

TITLE OF REPORT: Home to school and college transport project and Promoting Independence through Travel Training.

REPORT OF: Lynn Wilson, Service Director, Commissioning and Quality Assurance

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the Home to school and college budget, the range of reforms as part of the wider Travel Care project, savings and outcomes as a result of the Council's investment into Independent Travel Training.

POLICY CONTEXT

The Law

Section 508B of the Education Act 1996 deals with the duty on local authorities to make such travel arrangements as they consider necessary to facilitate attendance at school for eligible children. Schedule 35B of the Act defines eligible children – those categories of children of compulsory school age (5-16) in an authority's area for whom **free** travel arrangements will be required, they are outlined below (**The Law**).

Background

The Home to School and College transport budget spend has gradually increased since 2011. Previous budget cycles have included ambitious reductions in the budget linked to greater roll-out of personal transport budgets. These savings have not materialized, creating an additional pressure on the budget and an increased overspend.

In October 2016 it was agreed that a part time project lead would work with the SEND team and Central Transport Unit (now renamed the Travel Care Team) to implement a range of reforms and actions which were endorsed by Children and Adults' Portfolio and Cabinet. This work is ongoing from the Project Lead but in addition to their current full time role.

In 2018/19 an additional £500,000 was added to the budget to avoid the significant overspend and allow time for the changes to be implemented and the budget overspend reduced.

Progress to date

1. Revision of Pre 16, Post 16 and Adult Social Care transport policies
2. Implementation of Post 16 charge

3. Job evaluation and revision of roles within the Travel Care Team (including recommendation of individual risk assessments for those with complex needs and challenging behaviours)
4. Review of the procurement contracts and trial of single school providers
5. Implementation of an Independent Travel Training programme, promoting greater independence, health and social inclusion for children and young people, this has also been extended to a 'Train the Parent' programme;
6. Review of application, assessment and the introduction of a two tier appeals process, in line with DfE Guidance (2014);
7. Promotion of the use of personal transport budgets and wider range of options, including bus passes, which are cost effective alternatives to taxi based travel;
8. Revision of all leaflets and guidance, ensuring information is consistent and clear
9. Delivery of training to all taxi and mini bus drivers and passenger assistants who have a SEND or vulnerable adult contract
10. Partnership with schools and colleges to promote independent living and travel skills and added these as a standard agenda item to Education, Health and Care Plans
11. Adopted a regional (consistent) approach with our neighbouring authorities through the North East Regional Transport Group.

Budget challenges

The Law – Eligible children:

Statutory walking distances eligibility

Council's must provide **free** transport for all pupils of compulsory school age (5-16) if their nearest school is

- beyond 2 miles (if below the age of 8); or
- beyond 3 miles (if aged between 8 and 16)

Special educational needs, a disability or mobility problems eligibility

Unsafe route eligibility

In Gateshead we have Bewick Main Caravan Park near Birtley that does not have a footpath or lighting from the entrance up to the main road). This costs us £20,000 per year to transport children with no additional needs to Birtley schools. 3.

Extended rights eligibility

Provide free transport where pupils are entitled to free school meals or their parents are in receipt of maximum Working Tax Credit/ Universal Credit) if:

- the nearest suitable school is beyond 2 miles (for children over the age of 8 and under 11);
- the school is between 2 and 6 miles (if aged 11-16 and there are not three or more suitable nearer schools);
- the school is between 2 and 15 miles and is the nearest school preferred on the grounds of religion or belief (aged 11-16).

Discretionary Arrangements - Travel arrangements for other children

Section 508C of the Act provides local authorities with discretionary powers to go beyond their statutory duties and provide transport for children who are not entitled to free transport (under 5's and 16+).

Options:

The offer may be:

- A bus pass for use on public transport
- Travel training
- A place on a dedicated school bus
- A shared taxi or minibus
- An individual taxi or minibus

Or with parental/carer consent:

- A mileage allowance/personal transport budget *
- A walking escort

*The Local Authority cannot insist on this, even if the person has a Motability car or if the child is in receipt of high rate Disability Living Allowance or PIP.

Under 5's

It is not a statutory duty to provide free home to school transport (taxis) for under 5's however legal advice is that if SEND panel are agreeing placements in specialist nurseries the Council need to consider how the child will get there. It is reasonable to expect the child to be accompanied however most parents have other children to get to other primary schools and state that they can't be in two places at once. They have declined a personal transport budget which is usually a more cost-effective alternative.

There are currently 26 children under 5 being transported, mainly to Gibside Blaydon site, 1 to Percy Hedley, 1 to Cedars and 1 to Swalwell Primary. The total cost of transport for this academic year 2018/19 will amount to £146,148.

Out of borough provision

There are no places in SEMH provision in Gateshead, resulting in 5 children attending Howard House in Bedlington. Cost of transport per academic year is **£21,280**. There are also several children with very complex health needs requiring Percy Hedley and Northern Counties School placements who are also eligible for taxi provision, usually also with an escort.

New applications during the academic year

Throughout the academic year the SEN Panel agree nursery and school transfers where there is evidence that the child is not managing in mainstream provision and needs to

transfer to specialist provision. This often results in additional taxis where there are no places on existing transport – since September 2018 there have been 2 additional cars added at a cost of £220 per day (annual cost of £41,800).

ARMS units are based across the borough and have specialisms. This is resulting in children travelling up to 18 miles to school.

Primary Schools

Brandling – Communication

Bede – Behaviour

High Spen – Hearing Impaired

Rowlands Gill – moderate learning difficulties

Swalwell – Physical disabilities

Secondary

Thorp

Whickham

Pupil Referral Unit

We are currently transporting 8 pupils from the west of the borough to Millway and Ravensworth Terrace sites. As the bus journey times exceed the recommended 75 minutes the pupils qualify for taxi provision. This is at a cost of £121 per day, £22,990 annually.

Behaviour

Case study 1 –

Extra £25 for dedicated escort, then needed to be wheelchair accessible so larger vehicle with 1-1 escort cost £175 per week.

Arrangement has since broken down, Individual taxi cost - £260 extra per week, **£10,000** annual costs.

Case study 2 –

Child procured to travel with sibling and 4 others. Social worker advised there were child protection concerns.

Individual taxi £60 per day, £300 per week, **£12,000**.

Post 16 charge

In 2017/8 13 children aged 16 and 17 were eligible for the charge, generating an income of £8,450.

In 2018/9 there are 16 children eligible for the charge, generating an income of £10,400.

Whilst not generating significant income the numbers of applications and number of post 16 children transported has gradually reduced –

2015/16 – 88 before September, 81 after

2016/17 – 74 before September, 67 after

2017/18 – 74 before September, 67 after

2018/19 – 67 before September, **55 after**

Gateshead

Number of pupils transported (pre and post 16 numbers combined)

2011/12	517
2012/13	548
2013/14	552
2014/15	566
2015/16	572
2016/7	590
2017/8	527
2018/9	548 (26 of these are under 5)

Gateshead

Home to School (pre 16)

Year	Budget	Actual spend	Difference
2011/12	1,337,875	1,204,811.83	133,063.17
2012/13	1,337,875	1,248,606.26	89,268.74
2013/14	1,337,875	1,365,762.09	- 26,887.09
2014/15	1,475,007	1,516,804.04	- 41,797.04
2015/16	1,492,757	1,593,308.03	-100,623.03
2016/17	1,279,299	1,699,466.49	-420,167.49
2017/18	1,297,210	1,709,334.03	-412,124.03
2018/19	1,797,210	1,938,367.33	-141,157.33

(predicted as of 16/1/19)

Post 16

2011/12	121,155	294,030.66	- 172,875.06
2012/13	121,155	389,267.33	- 268,112.33
2013/14	121,155	366,149.60	- 244,944.60
2014/15	171,810	354,735.51	- 182,925.51
2015/16	182,010	370,412.98	- 188,402.98
2016/17	183,466	367,062.61	- 183,596.61
2017/18	186,035	312,536.74	- 126,501.74
2018/19	186,035	306,570.17	- 120,535.17

(predicted as of 16/1/19))

Appeals

As of 4 October there have been

1st stage appeals – numbers not available

2nd stage appeals – 15, 11 of which have been upheld.

Bus passes

455 this academic year @£210 per pass = £95,550.

427 in academic year 2017/18.

Independent Travel Training

Over the last two years the Council have utilised two different methods –

One full time member of staff funded 80% through SEN (4 days per week) and 20% through Adult social care working to the ACT team. The majority of this work this academic year has been for SEN. She is a Grade D post and is funded year on year through SEND grant.

Grade D with on costs - £23,484.52.

From September 2017 to September 2018 (full academic year) this post has successfully travel trained 15 young people, 13 of whom were on home to school transport. The cost of each place on their transport has been calculated to determine the savings which total **£48,244.80**. One case in particular was a Year 6 pupil that the SEND panel agreed to a Year 7 place at an alternative school from September 2018. This would have required an individual taxi at a cost of £50 per day, totalling £9,500. The child was willing to undertake travel training over the summer holidays and he was successfully signed off therefore no taxis were required.

Children North East delivered their Bus Buddy Scheme, funded through a one off SEND grant.

1st cohort of 7 achieved 6 young people travel trained

2nd cohort of 7 achieved 5 young people travel trained

3rd cohort of 7 achieved 5 young people travel trained

4th cohort was extended to the full contract of 28 young people at a cost of **£31,000**. This was to run from January – December 2018 with the option to extend the date (but no further funding) to March 2019 for 28 young people.

Of the 23 referrals (we have not referred any more as they have so many ongoing) it is likely that only 11 will achieve ITT. This will result in savings of **£35,763.70**.

ITT is a particular skill that we must get right for client confidence and safety. The travel trainer is a brilliant teacher who instils confidence in parents who are often reluctant/risk averse (and often resistant to their taxis being removed). Unfortunately she can only work with one child at a time and would benefit from additional support in the form of an Apprentice/co-worker on an invest to save basis.

We have so many case studies of success stories and a group of young people produced a DVD of how being an independent traveller has changed their lives. The most recent compliment is outlined below, both children attend separate special schools, in December 2018 Jack was also successfully signed off as an independent traveller:

“I am the mother of Craig (15) and Jack (13).

I am writing to say how happy I am with the work and help from Travel Trainer, Norma Nichol. Myself and my son (C) are both deaf.

Norma always spoke to us nice and slowly, so we could hear what she said and always faced us when talking, allowing us to lip read if we couldn't hear what she said. Norma was very helpful. I suffer from anxiety and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Norma always reassured me that C was okay and did everything he should do (whilst training) which helped me with my anxiety and PTSD. Norma was always polite and on time and always kept me up to date.

I am so glad Norma trained my son C as it has boosted his confidence. I look forward to Norma training my other son J.

Well done Norma, keep up the good work and thank you so much for your help with my son C, I will see you soon when you train J".
K.Potts October 2018.

SUMMARY

Whilst an additional £500,000 was added to the Home to School and college transport budget in 2018/9 we continue to be predicted to be overspent by £261,692.50 due to the issues outlined in this report which are out of the Project Lead's control. These have been raised with Senior Managers who recommend that further work is undertaken with a range of partners across the Council and another range of reforms are explored with more dedicated time by the Project Lead and Travel Care Team, including additional Travel Trainers where we have evidence of budget savings and positive outcomes.

NEXT STEPS

From 1 March 2018 additional officer time will be dedicated to the Travel Project (this is currently in addition to a full time other role) to explore a range of options to include:

- Increased partnership working between Travel Care Team and SEND team to explore challenges, better ways of working in relation to SEN decision making, provision of in borough placements etc
- Further revision of the pre 16 policy (it currently states primary school children qualify if they live over 2 miles away but the national guidance states 8 years and under), this may result in some children no longer being eligible
- Explore either an apprentice to work alongside the Travel Trainer or work in partnership with our Road Safety/Child Pedestrian Team in Development, Transport and Public Protection Team in Communities and Environment – there are some definite opportunities to work together and be involved with children and families at the earliest opportunity
- Extending the 'Train the Parents' sessions to parents of children in special and mainstream school, along with professionals working with and supporting young people with additional needs (Learning support assistants, Early Help advisers, foster carers etc) to promote the use of public transport

- Make changes to the decision making process of transport applications
- Promote Personal Transport budgets and bus passes through consultations, parents' events, Education, Health and Care Plan reviews
- Review all transport to those children for whom we do not have a statutory duty to provide transport
- Review the Trapeeze computer system which is currently costing £15,000 annually and is no longer fit for purpose, we have an opportunity to work with developers at a one off cost of £18,000 and then £2,000 annual fee, saving £13,000 annually
- Develop robust risk assessments through a dedicated and specially trained officer to ensure children with the most complex needs are safely transported to school.

RECOMMENDATION

It is requested that Overview and Scrutiny Committee recognise the challenges to this budget, support the ongoing work to bring the annual spend in line with the agreed budget and continue to receive 6 monthly updates in relation to transport and Independent Travel Training.

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