	Proposed transitional arrangements
<p><b>St Columba’s High School</b> It is recognised that the lack of a direct bus route to St. Columba’s from the Braeside area has been a long standing concern for families who attend the school.</p>	<p>That Inverclyde Council fully funds additional buses to meet the needs of St. Columba’s pupils for academic year 2019/2020 living in the areas identified in Appendix 2 (Braeside/Bow Farm). This is because this route is in the unique situation that there is no alternative route to the school by public transport. In line with all other transition arrangements, pupils will receive a free bus pass for this time. Based on current contract prices the cost of these buses will be approximately £240k</p> <p>That in academic year 2020/21 Inverclyde Council continues to fund the additional bus services from the Braeside/Bow Farm area. For academic year 2020/21 pupils using the route would pay the cost of a weekly bus pass of £6.90/week with the Council subsidising any shortfall between the income received and the cost of the buses required.</p>
<p><b>Inverkip Primary</b></p>	<p>Inverkip Primary School transport arrangements would continue for academic year 2019/20.</p> <p>For academic year 2020/21 there are no plans to replace the service with bus passes for pupils. This is because the distance for primary school pupils is only one mile rather than two and there are no plans to review primary school transport to use public bus services. This proposal gives parents from Inverkip Primary School a year to make appropriate alternative arrangements and brings the school into line with all other primary schools in the area. Any pupils who live over a mile from the school by the safest walking route will continue to be entitled to free transport in line with Inverclyde’s policy.</p>
<p><b>Clydeview Academy and Notre Dame High Schools</b></p>	<p>For those pupils who will be affected by this review, it is proposed to have an interim solution for the academic year 2019/20 that will provide free bus passes for those students previously in receipt of transport but now no longer entitled due to the implementation of policy as outlined above. This interim solution will be in place for one year only. Whilst service buses are expected to be able to cope with the majority of students affected, if all pupils choose to use the bus then there are not enough service buses to cope with the number of pupils for Clydeview Academy. This means that Inverclyde Council would put in a similar provision to that proposed for St Columba’s High School and fund transport for those pupils. For academic year 2019/20 this would be free to pupils but for academic year 2020/21 pupils would be</p>

	asked to pay for a bus pass at the same rate as that proposed for St Columba's High School.
	Maps of the catchment areas and available routes for pupils affected are attached as Appendices 3 and 4.

Appendix 5 outlines the full costs of the current provision for schools affected by transition arrangements the cost of the proposed transition year for 2019/20 and the final costs for academic year 2020/21 if the transition plan is agreed.

#### 5.4 Consultation and communication

No statutory consultation in terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 is required for the implementation of any of the proposals. It is however recommended as a matter of good practice to communicate any proposals contained within the paper with stakeholders who will be affected by the decisions. Communication about the proposed change to issuing of bus passes will be undertaken in May and June 2019 with all secondary schools and any particular transition arrangements where schools are specifically affected will also be addressed.

#### 5.5 Arrangements for review

The application of the transport policy should be reviewed on an annual basis. This will include any changes to safe routes, use of public service routes and uptake of subsidised transport.

### 6.0 IMPLICATIONS

#### 6.1 Financial Implications - One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Year	Proposed Spend this Report £000	Virement From	Other Comments
SEMP	Earmarked Reserve	Aug'19/June'20	349		

#### Financial Implications - Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact £000	Virement From (if applicable)	Other Comments
Education	School Transport	August 2020	168		On going increased recurring costs based on current uptake and proposals. To be referred to the 2020/23 Budget process

The majority of the funding for the existing arrangements is currently taken from SEMP but this cannot be sustained beyond June 2020. The proposals contained within this report will produce some saving on the current provision through the issuing of bus passes and removal of routes which no longer fit the criteria. The proposal is based on current uptake and Committee will be advised of any changes to these figures.

#### 6.2 Human Resources

N/A.

### **6.3 Legal**

Local authorities have a statutory obligation to provide free school transport. There remains concerns that by not fully implementing its policy on school transport the Council may be open to challenge in terms of the Equalities Act 2010.

In relation to the proposal for St Columba's High School set out at paragraph 5.3, officers looked at whether the Council could subsidise a registered local public bus service on the direct route. However, following discussion with SPT Legal Officers, it is clear that Inverclyde Council has no powers whatsoever to subsidise a public registered bus service for the affected pupils. SPT is the relevant organisation who has such powers, but their guidelines specifically prohibit SPT from subsidising a local bus service designed to serve "non-entitled" children in terms of home to school transport.

### **6.4 Equalities**

The Council is of the view that the public sector equality duty applies when the Council makes decisions about school transport.

### **6.5 Repopulation**

N/A.

## **7.0 CONSULTATIONS**

- 7.1 A comprehensive consultation on school transport was undertaken in November/ December 2016.  
CMT endorse this proposal.

## **8.0 CONCLUSIONS**

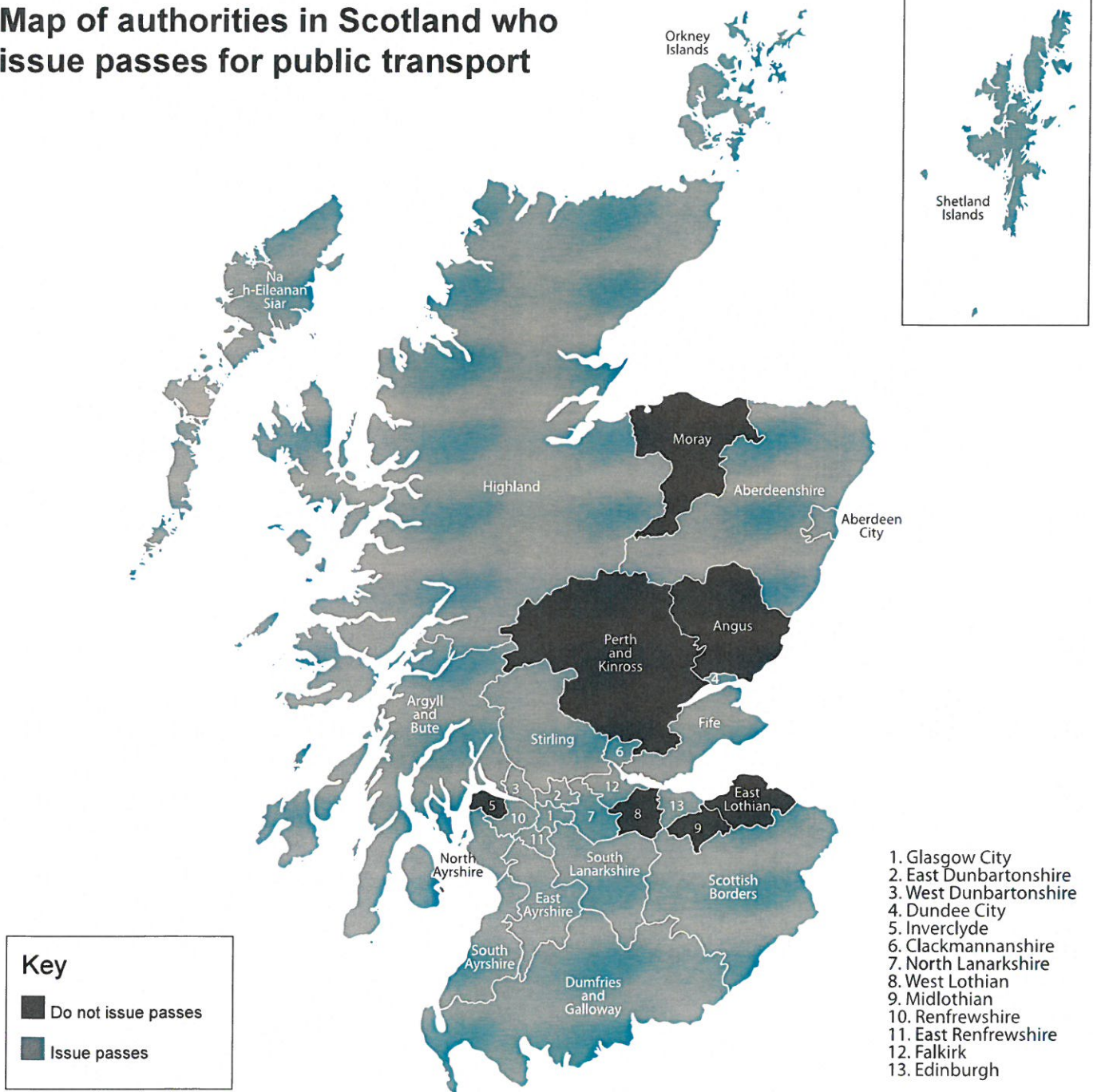
- 8.1 In the current financial climate where the Council is facing severe financial constraints, it is appropriate to review the current school transport provision in the context of the extremely challenging financial position faced by the Council in coming years. The review of school transport will also enable Inverclyde Council to ensure equality of school transport provision across all our schools.

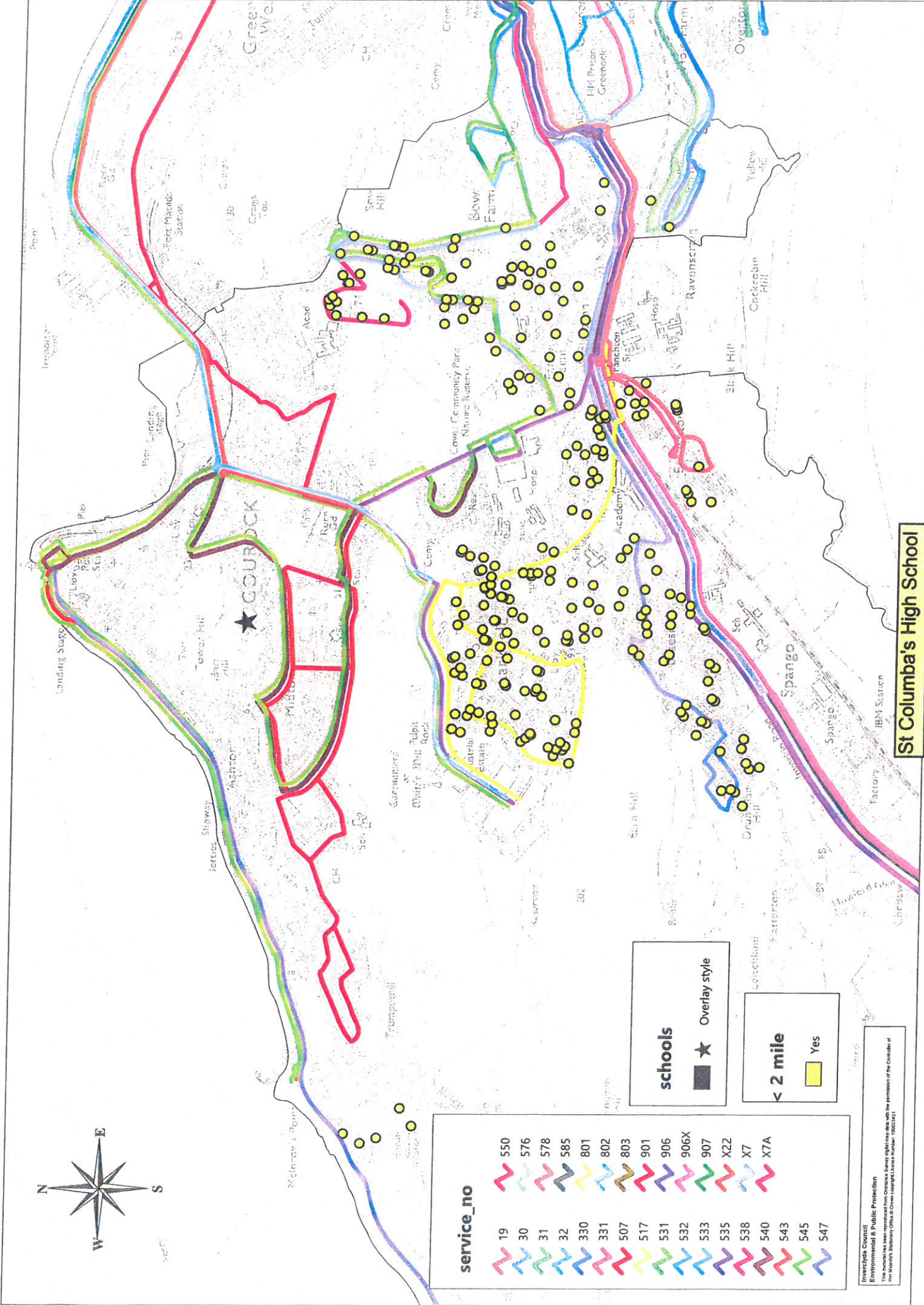
Any future on going additional transport costs will require to be considered by the Council as part of the 2020/23 budget

## **9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 9.1 Outcome of Statutory Consultation on School Transport Review Education Committee January 2017.

# Map of authorities in Scotland who issue passes for public transport





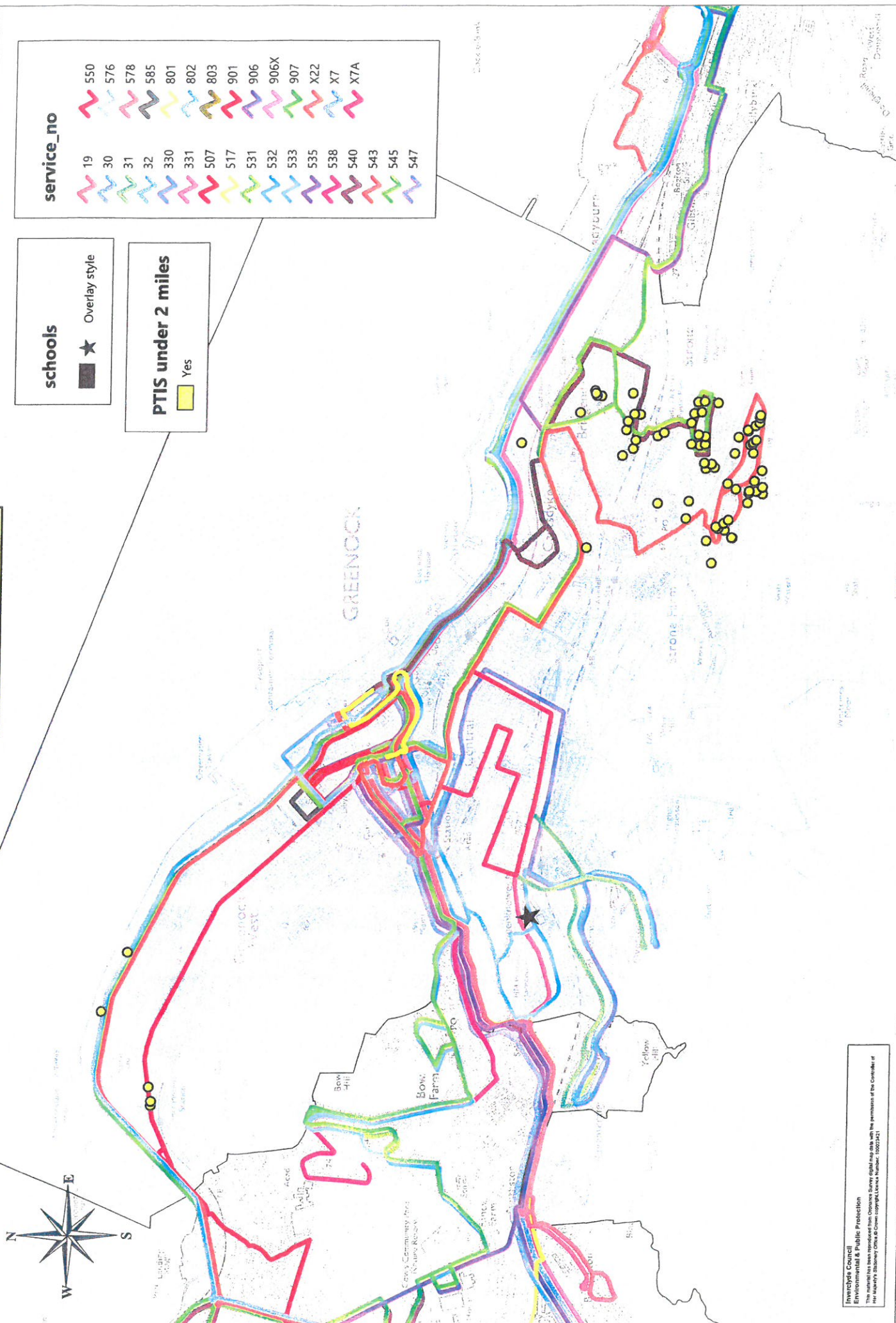
St Columba's High School

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Notre Dame High School



SEMP	2018/19 Academic Year Current £000	2019/20 Transition Current £000	2020/21 Steady State Current £000	
St Columbas	239.4	239.4	159	Note 1
Inverkip	39.9	39.9	4	Note 2
Clydeview	94.0	70	30	Note 3
SEMP Cost	373.3	349.3	193	
<u>Non-SEMP</u>				
Notre Dame	81.4	66.1	55.9	Note 4
Total	454.7	415.4	248.9	

Overall Pressure from 2020/21 Budget Year is £193k + 56k - 81k = £168k

Notes

- 1/ Assumes 292 pupils pay £276/year for a bus pass and current contract costs remain the same.
- 2/ Based on 4 qualifying pupils from 2020/21.
- 3a/ Transition assumes 70 pupils will get a bus provided by the Council whilst 72 will use public transport and be provided with a bus pass by the Council.  
b/ Steady state assumes all 142 pay for a bus pass and the Council continues to provide a bus for 70.
- 4/ Based on a current unit cost of £690/pupil (for 118 pupils). Assumes 37 will be bought passes in the Transition Year to use on public buses and from 2020/21, 37 will pay for a bus pass.

AP/LA  
25/4/19