

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cllr Michael Evans, Cabinet Member for Education	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	On or after 5th November 2016 (for single Member decision)	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 2901
TITLE:	SEND Home to School Transport , part of Strategic Review – Getting from A to B	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: None		

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 There has been a 31% increase in SEND cases requiring transport in the last four years. This reflects a growing population of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) within the local area and indeed nationally. The last academic year alone saw a 48% increase in the number of children receiving an Education and Health Care Plan (previously known as Statements of SEN).
- 1.2 This increased demand has created pressure on the transport budget and is currently resulting in an unsustainable financial overspend in this area. The current project overspend is £450K
- 1.3 Around the country Local Authorities are finding more innovative ways to deliver SEND transport to school/colleges which promotes better independence for families and provides costs savings. The table below highlights the current cost of B&NES home to school transport, benchmarked against Local Authorities who have undertaken activities to improve transport efficiencies by applying new principles to transporting pupils.

	B&NES	Avg Taken from 6 LA's
SEN transport cost per child	£5052	£3385
Mainstream	£1092	£802
Cost per guide, per child (all)	£1200	£500
No of children per guide escort	5	10

- 1.4 There is evidence from other Local Authorities that taking a different stance to delivering home to school transport, particularly for those children with SEND can have a number of benefits, such as giving families more personal control to make their own travel arrangements and supporting children to be more independent.
- 1.5 As part of an overall B&NES strategic transport review, there has been an opportunity to review the appropriateness and effectiveness of our Home to School Transport Strategy. Work is underway to review alternative travel provision options and implement new criteria for our customers and council staff; in particular this will focus on a robust, inclusive and fair assessment of SEND home to school transport.
- 1.6 This report summarises some of the learning throughout this review and contains information on how we will change our SEND transport criteria to better promote more independent travel and enable savings to our transport budget.

2 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 The Cabinet Member is asked to approve the following principles and proposed changes and approaches that will be incorporated into our new SEND transport policy.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 A new post has been created 'SEN Travel Advisor' to implement our changes. This will be fixed term initially for two years and financed by Strategic Review funds.
- 3.2 The process redesign lead is resourced by Customer Services as part of the Strategic Review.
- 3.3 The financial outcome of adopting these principles will create efficiencies as is being seen in the pilot of these principles for new SEND transport requests, highlighted in 5.10 of this report.
- 3.4 Our new approach should go some way to reducing spend on SEND transport to contribute to the councils strategic review budget targets. Overall home to school transport savings amount to £693k

3.5 The adoption of these principles should also limit the growth in the pressures being observed in the current SEND home to school transport budget, which is projecting an overspend of £450k in this financial year.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

4.1 An 'Equalities Impact Assessment' has been carried out and signed off by L Fradd and Christopher Wilford as part of the Strategic Review.

4.2 The recommendations support the Councils Sustainable Transport Strategy.

4.3 The recommendations support Children's Act 2004.

5 THE REPORT

5.1 The following principles and proposals are based on a customer focused 'Systems Thinking' review currently being undertaken in the SEND Service, as part of the 'One Council' Review. Significant customer insight has been gained by carrying-out a complete case study of all customers in receipt of transport.

5.2 Alongside this analysis of best practice from other Local Authorities and financial benchmarking across the country, it has informed what we could be doing differently and what we could be doing better, in order to fulfil our statutory responsibilities around transporting SEND children and young people to reduce council spend.

Principles

5.3 The following principles will be applied to both mainstream and SEND transport decisions to provide the most appropriate travel provision for each child and their family:

- We will promote travel independence to support the development of children and young peoples' life skills
- We will regularly assess transport throughout a child's school life to ensure the right travel provision is in place
- We will ensure that we deliver value for money for the council and its customers
- We will seek to deliver a sustainable and efficient transport system

- The council will retain a commitment to children and young adults who are unable to walk to school due to distance, safety, disability or mobility

We will offer parents/carers greater choice and control over the way in which their child/children travel to and from school by promoting the following changes and approaches:

- Personal travel budget (PTB)
- Travel passes for public transport
- Provide travel training to enable young person to travel independently
- Offer of a spare seat on a council contract transport
- Signposting young people and their families to additional travel support that they may be able to access, either from other government schemes/benefits or from other local provision

Proposed Changes & Approaches

5.4 Personal Travel Budgets - The council will promote the use of Personal Travel Budget (PTB) as an offer to eligible parents, to enable them to transport their child/young person to their place of education. A PTB is a direct payment to parents/carers to organise their own travel arrangements, which gives them flexibility and control and promotes independence. It will be based on home/school address and travel needs. Each will be assessed on a case by case basis. The child's school attendance will be monitored and if it falls below average then a reduction in next PTB payment will be made, in order to ensure that public finances are being administered effectively.

A PTB will be considered for all new transport needs. Over time we will assess all children and young people currently being transported to their place of education. However PTB's will primarily be considered in the following circumstances;

- Where a traveller has been assessed as requiring a high level of care/supervision/medical response
- Children/young people who are lone travellers in a council contracted vehicle
- An assessment has identified that a Personal Escort Guide is required
- Exceptional education location
- Consideration will be given to parents/carers location, disability, mobility and circumstance as to the schemes appropriateness' to them

5.5 Guide Escorts – Guide Escorts will be provided on SEND council transport with multiple passengers for the safety of both driver and travellers. If a risk assessments confirms that a child or young person requires a high level of care/supervision/medical response, the Council will, in the first instance, offer financial provision in the form of a 'Personal Travel Budget' to enable the family to make their own arrangements for travel. Only in exceptional circumstances due to parents/carers disability, mobility or circumstance, will the council provide a 'Personal Guide Escort'.

5.6 Lone Travellers – Lone travellers in some instances can be a high cost to the council (£12K to £30K per annum). The council will seek in the first instance to offer parent/carers financial travel provision in the form of a Personal Travel Budget to enable them to make their own arrangements for transport. Contract vehicles will only be offered when the council has explored all other options with parents.

5.7 If the child or young person is in receipt of higher rate Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment, (which has been awarded for the mobility of the child or young person or where parents/carers have a contract mobility car), it is reasonable for the council to investigate the parents'/carers' ability to transport their own child or young person to school, with the Council providing a mileage allowance to these parents/carers. Low income families will be exempt from this.

5.8 Travel Training for Independence - To support an individual child's/young person independence, we will offer 'Travel Training' to children or young people who have been assessed from year 9 onwards as being suitable for independent

travel. This promotes independence and life skills, in preparation for Post 16 education.

5.9 Exceptional Circumstances - The council does and will continue to consider all cases individually and will apply within the local policy a principle of 'Exceptional Circumstance' (see below) for the most vulnerable. This will be applied when statutory criteria for transport has not been met. These exceptional circumstances will be offered as temporary solutions and these circumstances will be regularly reviewed to ensure that resources are still being appropriately used.

5.10 This principle will be applied when necessary, on a case by case basis; to be used particularly where a child's education maybe severely disrupted. For example:

- The child/parent/carer is ill so unable to travel by normal means
- Other family circumstance

5.11 Alongside our analytical work and our learning from other Local Authorities, the review includes the following activities to support learning and inform our approach to managing these changes:

- The SEND team has been piloting a number of PTB's with a small group of parents. Learning and success is being captured through this pilot
- Extend PTB pilot to transfer lone travellers in taxis with a personal travel guide to a PTB, to ensure effective use of councils resources
- The SEND Service will enter into a consultation period with parents/carers and stakeholders about the changes we will be making to SEND transport
- We will conduct an impact assessment of our current case load and target customers that will be affected by these new principles so we can discuss options with them
- For existing customers, it is hoped these new principles will be applied from September 2017
- For all future requests for transport these new principles will to be applied after wider consultation carried out by the SEND service

5.10 To date the PTB pilot has been able to identify £97k of preventable yearly spend by switching parents to PTB's rather than providing direct private transport.

6 RATIONALE

6.1 The rationale for the recommendation in this report is that the council believes that by undertaking this review and implementing these Principles, changes and approaches, the council will be:

- Promoting independence, utilising the council's resources effectively, and enabling the council to provide free travel to the most vulnerable

- Changing the culture of reliance on traditional transportation methods, by offering alternative travel options that promote independence
- Protecting low income families regardless of statutory distance criteria
- Ensuring that Distance is NOT the only criteria we look at and that need is also considered
- That our recommendations are aligned with other councils in the South West, such as Bristol, North Somerset, South Gloucestershire, Dorset, Cornwall

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

7.1 None

8 CONSULTATION

8.1 Consultation has been carried out with the Strategic Transport Review Board, the SEND team, senior management in People & Communities, Council Solicitor and to date those families who have been part of the pilot for personal travel budgets.

8.2 Further consultation with parent/carer groups will be undertaken.

8.3 Statutory guidance states that consultations should last up to 28 days during term time for all interested parties.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

Contact person	<i>Louise Manning-Morton</i>
Background papers	Scoping of SEN Opportunities and SEN Customer Insight Reports are available. Email requests to Louise_Manning-Morton@bathnes.gov.uk
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	