

**MINUTES OF A SPECIAL MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND LEARNING  
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**Tuesday 5 July 2011 (7.30pm – 9.00pm)  
Havering Town Hall, Romford**

**Present:**

Councillors Sandra Binion (Chairman), Dennis Bull, Nic Dodin, Gillian Ford (Vice-Chairman), Robby Misir, Pat Murray, Billy Taylor, Lynden Thorpe (substitute for Frederick Thompson) and Linda Trew.

Co-opted Members: Phillip Grundy and Anne Ling.

Also present was Councillor Paul Rochford and 25 members of the public.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Keith Darvill and Frederick Thompson, and non-voting members Margaret Cameron, Sue Kortlandt and Keith Passingham.

The Chairman advised those present of action to be taken in the event of an emergency evacuation of the building becoming necessary.

**31. PROPOSALS FOR THE PROVISION OF TRAVEL ASSISTANCE TO  
SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN WITH SEN – REQUISITION OF CABINET  
DECISION**

The Committee considered a requisition of a Cabinet Decision made on 15 June 2011, regarding changes to the travel assistance offered to children with special educational needs to and from school.

The decision had been called-in in accordance with paragraph 17 of the Overview and Scrutiny rules by Councillors Keith Darvill and Gillian Ford.

The Committee was informed that the changes to the travel scheme sought to ensure that a high quality service could continue whilst making efficiency savings, broadly through an end to the assumption that SEN pupils would receive assistance to and from school only from a de facto taxi service.

Specific changes to the service were outlined as follows:

- The adoption of the revised policy on travel assistance (provided as an appendix to the Committee)

- The introduction of a requirement that parents must apply for travel assistance for their child in respect of each academic year.
- The introduction of safe meeting points for children currently transported by PTS bus to Corbets Tey and Dycorts schools (subject to a full independent assessment of need).
- That children who are eligible for and given travel assistance in the form of door to door transport, will only be taken to and from the child's home address. New requests for travel assistance to school from an address other than the child's home will not be accommodated. Existing arrangements for a small number of families will continue while the children concerned remain eligible for door to door travel assistance to school.
- The expansion of the existing travel training scheme to all children and young people with SEN who are assessed as being suitable and likely to benefit from such training.
- The introduction of a mandatory assessment of suitability for travel training for all students with SEN:
  - on receipt of any new requests for assistance to get to school or college
  - at the end of Key Stage 3 (approximately age 14), if already receiving Council assistance in getting to school, and;
  - at age 21 for those in Further Education establishments and already receiving Council assistance in getting to College.

The Committee noted the reasons for the decision as follows:

1. The adoption of the revised policy will clearly set out the Council's aim of increasing independence and reducing reliance on Council-organised transport solutions.
2. An annual application for travel assistance will:
  - Ensure that only those who are eligible for help will receive it year-on-year;
  - Avoid transport solutions being paid for by the Council indefinitely where the student no longer meets the eligibility requirements; and
  - Enable the Council to identify where a student's circumstances have changed, so that the assistance offered can be tailored to suit their needs best.
3. The introduction of safe meeting points for pupils at Corbets Tey and Dycorts schools will reduce bus journey times for many children, as journeys will follow a more direct route with fewer stops.

4. Where door-to-door transport to school is provided, stipulating that for new applicants this will only be to and from the child's home address will enable the Council to carry out efficient route planning and make the best use of its resources, whilst meeting its statutory obligations.
5. Extending the travel training scheme to children with SEN who are assessed as suitable will:
  - Give increased freedom and quality of life;
  - Be an enabling process for future employment and social life; and
  - Develop social skills and increased self-confidence.
6. The introduction of mandatory assessments of suitability for travel training will enable the Council to identify as early as possible any children who would benefit from personalised travel training. By assessing children at Key Stage 3, the focus will not only be on helping them to be independent on their journey to school but also looking to their potential future journeys to college. For those in Further Education, training will improve their future employment prospects as they would be better prepared for travel to work.
7. Increased use of voluntary sector organisations will create a mixed economy and facilitate the smooth implementation of travel training and safe meeting point proposals in a cost-effective manner. This would be necessary for timely execution as the Council does not have sufficient staff resources to dedicate to this.

The Committee considered the other options considered as detailed in the report. Officers then explained the changes and the process by which the decision had been made in response to the reasons for the requisition detailed in the report presented to the Committee.

Officers began by detailing the detailed and extensive consultation that had been undertaken with regards the change in policy. 385 questionnaires were sent to parents. Officers further explained that the LA did have a statutory duty to ensure travel assistance for SEN pupils and that the changes would cement that duty, whilst delivering £600,000 of savings.

There were a number of questions surrounding the proposed independent assessment of travel needs that would be undertaken for those parents relying on travel assistance. Officers made it clear that the judgement of the independent charity would be final and the LA would go with their recommendation. This would include continuing to provide to the current provision to those families judged to be in the most need. The independent assessor was a charity that had expertise

in the needs of SEN pupils; this organisation was selected not only for its expertise in this area, but also to guarantee independent judgements.

Officers explained that other boroughs had adopted similar proposals to reduce costs and that these schemes had largely been successful, this was based on best practice from Barking and Dagenham, Hackney and Tower Hamlets which were being used to inform the Havering model.

Members questioned as to the feasibility studies that had been carried out to assess specific and nuanced complexities for SEN parents and how changes would affect them. Officers reaffirmed that the independent assessment was being established for the very reason of ensuring that individual and specific needs would be catered for.

The Committee noted that the new regime would bring a fresh emphasis on travel training for SEN pupils to make them confident and able to access and use public transport safely, this would be part of a wider process of helping them obtain independence later in life. All children would be encouraged to achieve maximum independence and this would mean a high percentage of children would be travel-trained than at present. Leading LAs had been researched in the area of travel training to help inform Havering's policy.

In order to best facilitate an effective and robust travel training provision Havering was looking at possible joint-procurement with neighbouring boroughs, whereby the voluntary and private sector could play a role in delivering the service. The finalised scheme would be in place by December. There were concerns that some children who were not ready would be forced into undertaking travel training; this might also be against the wishes of the family. However, officers stated that they would judge each case by the verdict of the independent assessment.

The Committee moved on to consider the proposed central locality points that would replace the de facto taxi service. Pupils would now be collected from these central locations, which were guaranteed to never be more than a ten minute walk from the child's home. The Committee looked at maps which showed where the central points would be located and members were informed that these points would be constantly reviewed to keep in line with demographic changes. It was also explained that if a parent picked a school for their child that was further than an alternative nearer school then the parent would be responsible for transport and they would be able to rely on the travel service.

Members queried the reasons for many parents being against the re-introduction of central travel points (this model having been used in the

past). It was stated that there were myriad factors for this, largely concerning concerns of marshalling the children to the central location, fear of them standing in the rain. Ultimately, convenience was the biggest argument against.

In response to queries regarding drop-off points, officers explained that multiple addresses would now not be applicable and the current practice whereby some children could be dropped off to a different address from their home would cease. However, it would continue for those currently having this service. All drop-off points would be the same as the child's home address. If there would no one to meet a child then the child would be taken to a place of safety, such as a children's centre, council offices or a school and the parent would need to arrive at that location with photo id to collect the child.

Finally, members questioned the financial impact the changes would have on the Passenger Transport Service (PTS), which provided the service. It was stated that a business model had been drawn up the PTS and that this did not include any planned redundancies. The PTS had been fully involved in the process. In the first 3 weeks of the schemes introduction the service would provide a higher level of marshalls and support staff to ease the transition.

The Chairman asked the Committee to vote on whether to uphold the requisition.

**The Committee voted not to uphold the requisition by 8 votes to 3 with 2 abstentions.**

The voting was as follows:

For: Councillors Dodin, Ford and Murray  
Against: Councillors Binion, Bull, Misir, Thorpe, Taylor and Trew. Co-opted Members Phillip Grundy and Anne Ling

**The meeting was concluded.**