
SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT

SUMMARY REPORT

Purpose of the Report

1. To provide Scrutiny with a summary of plans to consult on the introduction of a SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) Travel Assistance Policy.

Summary

2. Following Cabinet approval to commence consultation on the introduction of a Travel Assistance Policy to provide the opportunity to offer a more flexible range of travel options to families.
3. The policy will ensure that children and young people with SEND do not miss out on the opportunity to develop independent travel skills. Independent travel skills gained in adolescence can be carried forward into adult life.

Recommendation

4. It is recommended that :-
 - (a) Scrutiny be aware of the forthcoming consultation on the Travel Assistance Policy.
 - (b) Scrutiny consider and respond to the proposals outlined in the consultation.

Reasons

5. The recommendation is supported by the following reasons:
 - (a) The policy requires amendment to give pupils with SEND opportunity to acquire independent travel skills and to give families greater flexibility to support their children to travel to school. This is centred upon providing assistance where appropriate to help people help themselves; it is about promoting independence.
 - (b) To enable the proposed Travel Assistance Policy to be further considered prior to decisions being made on the changes being proposed.

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Background Papers

No background papers were used in the preparation of this report.

S17 Crime and Disorder	This report has no implications for Crime and Disorder
Health and Well Being	The Travel Assistance Policy will contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or a disability in the borough.
Carbon Impact	There are no issues which this report needs to address.
Diversity	The Travel Assistance Policy will contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or a disability in the borough
Wards Affected	Children and young people with SEND may live in any ward.
Groups Affected	Children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities
Budget and Policy Framework	This report does not represent a change to the budget and policy framework.
Key Decision	This is a key decision
Urgent Decision	Yes, so as not to delay start of consultation and meet various timescales.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The report contributes to the Sustainable Community Strategy Priority 'the best start in life'.
Efficiency	There are no direct efficiencies to the Council from the information contained within this report.
Impact on Looked After Children and Care Leavers	The Travel Assistance Policy will contribute to improved outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or a disability in the borough a number of these children are Looked After Children or Care Leavers.

MAIN REPORT

Information and Analysis

6. Darlington Borough Council has a statutory responsibility to assist eligible children and young people of statutory school age to travel to school. Transport assistance is currently allocated at the point a pupil become in receipt of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). The mode of travel assistance is commonly in the form of door to door minibus or taxi.
7. The current Home to School Transport policy does not adequately address the needs of pupils with SEND. Once transport support is allocated it usually remains in place until the end of the young person's schooling.
8. There are two key consequences of current practice. Firstly, children and young people who have the potential to travel independently are not given the opportunity to do so and thereby are not equipped with the necessary skills to independently access their community and the workplace in adulthood. Secondly, over-provision has resulted in a significant projected overspend on the Council's Home to School Transport budget.

Proposals

9. The key principles of the proposed new policy are outlined below.
 - (a) PROPOSAL ONE (Definition of Education Travel Assistance)
 - (i) It is proposed that the name of the Home to School Transport Policy for pupils with SEN be amended to 'Education Travel Assistance Policy'. The name change reflects the fact that travel assistance can be provided in a variety of ways, not just through the provision of 'transport' e.g. a bus or a taxi.
 - (b) PROPOSAL TWO (To formalise the annual application and review process)
 - (i) Currently travel assistance arrangements for children and young people are assessed and determined at the time they start at a new education setting. This means, for example, that a young person starting in Year 7 may have their travel assistance arrangements rolled forward until they finish in Year 11.
 - (ii) This approach does not always take account of the personal development of individual children and young people, opportunities to promote independence and any changing individual or family circumstances e.g. medical needs.
 - (iii) In allocating SEN home to school travel assistance, the approach of offering the least restrictive option is key to supporting independence and the best way of achieving this will be an annual review process. This

approach will also ensure that any important information in relation to health needs, medication and emergency contact details is kept up to-date. In the majority of cases where there has been no substantial change in circumstances, existing arrangements will carry forward but the process will facilitate more effective scrutiny and review of individual travel assistance arrangements. It will also enable families, currently in receipt of 'transport' to consider more flexible arrangements through a cash allowance or Direct Payment.

- (iv) It is therefore proposed that transport assistance is reviewed on an annual basis with effect from the September following implementation of this policy. The Admissions and Transport Service will review all new applications and any other existing arrangements which have been identified for changes in circumstances or requiring a review.

(c) PROPOSAL THREE (Personal travel assistance budget and cash allowance)

- (i) Where a child or young person is eligible, care will be taken to ensure that travel assistance is provided in the most appropriate and least restrictive way possible. In the case of high volume routes, shared transport arrangements are likely to continue to be the most cost effective and sustainable solution under most circumstances. However, in the case of solo or ad-hoc arrangements a cash allowance or direct payment in the form of a Personal Travel Assistance Budget may provide greater flexibility for families and carers to make their own arrangements.
- (ii) This would mean that every new application for travel would be considered for a cash allowance or, in cases of complex or exceptional needs, a direct payment in the form of a Personal Travel Assistance Budget. Other direct support may also be considered. Such support may be provided in the form of a travel pass for public transport, mileage allowance for parent/carer or shared transport

(d) PROPOSAL FOUR (Circumstances when travel assistance is not provided)

- (i) Where a parent has requested an out of area placement for a pupil with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and the Council considers there is a nearer suitable placement which can meet the child's needs it is proposed that travel assistance will not be provided.

(e) PROPOSAL FIVE (Independent Travel Training)

- (i) Travel training gives people with special educational needs or disabilities the confidence and skills to travel on buses and trains. Help can also be provided for walking routes. Being able to travel on public transport is a key life skill. It lets you make choices about how you live, go about your daily life and fulfil your potential. Training can be individually tailored to the needs of the young person and include aspects like:
 - a) Confidence in using buses or trains

- b) Personal safety
 - c) How to use timetables and buy tickets
 - d) Road safety, including how to cope with traffic on major roads
 - e) What to do when things go wrong (e.g. the bus is late) and
 - f) Money skills
- (ii) Darlington Council has recruited through external grant funding a travel trainer to support young people to access independent travel where families and carers consider this to be appropriate to their needs.
- (iii) It is recognised that it will be important to work with parent/carers and education settings to identify suitable young people for travel training and to work within the young person's time frame.

Consultation

10. It is proposed to consult on the proposed changes from the 10 October to 21 November 2018 and then bring the matter back to Cabinet in February 2019.