

Home to School Transport

1.0 Introduction

1.1 BMBC has a statutory duty under section 508A and 508D of the Education Act 1996 (amended by the Education and Inspections Act 2006) to ensure that travel assistance, as it considers necessary, are made to facilitate attendance at school for eligible children or students. The Council's Home to School Transport Policy sets out BMBC's arrangement for facilitating this statutory duty. The current Home to School transport policy dated 2018 -2021 is the latest policy and its contents still apply, pending a review in 2023/24.

1.2 Travel Assistance is provided as follows:

- Mainstream pupils up to the age of 16, who live more than 2 miles from their nearest school under the age of 8, or 3 miles aged 8 years and over, or do not have a safe walking route to school. Mainstream pupils eligible for travel assistance are usually provided with a zoom zero bus pass.
- Special educational needs and or disabilities. If a pupil has been placed at a setting that can meet the pupil's needs by the local authority that setting for the purposes of applying the Home to School Transport Policy is the nearest school. Pupils eligible for travel assistance can access a range of assistance packages; personal travel budget (PTB) for parents or carers to take them to school, independent travel training to assist the pupil with their walking route or bus route to school, a seat in a multi-occupancy vehicle such as a minibus, or a single occupancy taxi. The ability and specific needs of the pupil, in consultation with parents and carers determine which package they end up with.

1.3 Eligibility to receive travel assistance in the case of mainstream pupils is determined by the Home to School Travel Assistance team through the application of the Council's Home to School Travel Assistance Policy. Eligibility for pupils with special educational needs and or disabilities is determined by a monthly Travel Assessment Panel. Members of the panel include Group Manager Travel Assistance team, Education. Health Care Plan team manager, Independent Travel training manager and a manager of looked after children.

1.4 If a parent/carer disagrees with the decision of either the travel assessment panel or in the case of mainstream pupils, the travel assistance team they have the right to appeal. Stage 1 appeal is heard by the Head of Service and stage 2 is heard by an independent panel.

2.0 Current Position

2.1 Pupils meeting the eligibility criteria for travel assistance is increasing year on year which is putting a huge strain on funding as shown in the table below:-

Key data sets	July 2017	July 2018	July 2019	July 2020	July 2021	July 2022	% Increase 2017 –2022
Total special education need / disabilities either in minibuses or taxis	597	634	667	680	708	761	27.47
Total number of <u>in borough</u> children	475	479	491	496	511	525	10.52
No of <u>in-borough</u> locations	24	28	28	25	30	36	50
Total number of out borough pupils	122	155	176	184	197	236	93.44
No of out - <u>borough</u> locations	30	33	33	35	35	40	33.33
No of passenger assistants required	78	85	91	102	113	121	55.13
No of mainstream pupils with free bus pass	444	534	650	712	884	986	122

3.0 Mitigation Measures

3.1 In 2019, a number of initiatives were introduced to mitigate against the increasing numbers of pupils requiring travel assistance to school and subsequent spiralling costs.

Key data sets	July 2017	July 2018	July 2019	July 2020	July 2021	July 2022	% Increase 2017 –2022
Total number of parents / carers receiving a personal travel budget	0	0	24	33	113	155	155
No inhouse routes	0	0	0	11	18	26	26
No of pupils independently travel trained	1	4	25	0	0	12	12

3.2 As can be seen from the above table the implementation of personal travel budgets has been extremely successful and has removed to date 155 pupils from requiring school transport. A personal travel budget is cheaper than the cost of providing transport and it alleviates an overloaded system. Parents and carers have the right to refuse a personal travel budget in favour of organised transport.

3.3 In house routes have also steadily increased since their introduction. They are used to plug the gaps where commercial providers struggle such as provision of wheelchair accessible transport and where tendered prices for a route is high and a cost saving can be made.

3.4 Independent Travel Training, the final initiative implemented to help mitigate against the increasing pupil numbers requiring transport and spiralling cost of transport provision, has had a chequered success rate caused by Covid. After reaching an all time high of 25 pupils the service was hit by Covid and unable to continue for a couple of years. The Service has now resumed, and it is anticipated that numbers will continue to increase.

4.0 Future Plans and Challenges

4.1 As part of the business unit's continuous improvement philosophy, Home to School Transport will look at several areas to streamline systems and reduce or control costs in 2023/24. This work will be key for the upcoming transformation review in the coming year.