

BARNSELY METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

This matter is a Key Decision within the Council's definition and has been included in the relevant Forward Plan

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR FOR PLACE TO CABINET ON 3 MAY 2017

Travel Assistance Consultation Findings

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 On 16th November 2016 Cabinet supported the recommendations for the draft Travel Assistance Policy and to support the decision to undertake a nine-week consultation period on the updated draft policy.
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to provide a summary of the consultation findings and to seek support for the implementation of the updated Travel Assistance Policy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That Cabinet is minded to accept the consultation and its findings;
- 2.2 that Cabinet supports the strategic drive of alternative transport provisions such as travel training; the use of personal budgets; and mileage payments to be used as a way of developing independence in children, providing them with life skills and preparing them for further education, apprenticeships or employment;
- 2.3 that Cabinet supports to engage with parents, carers, guardians and key professional stakeholders to co-produce policy processes and guide(s) to support the Travel Assistance policy;
- 2.4 that Cabinet supports the recommendation to implement the Travel Assistance Policy thereafter; and
- 2.5 that Cabinet supports the implementation of the updated Travel Assistance Policy which incorporates the minor amendments which arose from the consultation activity.

3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1 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 expired 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.

3.2 The updated policy has been developed around the following key aims:

- To provide travel assistance services that offer a more bespoke arrangement that compliments the development of Independence in children
- 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.

3.3 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.

3.4 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 apply for travel

assistance, how decisions are made and how parents and carers may appeal against decisions that they are unhappy with.

3.5 Key changes to the policy include:-

3.5.1 To expand the range of options: To encourage and support the strategy of creating independence. Unless otherwise specified, travel assistance will normally comprise of one or more 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.

3.5.2 To introduce regular transport assistance review: 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.

3.5.3 Greater dependency and use of Travel Training as an option: Historically this has been a reactive 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.

3.5.4 To introduce the 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.

3.5.5 Simplify 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.

4. PROPOSAL AND JUSTIFICATION

4.1 As per recommendation the Authority consulted with the public over the proposed draft Travel Assistance Policy. The purpose of the consultation was to engage with the parents, carers, guardians of service users and those involved with the service from a professional perspective. For this section this will be known as the 'Public

Consultation'. In addition, a second simplified survey questionnaire was produced aimed directly at children being the users of the service. This in particular is picked up in Section 4.13 and is referred to in this report as the 'Child Pupil Survey'.

- 4.2 In summary, there was a good level of engagement for the Public Consultation & the Child Pupil Survey through the UEngage portal. In addition we also received some limited feedback directly through staff; through social media and through direct correspondence with key stakeholders. In terms direct correspondence we wrote to c500 service users twice making them aware of the consultation process. Please see Appendix 1 & 2 for details.
- 4.3 Of 97 online responses received in the Public Consultation, 83 (or 86%) were from parents, carers or guardians with a stake in the proposals. 7 respondents (7%) were from either a school governor or teacher and a further 8 respondents were from consultees who were responding on behalf of an organisation with an interest in the proposals. These included the Barnsley Special Educational Needs and Disability Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS).
- 4.4 It should be noted, that whilst this represented a good level of engagement responses were primarily from children or pupils with a Statement of SEN (45%) and or EHCP (43.5%). Parents, carers or guardians of children in receipt of Zero Fair Passes did not provide consultation feedback to the same degree.
- 4.5 A majority of those who provided consultation responses did indicate (74%) that their children's lives were significantly impacted by a complex health issue, such as a disability. A further 14% said that the health issue impacted on the child or pupil's daily life a little.
- 4.6 With the consultation responses received being largely from parents, carers or guardians of children or pupils with a Statement of SEN and or EHCP it is understanding that there would be some concern about supporting greater independence in traveling between home and school. 58% of respondents did not support this option, albeit and encouragingly, a higher than expected 26% of responses said that they support giving greater independence and choice when travelling between home and school.
- 4.7 It is reasonable to state that a broad correlation of those that did not support were from parents, carers or guardians. Whilst those that did support were from a professional capacity.
- 4.8 The main concerns from parents, carers or guardians that were not in support were associated with child safety, safeguarding, length and complexity of journeys, whilst also concerned about physical and emotional well-being of their children.
- 4.9 Respondents were asked what impacts this policy would have on their family life and work. A large majority of respondents identified that it would have a negative impact. Impacting on working hours and jobs.
- 4.10 From the Public Consultation there was a clear majority of respondents in support of mini buses/taxis the overall preference overall of 38%.

- 4.11 Clause 9.13 within the draft policy will be updated in line with a Court of Appeal Judgement. Where a child has a SEN or EHCP and parental preference is for the child to attend an establishment further away than that recommended in the Statement, the Authority must weigh the relative costs and reasons for the parental preference and reach a decision which is proportionate and compatible with the efficient use of resources. This clause will be amended accordingly.
- 4.12 Outside of the UEngage we did receive a small number of comments via social media; shared directly with the team; and through email. The content of these were in keeping with the UEngage responses.
- 4.13 With reference to the Child Pupil Survey, the strategy of this was to offer the ability for service users to feedback directly. Whilst the intent was correct noting the analysis of the separate survey, Cabinet should be mindful that a substantial majority of respondents were from a single Post Code and confirmed that, since they did not have a SEN, EHCP, a disability or complex health need, they would not be affected by the proposals set out in the consultation paper. Therefore, Cabinet is requested to treat the outcome of the Children's survey with a level of caution when considering its recommendation on the proposal. Please see Appendix 2.
- 4.14 In conclusion the consultation has found that there are understandably levels of concern and anxiety from parents, carers and guardians in respect of potential change, and recognition that if handled appropriately the updated policy can be implemented without further need for redrafting or additional consultation.
- 4.15 In implementing this policy it is clear from the consultation responses that we need to develop a strategy to manage anxieties through the implementation of this policy. Engaging and co-producing commissioning processes and policy guides will serve to address such concerns.

5. CONSIDERATION OF ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES

- 5.1 Consultation findings outlined concerns with the proposed Travel Assistance Policy. With this it is evident that all proposed Policy Changes will need to be handled carefully and implemented only when it will ensure that any child or pupil should be no worse off from any proposed changes. This is in keeping with the legislative requirements for children's needs.

6. IMPLICATIONS FOR LOCAL PEOPLE/SERVICE USERS

- 6.1 No immediate changes as a result of the consultation. 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

8.1 In the present and foreseeable future demand is expected to rise for children who are or will be eligible for Travel Assistance. This will mean that additional resources will need to be provided to support service users. It is anticipated that this additional resourcing will be focused around managing the service; the provision of drivers and escorts; and in the travel training service.

9. COMMUNICATIONS IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Evident from the findings of the consultation there is a need to produce a parents, carers and guardians guide to accompany the updated policy.

10. CONSULTATIONS

- 10.1 Appendix 1 & 2 provide analysis of the responses received on the Uneage system. The profile of the respondents for appendix 1 is reflective of the boroughs' demographic given the targeted nature of this service. The profile of appendix 2 did not reflect the borough demographic profile. It was felt that this was due to many responses having been received from a very small area of the borough.
- 10.2 A 'One Council' Task and Finish group with representation from all directorates involved in the delivery of this Policy have been consulted in the development of this policy and report
- 10.3 A draft of this report has been to Place, People and Communities DMT meetings for their consideration and input.

11. LIST OF APPENDICES

- 11.1 Outcome from the public consultation appendix 1 & 2.

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