

## **Appendix 2 - Home to School Transport Policy – Needs Analysis**

### **Introduction**

Buckinghamshire County Council is committed to providing a sustainable model of transport provision in Buckinghamshire. This means the Council is unable to continue delivering home to school transport in the same way. As part of the wider transport transformation programme we are looking at how quality can be improved to best support residents' travel needs. The Client Transport team regularly reviews existing services to reflect changes in usage and other relevant factors (such as road/traffic issues) and secure improvements in terms of service and/or value for money. It is essential that we now review the existing guidelines that shape transport provision to identify potential changes that could support future planned growth, whilst meeting need and maintaining the service being delivered.

For any proposed changes to Home to School Transport we will operate to four guiding principles.

We will:

- Continue to support those most in need
- Promote principles of independence
- Provide the most cost effective travel assistance
- Promote and encourage the use of sustainable travel

### **Outline of the issue**

Demand and costs for Home to School Transport are set to increase in line with extensive house expansion and projected population growth. Actions proposed to support the changes in policy are part of a long term plan aiming to address the issues by focusing on sustainable travel options, and resulting in a longer term strategy to manage demand and costs.

There is acknowledgment of the vulnerabilities of those in receipt of these services and the need for sensitivity in making any changes. In order to better understand the need for provision, and ensure that those who need support the most continue to receive it. As well as the JSNA section on Education produced in 2016, the council has reviewed services for children and young people with SEND within that cohort on three occasions.

### **Understanding the needs of our population**

In 2014, there was a comprehensive review sponsored by the council and the NHS Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) that proposed service integration. The summary proposed a future model of delivery and presented the following:

- Within Buckinghamshire, 3.1% of children and young people (0-25) have an Education, Health and Care Plan, compared to 2.8% nationally.
- Numbers are increasing; many have eligible needs for services across health, social care and education, c.200 children by 2026; the highest numbers are in Aylesbury Vale and Wycombe districts.

- Increasing complexity of need e.g. profound and multiple disabilities up by 63% between 2009 and 2013; increased prevalence of Autistic Spectrum Disorder.
- Vulnerable group: 2.5% of children and young people with a statement and/or known to the Children with a Disability (CWD) Team are looked after children, compared to 0.05% of the general children and young people population.

There are approximately 3,500 children and young people with SEND who are supported by the council (at a cost of approx. £67m) – most are placed within Buckinghamshire but 200 are placed out of county, 200 in independent provisions and 60/70 in early years provision). There are also approximately 200 CWD where 85% are also SEND (approx. £7m). There are some substantial budget reductions in this area (approx. £16m) alongside the anticipated growth in demand.

### **Preparing for the future**

Following discussions with the Business Intelligence and Improvement Team, a projection tool was developed to show how demands and costs are expected to change and provide evidence to inform the options for configuring services to reduce demand and costs. This tool is able to produce sophisticated information right down to child level, which would allow for better planning and a seamless transition to Adults Services.

The tool provides opportunities to:

- Understand how the demand and costs for services is likely to change over the next five years based on past trends, service use and population growth
- Create different scenario 'levers' showing the impact of preventative services or the impact of changing how the service is delivered, informing a Cost/Benefit Analysis of different ways that related services can be configured
- Show how SEND/CWD dynamically drives demand for other services

### **Who will the proposals affect?**

The proposed model shifts transport services from a substantial Council commissioned provision to a more sustainable model that utilises and expands the public networks. This model has greater community benefits, and is more cost effective, as well as reducing isolation and improving geographical links across the county. Input is designed to be child-centred, with a focus on promoting independence.

Typically, those people who might be involved include parents / carers, educators including early years practitioners, school teachers and college tutors, and those providing voluntary / independent provision and services, including out of school and holiday activities.

## **Needs analysis of the five transport areas being consulted upon**

We recognise that home to school transport is a valued service by families and we need to ensure that the impact is minimised as far as possible.

The following mitigations apply to all of the options:

- It is planned to phase in the changes for new cohorts that would be making school preference decisions and start to travel after the new policy is agreed. This a) phasing and b) delay will enable parents to understand the costs associated with their school and college choices (both SEN and mainstream) and express their preferences accordingly in the light of the new policy.
- We will maintain an exceptions policy and officer / Independent Appeal Panel transport decision-making process to consider cases falling outside the new policy.
- The national Low Income Policy will continue to operate and will support families meeting the financial threshold test within the Low Income Policy.

Whilst the proposals are illustrated using the current numbers of travellers and current levels of costs and charges, the current cohorts will be unaffected and any savings are therefore based on estimated figures and known. A detailed demographic needs analysis has been undertaken to test the impacts for any particular vulnerable groups.

### **SEN Post-16 Provision**

In the current year, 400 pupils are being transported to 6<sup>th</sup> form in special schools (in and out of county) and FE colleges (in and out of county).

For this group, all parents would be expected to make a contribution but to mitigate this then they can apply for a bursary from the college or school attended to offset the cost. Bursaries are provided nationally to schools and colleges by the government and they are distributed to individual families on a needs led basis.

For students with specific personalised transport requirements for reasons related to their SEND, for example students requiring a Passenger Assistant, sole transport, wheelchair accessible taxi, tail lift adapted vehicle, there will be no impact as their transport needs will continue to be met.

The level of parental contribution is still to be determined and it may vary according to distances vs flat rate and/or relating to the type of transport.

### **Increasing charges on the Mainstream, Paid-for Transport**

We are proposing to annually increase the level of contribution from parents towards their Home to School Transport.

The residual effect of the increase in charges for paid-for transport is a year on year drop off in the numbers of travellers is shown below. For this reason, consideration should be given to a further potential drop off as a result of a decision to increase charges.

### **Year on year impact of increasing charges on Paid-for transport cohort**

<b>Academic Year</b>	<b>Reduction in payers</b>	<b>Percentage reduction</b>
<b>2018/19</b>	329 (predicted)	8% (predicted)
<b>2017/18</b>	454	10%
<b>2016/17</b>	627	12%
<b>2015/16</b>	773	13%
<b>2014/15</b>	826	12%

Approximately 6.8% of the current cohort is identified as potentially low income families in Acorn groups 4 and 5 (Financially Stretched and Urban Adversity groups). The National Low Income Legislation assists families meeting the financial threshold ( the policy supports families whose children are eligible to receive free school meals) travelling up to 6 miles (15 miles for faith schools) to one of the nearest 3 schools. This will continue and is unaffected by the changes but a small number of families may continue to express school preferences that do not fit within this policy and may seek assistance outside of the policy via the exceptions policy.

The increases to travel costs for statutory school age children bring it more in line with the mainstream post 16 charging levels which are currently set to deliver full cost recover and are aligned to the length of the journey. The increased charges for post 16 travellers will continue to be adjusted to achieve a full cost recovery.

There are 164 routes, 64 of which have public network buses following similar routes. Of these routes, 48 routes are running without eligible travellers so through commercialisation the council's aim would be to align these travellers onto existing public bus routes and/or new commercialised services. Travellers on these routes would therefore move to a direct payment with the bus company which could be a saving for parents.

14.8% go to an upper school that is not the nearest appropriate school

78.9% go to a grammar school that is not the nearest appropriate school

By phasing in the increases annually by 5% per year ensures:

- Parents making new preference decisions have time to modify their preferences in light of the expected costs and, if prohibitive can choose to revise the school preferences expressed
- Parents can choose schools already served by public bus services. A large cohort of families are already using public bus services to get to school –

either because a) there is no council provided school bus service to their preferred school or b) the public service is cheaper and they prefer to use it.

Children with mobility issues (with or without an EHCP) will continue to be considered for assistance under the s.508B statutory responsibilities.

### **The 'Evreham Promise'**

This currently provides free transport for some children not attending their nearest school as a result of a historic decision.

Parents would have three options if this change was made.

1. Parents could choose to pay for home to school transport to the school. If all parents took this option then this would generate income but delivering this transport would still cost the council in excess of £100k annually on current rates of subsidy.

2. Some parents would still attend but would travel independently to the school. To illustrate - If 50% of families chose to pay then the income would be £90,748 with a reduced cost of c£53,500 It is difficult to predict the proportion that would change their preferences.

3. These routes would plan to be commercialised by 2020 and this would then allow the community offer to be widened alongside continuing to provide home to school transport access via the route. Commercialisation allows the costs to reflect the length of journey and gives increase access at other times of the day and to other travellers.

4. An estimated 10% of parents would modify their preference and choose for their child to attend their nearest school. In doing so they would either have no need for home to school transport or, if over three miles, would become eligible for home to school transport as it was the nearest school.

5. The detailed Acorn analysis shows that approx. 20% of the cohort may be vulnerable/low income families and if they meet the national threshold would be entitled to Low Income assistance to their three closest schools and /or they may apply for exceptional consideration.

### **Ivinghoe Promise**

This currently provides free transport for some children not attending their nearest school.

Each year 135 children costing £64,284 travel to Cottesloe School on the basis of this concession within the policy. Currently, 262 children travel to Tring school (total cost £122k)

In 2018, of the 90 children joining Cottesloe School from the area, 33 are closest to Tring School. Using this cohort as an example, parents would have three options when expressing their order of preferences for school places:

1. They may all choose to continue to attend their preferred school and would pay which would generate 18k income (33 pupils)

2. They may apply and place Tring School as their highest preference and, if offered a place they would be eligible to receive free transport to Tring School.
3. They may apply and place Tring School as their highest preference but not be offered a place in which case they would be eligible to receive free transport to Cottesloe School as the nearest available school under the national legislation.
4. They may choose to travel independently or choose other schools outside the county for which they may or may not have an entitlement to transport.

Approximately 10% of the group were identified as vulnerable/low income families and they would be able to apply for Low Income assistance under the national low income legislation or ask to be considered exceptionally outside the policy for transport assistance.

### **Under 5's transport to nursery and special school provision for pre-school children with EHCPs already.**

This is a small cohort of 8 pupils currently (expected to increase in future) and so it is not appropriate to extrapolate their needs.

Children currently being provided with nursery/pre-school provision will continue to be provided with transport and this will be reviewed as they become statutory school age.

All decisions for non-statutory school provision for pre-school age children already holding an EHCP will be made via officer panel and depending on the strength of the case made for needing transport assistance this may be offered on the basis of a bus pass or mileage in rural and/or vulnerable cases where the attendance has been identified as educationally essential.

### **Rural Agenda**

The Council recognises that the county has significant rural areas and school transport is valued by parents. However this initiative is enabling the rural transport offer to families to be improved by widening access to routes and integrating them with the local bus services.

### **Community transport**

Greater integration of the Home to School services with public bus routes will support rural communities and provide new access to families.

### **Access to services**

It is important to note that this initiative is intended to support the expansion of public services across the county as a whole.

### **Alternatives to transport**

This initiative supports the council's vision in relation to sustainable transport options in particular projects such as walking bus, independent travel training, revised safe walking and cycle routes.

## **Conclusions**

This report confirms that the needs of the local population could be met by offering alternative travel assistance options. These options will be subject to consultation and the impact of these changes will be analysed following receipt of consultation responses.

## **Recommendations**

The recommendations have been highlighted in the Cabinet report. This assessment supports the Cabinet report.