



Report to Transport, Environment and Climate Change Select Committee

Date:	3 November 2022
Title:	Home to School Transport in Buckinghamshire
Cabinet Member(s):	Steven Broadbent, Cabinet Member for Transport
Contact officer:	Cheryl Platts, Transport Policy & Improvement Manager
Ward(s) affected:	none specific
Recommendations:	That the TECC Select Committee note the update on home to school transport in Buckinghamshire

1. Executive summary

- 1.1 The purpose of this paper is to provide an update on home to school transport. This paper also provides an introduction and progress update on the Client Transport Improvement Programme.

2. Content of report

Background

- 2.1 Transport Services supports and enables high quality, efficient and safe transport solutions so that children and adults are able to get to school, work and access public services.
- 2.2 This briefing paper covers the Client Transport Service, within Transport Services, which provides home to school transport for eligible children of statutory school age (5 to 16 years old), pupil referral unit (PRU) transport, and travel assistance for eligible Post-16 (of sixth form age) students and young people with SEND up to the age of 25.
- 2.3 In 2021/22 the Council provided home to school transport for approximately 7,850 children and young people. This comprised of 7,200 students who were eligible for

school transport assistance in line with the Council's [Home to School Transport Policy](#), made up of approximately 4,700 mainstream students and 2,500 students with SEND. In addition to eligible students, the Council transported approximately 650 non-eligible "spare seats" (i.e. paid-for school bus transport) students on some of our school buses.

- 2.4 The service also provides social care transport for 245 adults with additional needs, and 49 children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) who either have social care plans (i.e. respite arrangements) or who are children in care.
- 2.5 Over the last 5 years there has been a significant demand increase in SEND Transport in line with demographic growth. Locally the demand for SEND Transport has increased in line with the growth in Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs) though at a lower rate of growth. Since 2017-18 an additional 517 children in 2021-22 were provided with Council-arranged transport in line with statutory requirements. This equates to a 26% increase in demand for SEND transport over this period, in comparison to a 39% increase in EHCPs.

The percentage change of eligible young people with SEND year on year and vs. 2017-18 are shown in the table below.

School year	Total no. of eligible SEND young people (including PTBs)	% change in total number of eligible SEND young people from previous year	% change in total number of eligible SEND young people since 2017-18
2017-18	2,024	-	-
2018-19	2,306	14%	14%
2019-20 ¹	2,106	-9%	4%
2020-21	2,296	9%	13%
2021-22	2,541	11%	26%

Policy Context

- 2.6 The Council's [Home to School Transport Policy](#) describes the policy for home to school travel assistance and the criteria applied to determine eligibility. Our policy discharges our statutory duty. The key areas of statutory duty are to:
- Make transport arrangements for all eligible children. For eligible children of statutory school age (5 to 16 years), the travel arrangements must be free of charge to parents/carers. There are four categories of statutory school age

¹ Decrease is attributed to the Covid-19 pandemic

students living in Buckinghamshire and attending their nearest suitable school who are eligible for Council funded travel assistance:

- children who live beyond the statutory walking distance
 - children from low income families
 - children whose walking route to school is unsafe
 - children with Special Educational Needs (SEN), a disability or a mobility difficulty and who are unable to travel independently from home to school.
- Prepare and publish an annual transport policy statement specifying the arrangements for the provision of transport, or otherwise that the authority considers necessary to make, to facilitate the attendance of all persons of sixth form age receiving education or training.
 - Encourage, enable and assist the participation of young people with special educational needs and disabilities up to the age of 25 in education and training.
- 2.7 Nationally, as is the case at Buckinghamshire Council, all other councils are facing increased pressures on home to school transport budgets, particularly SEND Transport.
- 2.8 In May 2019 the LGA [commissioned a research report](#) to understand the drivers of increased pressures on home-to-school transport budgets; how councils seek to bring budgets under control; and what they need to support them to do this. Key issues identified which are in line with the experience in Buckinghamshire are:
- Market pressures affecting the cost of mainstream and SEND home to school transport
 - Increasing numbers of children with Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs)
 - Increasing complexity of needs
 - Increasing distance travelled due to school occupancy and distribution of specialist provision

School Transport – School Term Start Update

- 2.9 Over the last two to three years there has been a marked improvement in the school term start arrangements. This is evidenced by:
- An effective issuing of bus passes. Whilst a few temporary school bus passes were in use in September 2020, all school bus passes (approximately 4,200 passes) were issued by the stated deadlines in August 2021 and August 2022.
 - An improved online Spare Seat application process. This has enabled parents to have better information on the availability of spare seats before they apply.

This has improved the success rate for parents to secure paid-for seats from about 50% in 2020, to 84% in July 2021 and 89% in July 2022.

- A reduction in customer contact. When comparing our peak customer enquiry period from July to September, there has been a 37% reduction in school transport enquiries. This can be attributed to a significant improvement in school transport communications with better online information and personalised letters in 2022.
 - From 1 July to 30 September 2021 we received 5,091 school transport enquiries, of which 70% were responded to within 5 working days.
 - From 1 July to 30 September 2022, we received 3,195 school transport enquiries, of which 84% were responded to within 5 working days.
- A reduction in complaints. When comparing our total number of Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints from July to September 2021 (29 complaints) vs. July to September 2022 (23 complaints), there has been a 21% reduction in school transport complaints.
- An increase in Personal Transport Budgets. Personal Transport Budgets (PTBs) were introduced in 2021. As at March 2022, 370 PTBs had been taken up for the 2021-22 academic year. In comparison, as at 30 September 2022 almost 440 PTB offers had been made (including over 230 PTB renewals) for the 2022-23 academic year.

The Client Transport Improvement Programme

2.10 Since 2020 Client Transport has been on an improvement journey, which is tracked and managed through a Client Transport Improvement Programme. The programme is overseen by the Service Director for Transport Services with a board membership which includes the Corporate Director for Communities, the Cabinet Member for Transport and other senior officers from across the Council. The objectives of the programme are:

- To improve the customer experience.
- To ensure that the service has effective budgetary control.
- To ensure that the service operating model is sustainable, effective and efficient with robust contract management.
- To reduce demand and need for Council arranged transport through providing alternative transport solutions.

2.11 The key achievements of the Client Transport Improvement Programme to date include:



- Transport retendering complete. Since January 2021 a total of 1,300 contracts have been retendered covering all school, college, PRU and adult social care transport. School transport retendering has delivered annual savings of approximately £3m.
- Increase in the number of school bus routes run commercially. In 2021 and 2022 the service successfully encouraged the set-up of 18 new commercial school bus routes. It is faster to book and secure a seat with a commercial operator, which results in a better customer experience for parents/carers. It has also enabled a significant reduction and remodelling of the Council's school bus provision to ensure the Council's provision is focused on providing transport for children who qualify under the Council's policy.
- Personal Transport Budgets (PTBs) introduced in 2021. As at 30 September 2022, 437 PTB offers had been made for the 2022-23 academic year. PTBs give young people and their families the freedom and flexibility to make their own travel arrangements to suit their lifestyle, rather than relying on council provided transport.
- Client Transport went live with Capita ONE in February 2021. This is the same administration system used by Children's Services to manage education records, enabling shared visibility of the single client record, and greater accuracy in data management.

Key Current Projects

- 2.12 Autumn 2022 School Transport Policy Consultation at www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/school-transport-consultation – a 6.5 week consultation from 19 October to 4 December 2022. The consultation includes proposals for:
- Simplifying school bus ticket charges for the Spare Seat scheme to make it easier for parents / carers to know upfront how much they will have to pay before applying for a seat. Three options for change are proposed.
 - Updates to our school transport policies to make them clearer and easier to understand.
- 2.13 Pilot of Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) and e-ticketing on school buses – we are developing a project proposal to trial RTPI and e-ticketing technology in 2023.
- 2.14 Implementing Independent Travel Training from September 2023 in collaboration with Buckinghamshire schools and families – ITT helps young people with SEND to develop the skills, confidence, and knowledge to use transport safely.

3. Legal and financial implications

Legal implications

- 3.1 Section 508B and section 509AA of the Education Act 1996 set out duties on the Council to arrange travel or other arrangements as it deems necessary for pupils of compulsory school age and of sixth form age (Post-16) to enable them to attend educational establishments. For compulsory school age eligible pupils, the arrangements must be free of charge, whereas for Post-16 students the arrangements can include financial assistance.
- 3.2 In addition to the statutory duties under the Education Act 1996, there are a number of overarching duties that are relevant to the Council's [Home to School Transport Policy](#) and our [Post-16 Transport Policy Statement](#). These include duties under:
- The Education and Skills Act 2008 to encourage, enable and assist participation of young people with SEND up to the age of 25.
 - The Children and Families Act 2014 in relation to the local offer

Financial implications

- 3.3 The total approved budget for Home to School Transport in 2022/23 is £23.2m. Last financial year the outturn was a net expenditure of £23.1m which was a £2.0m higher cost than budgeted. In 2021/22 the outturn net expenditure was:
- Mainstream (primary and secondary transport) at £7.4m
 - Pupil Referral Unit Transport at £0.7m
 - Pre-16 SEND Transport at £11.3m
 - Post-16 SEND Transport at £2.6m
 - Post-19 SEND Transport at £1.1m
- 3.4 The Q1 outturn reports a £1.1m higher cost than budgeted for Transport Services. This consists of:
- a £1m cost pressure within Home to School Transport due to increased contract costs. This includes adjustments for the expected increase in PTB costs as families transfer over at the start of the academic year, with a subsequent reduction in contract costs, and a 3% increase given to Home to School contracts to mitigate rising fuel prices
 - a £0.1m adverse pressure currently forecast within Client Transport due to staffing costs.
- 3.5 A key part of the Client Transport Improvement Programme is seeking to control costs in the context of a demand-led statutory service. This has been achieved through activities such as retendering, vehicle optimisation, remodelling routes,

introducing alternatives such as PTBs and introducing charging for Post-16 SEND council arranged transport in addition to school bus ticket sales.

- 3.6 Owing to the statutory requirements to provide home to school transport the Council is legally obliged to ensure provision. This national cost pressure is particularly acute for rural county authorities. Nevertheless, all options to control costs whilst meeting statutory requirements are being pursued.

4. Corporate implications

- 4.1 The provision of home to school transport assistance to eligible young people is a statutory duty, which links to our corporate priorities in the following ways:
- Strengthening our communities – the provision of transport enables children and adults across the county to access vital services.
 - Supporting the vulnerable – transport assistance is put in place to help eligible students with SEND to get to school.

5. Next steps and review

- 5.1 The key next steps for the Client Transport Improvement programme are:
- [School Transport Public Consultation](#) - This 6.5 week public consultation exercise went live on 19 October 2022. The key change proposal is to simplify the current charging rates for spare seats to make it easier for parents to understand.
 - Pilot Real Time Passenger Information and e-ticketing on school buses - A project proposal is being developed to enable a trial of the technology in 2023.
 - Implement Independent Travel Training (ITT) in September 2023 - ITT is a proven method of enabling young people with SEND to develop the skills, confidence, and knowledge to use transport safely.