

Early Years, Children and Youth Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel Transport Contributor Session 22nd October 2012.

Home to School Transport

Current Policy

1. Statutory Distances

A Local Authority has a duty to provide transport if the statutory distance to the nearest appropriate school is exceeded. Statutory walking distance” is two miles for children aged under eight, and three miles for children aged eight and over. The measurement of the “statutory walking distance” is not necessarily the shortest distance by road. It is measured by the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk with reasonable safety.

Under the current statutory distance policy of the council we currently transport 957 children at an annual cost of £850,000.

2. Hazardous Route

Where children live within “statutory walking distance” of their nearest appropriate school a local authority has to make travel arrangements where the nature of the route is such that a child cannot reasonably be expected to walk (accompanied as necessary) in reasonable safety.

In conducting the risk assessment, local authorities should take a range of factors into consideration, including:

- the age of the child;
- whether any potential risks might be mitigated if the child were accompanied by an adult.
- the width of any roads travelled along and the existence of pavements;
- the volume and speed of traffic travelling along any roads; the existence or otherwise of street lighting; and
- the condition of the route at different times of the year, at the times of day that a child would be expected to travel to and from school.

Under the current hazardous route policy of the Council we currently transport 833 children at an annual cost of £830,000.

3. Denominational

Local authorities, in fulfilling their duties in relation to travel, are required to have regard to the wish of a parent to have their child educated at a particular school on the grounds of the parents’ religion or belief.

Assistance with denominational transport is currently provided to the nearest appropriate school if the statutory distances are met and the child is baptised in the relevant faith.

In September 2007 the Council introduced a charging policy for children qualifying for denominational transport. The current charge is £300 per annum [£50 per term]. For the 2nd and 3rd child a reduction of 50% is given. No further charge is made for additional children if a family has more than 3 children travelling. If a family is in receipt of free school meals or maximum working tax credit they are exempt from the charge.

The Council currently spends £310,000 on transport to denominational schools. The total annual income collected from parents is £65,000. The annual net cost is therefore £245,000. A total of 189 children pay the full charge and 55 children pay the 50% reduction. A further 62 children travel but are exempt from the charge.

4. Special Educational Needs [age 0-16].

Transport assistance is given if the pupil is attending their nearest Special School and the statutory distances are met. When the distances are not met the following criteria are considered.

- The nature of the child's disability.
- Family circumstances
- The pupil's social skills.
- The nature of the journey.

We currently transport 271 pupils at an annual cost of £1.45m.

5. Children in Care

To enable continuity of education when a child is placed in care consideration is given to assisting with transport so a child can remain at their existing school. This is normally provided when a child first comes in to care, is in short term care, is in Key Stage 4 or at a time of transition in years 2-3 or 6 -7.

We currently provide transport for 25 pupils at an annual cost of £70,000. The majority of transport will require an individual taxi due to the length of the journey and the fact we have no existing transport we can use.

6. Medical

Local Authorities must make travel arrangements for children with a mobility or temporary medical problem which means they could not reasonably be expected to walk to school e.g. where the child has a broken leg.

We currently transport a small number of children under this policy for short periods of time at an annual cost of £15,000 per annum.

7. Post 16 SEN Transport

Travel arrangements for post 16 students will be considered are attending the nearest appropriate further education provision and:

- Have had a statement of Special Educational Needs, or medical or physical difficulties, which means they are unable to walk the distance of 3 miles (accompanied as necessary) and
- Are studying a full time course

We currently transport 31 pupils at an annual cost of £95,000. 14 of these students are in receipt of Disability Living allowance. If a pupil is in receipt of the Disability Living Allowance with the inclusion of the mobility allowance they are charged £50 per term in-line with the fare paying passenger scheme.

8. Extended rights to free travel for low income families

Children from low income groups are those who are entitled to free school meals, or those whose families are in receipt of their maximum level of Working Tax Credit.

From September 2007, children aged eight, but under age 11 from low income families must have travel arrangements made where they live more than two miles from their nearest qualifying school.

From September 2008 children who are 11 or over from low income families must have travel arrangements made to one of their three nearest schools where they live more than two miles, but not more than six miles from that school.

Where a parent has expressed a preference for a school on the parent's religion or belief, then a child aged 11 to 16 must also have travel arrangements made for them to the nearest suitable school preferred on grounds of religion or belief, where they live more than two miles, but not more than 15 miles from that school.

We currently transport 150 pupils at an annual cost of £90,000 under this policy.

9. Fare Paying Scheme

Where we have spare seats on vehicles carrying entitled passengers we can offer these seats to non-entitled children. The current charge is £300 per annum [£50 per term]. For the 2nd and 3rd child a reduction of 50% is given. No further charge is made for additional children if a family has more than 3 children travelling. If a family is in receipt of free school meals or maximum working tax credit they are exempt from the charge.

We currently transport 120 children collecting annual income of £30,000.

How are children transported?

The Council's Transport Services Team is responsible for contracted out Home to School Transport – This utilises 50 or so contractors and daily there are 221 school routes to 68 locations carrying over 2000 students. A lot of the work is orientated to purchasing at lowest cost and route planning as efficiently as possible. Where appropriate children can be given a public bus pass. Contracted transport involves coach, minibus and some taxi transport.

Transport Services also covers safeguarding, contractor reliability etc. There are 52 Guide Escorts who go on routes where the children have special educational needs.

Home to School transport needs are also partially met by the In House Passenger Fleet – this covers 30 vehicles and 26 Drivers. Most of the vehicles are specialist for wheel chairs and the like and most of the work done is for Special Educational Needs provision. To optimise efficiency best use is made out of any spare capacity – for this reason the drivers also cover Dial a Rides, Treatment Centres, School Meal deliveries etc. This fills in the time between the morning and afternoon runs. The drivers in this type of work need to be of high quality. In house passenger management also has a role looking after CRB's, contractor quality assurance and dealing with 'safe pick up' disputes.