

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is not a Key Decision within the council's definition and has not been included in the relevant Forward Plan

**Report of Executive
Director, Place Directorate**

TRAVEL ASSISTANCE POLICY – CONSULTATION RECOMMENDATIONS ON UPDATED POLICY

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to present the draft updated Travel assistance Policy. This is an updated document of the authorities' last Home to School Transport Policy 2015-16. This report conveys and highlights the main planned changes that the authority would like to see incorporated into the updated policy. This report seeks to gain support to consult with the residents and relevant stakeholders of the borough prior to an implementation of the updated policy planned for 1st April 2017.

2. Recommendation

- 2.1 That Cabinet supports the draft Travel Assistance Policy.
- 2.2 That Cabinet supports the decision to undertake a nine-week consultation period commencing in November on this updated policy.

3. Introduction

- 3.0 As part of Future Council, transportation for eligible children, young people and adults have been brought together under BU 6 Environment & Transport, within the Place Directorate. The current Travel Policy expires at the end of 2016. A 'One Council' joint task & finish group from different business units have worked together to update the policy in line with our corporate strategy; that is to support eligible children and adults with the provision of statutorily required services that encourage and support independence.

As part of this group's work it built upon the review of transport services undertaken in 2014. This work benchmarked our services against many other local authorities in the region. This draft policy has been centred on Doncaster's recent update of the policy to bring service convergence and consistency across south Yorkshire.

- 3.1 This draft updated policy has been developed around the following key aims:
- To meet our corporate strategy to create and support independence;
 - To provide a more sustainable, efficient and effect service offer;

- To update our policy in line with best practices recommended by Department for Education;
- To align our updated policy more closely with our adjacent south Yorkshire authorities and those services that South Yorkshire Passenger Transport support; and
- To support and compliment the Barnsley SEND Strategy 2016-18.

3.2 This is part of a wider series of changes being introduced to improve the service offer to eligible children and adults across the borough. The four key themes of this work are:

1. To improve the daily operations of the transport service to eligible children, young people and adults;
2. To improve the provision of services through better use of third party providers;
3. To update and improve the provision of services through a refocussed Travel Assistance Policy; and
4. To work with other authorities and the SYPTE to bring about improved collaborative working and better use of resources.

3.3 This Policy is prepared in response to the duties of Barnsley Metropolitan Borough Council (BMBC), under section 508B of the Education Act 1996, (amended by Education and Inspections Act 2006) which deals with the duty of Local Authorities in England to ensure that suitable travel assistance as it considers necessary are made to facilitate attendance at school for eligible children or students. The Council's policy is to provide free school transport (referred to in the Act and in this document as "Travel Assistance") to these categories of eligible children in accordance with its legal obligations, but not otherwise unless there are exceptional circumstances. This travel assistance policy has been designed to and compliments the school curriculum in providing the skills to create independence. It will provide support to eligible children to encourage independent travel.

The policy summarises the categories of eligible children set out in the Act who are entitled to travel assistance. It also sets out how parents or carers must apply for travel assistance, how decisions are made and how parents and carers may appeal against decisions that they are unhappy with.

3.4 Key changes to the policy include:-

3.4.1 Introduction of a hierarchy of options: To encourage and support the strategy of creating independence. Unless otherwise specified, travel assistance will normally comprise of one of the following options for pupils:

- A Zero Fare Pass (ZFP) Passes are purchased by the LA from South Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive (SYPTTE);
- Personal Budgets – In Particular for pupils having SEN or EHCP, provision of payment through personal budget;
- Mileage Reimbursement – Paid half termly or termly retrospectively, based on the Families choice;
- Independent Travel Training – Provision of training as part of a pupils curriculum to encourage independence; and
- Travel Assistance - Via a coach, mini-bus, people carrier or taxi/private hire or similar vehicle.

3.4.2 The introduction of annual reviews: As part of the LA's corporate strategy to develop people to their full potential aligned with the Key Stages of the educational curriculum, the Travel Assistance provision will be reviewed to assist in the development of independence for any qualifying pupil who is in receipt of services through this policy. At the present moment this is not a formal part of the process and will place a demand on both People and Place directorates.

3.4.3 Greater dependency and use of Travel Training as an option: Historically this has been a reactive and passive-based service. The updated policy will consider this as a clear option within the hierarchy. The benefits of travel training are proven to show greater access to education and employment opportunities. In addition the outcomes from this included greater accessibility, road safety awareness, improved health and a reduction of dependency of social services and the like. This will place a resource demand on the Communities directorate's Travel Training team.

3.4.4 The introduction and use of the Personal Budget: Represents a change in the provision of services within this policy. It seeks to place the choice of provision with the parents and carers. This process will place a resource demand on People and Place directorates with respect to the administration and management.

3.4.5 Review of the appeals process: The present appeals process was not in keeping with the best practice advised by the Department for Education. Therefore this has been amended.

3.4.6 Following the consultation in 2015 with respect to removing non-statutory transport for post 16 with an SEN statement; this element of the policy has been retained. This was an approved KLOEs to save £40k.

4. Consideration of alternative approaches

N/A

5. Proposal and justification

- 5.1 Presently there are a number of significant changes in national policy for health, special educational needs and disability, which will impact upon the delivery of this service, by increasing demand on limited resources.
- 5.2 In January 2015, Barnsley's SEN population was 16.1% compared with 15.4% nationally.
- 5.3 Barnsley generally has higher numbers of children subject to a statement of SEN or an Education, Health & Care Plan (EHCP) than is the case regionally, 1.3% higher and nationally 1% higher.
- 5.4 Statements / EHCP as a % of school population (Jan 2015)
- England 2.85%
 - Yorkshire & Humber 2.4%
 - Barnsley 3.8%
- 5.5 Barnsley has good provision of specialist educational establishments within the borough, albeit as of May 2016 there are 92 children placed in out of borough independent special schools. This number is increasing each year.
- 5.6 The following table indicates the recent change in demand since April 2014.

Objective Measure	Apr 14	Apr 15	Apr 16	May 16	Jun 16	Jul 16	Aug 16	Sept 16	Oct 16	Comments
Number of Children Statutory (Mainstream) Zero Fare Passes (ZFP)	566	511	478	478	478	478	478	378	448**	
Number of Children Statutory Special Educational Needs (SEN)	392	448	495	492	501	501	501	508	519	
Average Cost per Child – SEN	-	-	14.68	14.63	14.91	14.91	14.91	Not yet confirmed	Not Yet confirmed	Purchased Orders are Still being raised
Number of vehicles used	85	96	100	100	100	100	100	96	105	
Number of Escorts used	60	65	71	71	71	71	71	81	83*	

*This figure includes some parents who are acting as escorts for their own children.

** Number of ZFP on issue as at 07/10/16. This is ongoing. As expected, sporadic applications are still being received.

- 5.7 The following table identifies the number of children we are providing services to:

Category of Pupil/Student	As at 07.10.2016	Remarks
Mainstream - Zero Fare Passes (ZFP)	448	Daily requests still being made for service

Statutory Pupils aged 5 to 16 - SEN	429	Transport provided to Special Schools both in and out of the Borough.
Pre 5 - SEN	5	4 to Greenacre & 1 to Royston Meadstead Primary
Post 16 - Mainstream	0	Nil
Post 16 - SEN	84	71 to Greenacre & 13 to other Schools
Post 19	1	to Portland College, Notts. This placement ceases at the end of this academic year.
TOTAL	967	

5.8 To deliver the key aims of section 3.1 this policy represents a conscious change strategically from a policy based upon provision of transport services to one that provides assistance with transport services. This aligns with one of our Future Council Priorities - 'People achieving their potential' and is centred upon providing assistance where appropriate to help people help themselves; it is about being an enabling organisation.

5.9 The key changes to the new draft Travel Assistance Policy and those that we need to consult over are:

- Greater promotion and planned use of the Travel Training service;
- Introduction of payments for transportation alternatives within a Personal Budget; and
- Deletion of travel assistance for pupils' attending denominational schools.

5.10 In 2015, a seven-week consultation period ran from 23rd February, to 17th April. It sought the view of parents, carers and guardians of children who received free home to school transport services, in particular for the following proposed changes:-

Pre-School Children:

Either

- Withdraw or phase out free, non-statutory home to school transport for pre-school children, or
- Introduce a charge for this service.

Young People Aged Over 16:

Either

- Withdraw or phase out free, non-statutory home to school transport for young people aged over 16 with SEN or
- Introduce a charge for this service

5.11 The outcome from this consultation for pre-school children was to make the changes to this updated policy for non-statutory home to school. For 16/17 there are not any pre-school children that this service is provided to.

5.12 The outcome for young people aged over 16 with SEN for non-statutory home to school was overwhelmingly in favour to retain the service. As part of the

consultation there was concerns raised by equality forums, local MPs and those that used the Engage system.

6. Implications for local people / service users

No immediate changes as a result of this updated policy. Eligible children and young people in receipt of services through this policy will continue to receive services, albeit this will change and evolve over time as the reviews of services becomes more embedded into the process and as we seek to provide services that help people help themselves.

7. Financial implications

7.1 The Travel Assistance function continues to face significant financial pressures. Whilst the additional cost as a result of the increase in users of the service has been recently recognised within the Council Medium Term Financial Strategy, the service still shows a forecast overspend as reported in the recent Quarterly Monitoring Report.

7.2 Future delivery of a balance budget for the service is heavily predicated on the adoption, strict control and adherence of this new policy. This will be monitored carefully from 1st April 2017 with any variations reported through the normal financial performance monitoring route

8. Employee implications

N/A

9. Consultations

Internal consultation has been undertaken. External consultation has been undertaken with other local authorities. Previous consultations on Home to School have also been considered in the development of this report and appendix. This report seeking support to consult with service users and key stakeholders.

10. List of Appendices

10.1 Appendix one – draft Transport Assistance Policy

11. Background Papers

None

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