



CABINET

Subject Heading:

Home to School Transport Policy Consultation

Cabinet Member:

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SLT Lead:

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Report Author and contact details:

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Policy context:

This is a change in the existing School Transport Policy to offer alternative options to parents/carers to get their child to school

Financial summary:

This Policy change will enable the service to meet its MTFS target over the next 4 years of £1.4m

Is this a Key Decision?

*Indicate grounds for decision being Key:
(a) Expenditure or saving (including anticipated income) of £500,000 or more*

When should this matter be reviewed?

September 2024

Reviewing OSC:

People OSSC

The subject matter of this report deals with the following Council Objectives

People - Things that matter for residents X

Place - A great place to live, work and enjoy X

Resources - A well run Council that delivers for People and Place. X

SUMMARY

In recent years, Havering has experienced a significant and continued increase in the number of requests for an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and the number of EHCPs being issued. The number has increased from 1,328 in 2017/18 to 2,189 in 2021/22, a cumulative increase of 861, or 62% based on 2017/18 levels. This increase is forecast to increase further, and we expect to have over 3,200 by 2025/26.

This increase in EHCPs has also resulted in a significant increase in demand for transport assistance, and spend has exceeded budgets for a number of years, despite various mitigations being introduced. The pandemic impacted on spend as travel was disrupted due to the various periods of lockdown, which meant that spend was suppressed in 2020/21 and 2021/22, but spend in 2022/23 was £5.5m, against a budget of £2.7m – an overspend of £2.8m.

The DfE has recently launched new Home-to-school travel statutory guidance, which requires the Local Authority to review its existing policies.

We currently support around 600 individuals up to 25 years old with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. It tends to be parents applying for young people up to 16 then individuals post 16 up to 25 subject to individual's capacity and ability.

The aim of the project is ultimately to deliver a more personalised transport assistance service, whilst delivering savings of £1.4m over four years as a minimum. We aim to introduce new policies to meet the new statutory guidance from the DfE for the relevant age groups.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is recommended to agree to consult on the attached draft Home to School Transport policy

REPORT DETAIL

1. Havering Council currently offers advice, support and assistance to eligible children and young people travelling between home and school/college in accordance with the criteria set out in our [home to school travel assistance policy](#).
2. In recent years, Havering has experienced a significant and continued increase in the number of requests for an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and the number of EHCPs being issued. The number has increased from 1,328 in 2017/18 to 2,189 in 2021/22, a cumulative increase of 861, or 62% based on 2017/18 levels. This increase is forecast to increase further, and we expect to have over 3,200 by 2025/26.
3. This increase in EHCPs has also resulted in a significant increase in demand for transport assistance, and spend has exceeded budgets for a number of years, despite various mitigations being introduced. The pandemic impacted on spend as travel was disrupted due to the various periods of lockdown, which meant that spend was suppressed in 2020/21 and 2021/22, but spend in 2022/23 was £5.5m, against a budget of £2.7m – an overspend of £2.8m.
4. The purpose of this report is to gain approval for a consultation and to ensure that the process is legally compliant.
5. A review of existing policies in other boroughs (Appendix A) has shown that Havering is an outlier in many aspects. For example, many do not provide transport assistance if the school is the parental choice and an alternative school is closer. Many also seek financial contributions for pupils who are post-16 but require transport. All boroughs use the statutory distance criteria, but passenger assistants are not universally provided. Most boroughs promote the use of travel training and fuel re-imburement, and whilst most state that a seat on a passenger bus and/or taxi are exceptional, the majority of children in Havering access transport assistance in this way.
6. It is recommended that the policy is refreshed, and the main changes to the policy will be as follows:
 - Make it clear within the policy that sustainable, cost effective levels of support will be promoted and offered to families, and that the first offer of transport assistance would be the option that would incur the least cost to the Council.
 - Introduce flexible models of transport assistance which would allow families to support/share transport – for example car-pooling so that a parent could escort more than one child.
 - Establish a single team to oversee this and monitor the home to school transport arrangements which is currently split in three separate areas. In

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1	16.6 miles	£254 (£48,260 over 190 days)	Yes	£29.21 (£5,549.90 over 190 days)	£33.60 (£5,376 over 190 days)	£224.79 (£42,710.10 over 190 days)	£220.40 (£41,876 over 190 days)
2	18.2 miles	£225 (£42,750 over 190 days)	Yes	£32.03 (£6,085.70 over 190 days)	£39.94 (£7,588.60 over 190 days)	£192.97 (£36,664.30 over 190 days)	185.06 (£35,161.40 over 190 days)
3	21.3 miles	£207.90 (£39,501 over 190 days)	Yes	£37.48 (£7,121.20 over 190 days)	£37.92 (£7204.80 over 190 days)	170.42 (£32,379.80 over 190 days)	169.98 (£32,296.20 over 190 days)
4	16.0 miles	£190 (£36,100 over 190 days)	Yes	£28.16 (£5,350.40 over 190 days)	£30.53 (£5,800.70 over 190 days)	161.84 (£30,749.60 over 190 days)	159.47 (£30,299.30 over 190 days)
5	11.6 miles	£170 (£32,300 over 190 days)	Yes	£20.41 (£3,887.90 over 190 days)	£20.83 (£3,957.70 over 190 days)	149.59 (£28,422.10 over 190 days)	149.17 (£28,324.30 over 190 days)
6	25.8 miles	£240 (£45,600 over 190 days)	Yes	£45.41 (£8,627.90 over 190 days)	£46.17 (£8,772.30 over 190 days)	194.59 (£36,972.10 over 190 days)	193.83 (£36,827.70 over 190 days)
7	12.4 miles	£160 (£30,400 over 190 days)	Yes	£21.82 (£4,145. over 190 days)	£25.52 (£4848.80 over 190 days)	138.18 (£26,254.20 over 190 days)	134.48 (£25,551.20 over 190 days)
8	14.7 miles	£150 (£28,500 over 190 days)	Yes	£25.87 (£5,485.30 over 190 days)	£26.64 (£5061.60 over 190 days)	124.13 (£23,584.70 over 190 days)	123.36 (£23,438.40 over 190 days)
9	14.4 miles	£155 (£29,450 over 190 days)	Yes	£25.34 (£4,814.60 over 190 days)	£43.47 (£8,259.30 over 190 days)	129.66 (£24,635.40 over 190 days)	111.53 (£21,190.70 over 190 days)
10	22.7 miles	£228 (£43,320 over 190 days)	Yes	£39.95 (£7,590.50 over 190 days)	£42.11 (£8,000.09 over 190 days)	188.05 (£35,729.50 over 190 days)	185.89 (£35,319.10 over 190 days)

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The tables below illustrate the savings that could be achieved through making the policy changes above relating to the removal of a seat on a bus as a travel assistance option based on two of the routes in the current academic year;

TRAVEL OUT-OF-BOROUGH BUS						
Students	Mileage Distance	Daily Cost of Transport	Fuel Reimbursement Cost Per Day (A)	Direct Payment (Based on UBER Charges) (B)	Possible savings against (A)	Possible savings against (B)
1	19.1 miles	£81.67	£33.62	£36.26	£48.05 (£9,129.50 over 190 days)	£45.41 (£8,627.90 over 190 days)
2	20.7 miles	£81.67	£36.43	£38.98	£45.24 (£8,595.60 over 190 days)	£42.69 (£8,111.10 over 190 days)
3	19.5 miles	£81.67	£34.32	£37.13	£47.35 (£8,996.50 over 190 days)	£44.54 (£8,462.60 over 190 days)
4	10.2 miles	£81.67	£17.95	£22.43	£63.73 (£12,106.80 over 190 days)	£59.24 (£11,255.60 over 190 days)
5	9.8 miles	£81.67	£17.25	£22.88	£64.42 (£12,239.80 over 190 days)	£58.79 (£11,170.10 over 190 days)
6	12.7 miles	£81.67	£22.35	£32.50	£59.32 (£11,270.80 over 190 days)	£49.17 (£9,342.30 over 190 days)

TRAVEL IN-BOROUGH BUS						
Students	Mileage Distance	Daily Cost of Transport	Fuel Reimbursement Cost Per Day (A)	Direct Payment (Based on UBER Charges) (B)	Possible savings against (A)	Possible savings against (B)
1	1.6 miles	£69.17	£2.82	£7.31	£66.35 (£12,606.50 over 190 days)	£61.86 (£11,753.40 over 190 days)

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					over 190 days)	over 190 days)
2	1.3 miles	£69.17	£2.29	£6.69	£66.88 (£12,707.20 over 190 days)	£62.48 (£11,871.20 over 190 days)
3	1.7 miles	£69.17	£2.99	£6.69	£66.18 (£12,574.20 over 190 days)	£62.48 (£11,871.20 over 190 days)
4	2.2 miles	£69.17	£3.87	£7.05	£65.30 (£12,407 over 190 days)	£62.12 (£11,802.80 over 190 days)
5	1.1 miles	£69.17	£1.94	£6.69	£67.23 (£12,773.70 over 190 days)	£62.48 (£11,871.20 over 190 days)
6	0.9 mile	£69.17	£1.58	£6.69	£67.59 (£12,842.10 over 190 days)	£62.48 (£11,871.20 over 190 days)

8. As can be seen from the examples above, the Council is currently being charged a much higher rate For each route (taxis and a seat on a bus) when compared the costs associated with fuel reimbursement or The private taxi hire rates.

9. Some of these increased costs could be associated with the need to provide an escort. Therefore, it is recommended to provide financial assistance to eligible families so that they can provide their own passenger assistants.

10. However, it should be noted that the current buses are able to transport children with mobility issues And/or wheelchair users, which may not be able to be serviced by private taxis. In addition, the buses provide A consistent and calm environment for the children being transported, which means that children arrive at school ready for the day. The movement to private taxis could risk this position as the children could be transported by different taxis and/or drivers, which could result in children arriving at school distressed and not ready to engage in learning.

11. PTS currently pay escorts £17.74 per hour, and PTS escorts are contracted to 15 hours per week, term Time only, but they also pick up overtime hours outside this. Currently, taxi companies are charging from £14.50 - £38.00 depending on the journey time, and this is built into the cost of the journey. The current DPS Rate for children is £12.67 per hour and if we were to pay this to families, we could be saving £1.83 per hour compared to the lowest taxi rate, and £5.07 compared to the PTS hourly rate.

12. As well as the proposed changes to the policy detailed above, there is also a need to develop the Processes around application, awards, and appeals if these changes were to be adopted. For example, it is recommended that there is Member input into the Appeals process so that they are able to respond to any

complaints that follow the appeals process.

13. Savings proposed below assume that the baseline budget for 2023/24 is at least equivalent to spend in 2022/23, but uplifted in line with expected increase in demand (9%) – baseline £6.141m budget;

2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27	4 Year total
£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
0.100	0.200	0.500	0.600	1.400

14. There is a need for investment to develop the infrastructure for managing and developing travel assistance.

15. This investment would also allow for systems and processes to be developed to support the commissioning of transport across social care – i.e. emergency transport required for young people identified via social workers. The investment will also take into account and align with other developments, such as developing education and placements in the borough.

REASONS AND OPTIONS

Reasons for the decision:

To provide the Parents/Carers of Children within the Borough a voice in the changes to the Home-to- school transport through a consultation process.

To ensure all Policies affecting age groups up to 25 in line with the new statutory guidance as issued by the DfE

To manage the cost of Home-to-school Transport to prevent a cost escalation with existing offers to Parents.

To Achieve the MTFs savings Target of £1.4m over the next 4 years.

Improve the options to Parents and Carers on how they can enable their children are able to get to school.

At this stage it is not intended to look to recruit the two additional staff for the establishment of the new team as we will return with the request for additional staff to the team whether recruited internally or externally.

Other options considered:

The only alternative approach is doing nothing and maintaining the current policy which would not achieve savings and with the impending numbers in the current years of SEND young people will see the budget escalate beyond the current spend levels.

Increasing PTS was an option but is cost prohibitive with the number of investment in multiple more roots

Developing a framework with Taxi firms was looked into but this was also cost prohibitive.

IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

Financial implications and risks:

Without this approval to move to consultation we will not be able to achieve the MTFs target and attain control of the transport costs

Legal implications and risks:

The revised statutory guidance provides:

“Where they propose changes to their school travel policy which may affect children’s eligibility for transport, local authorities should consult locally. As a minimum, this should include consulting:

- schools whose pupils will be affected by the proposed changes, including those located in other local authority areas;
- parents whose children will (or may) be affected by the proposed changes, including those whose children attend school in a neighbouring authority, and those whose children may be affected in the future – for example, because they live in the catchment area of, or attend the feeder school of, a school affected by the proposed changes; and
- the local Parent Carer Forum.

Consultation should last for at least 28 working days during term time. Local

authorities may not consider it necessary to consult on minor amendments or corrections.

Local authorities should give careful consideration to:

- the impact proposed changes to their policy will have on parents' choice of school, particularly where travel arrangements have been made to support parents' preference for their children to attend a school with a designated religious character (some such arrangements are associated with long-standing local agreements about the siting of schools);
- the financial impact the changes will have on affected families, paying particular attention to the potential impact of any changes on children from low-income families;
- the impact the changes will have on people with protected characteristics

Wherever possible, local authorities should phase in changes so that children who begin attending a school under one set of travel arrangements continue to benefit from those arrangements until they leave that school.”

The proposal to commence a consultation is in line with the above requirements. Consultees must be given sufficient information and time to respond before their comments are conscientiously taken into account by the final decision maker.

Human Resources implications and risks:

Additional 2 staff required to a new Home to School Transport Team as well as the move of existing staff from other functions within the council currently providing the same support. This will be explored at a later date and when establishing the team will return with a separate report to proceed with the recruitment.

Equalities implications and risks:

The EQIA shows an impact on age and disability areas through providing a wider choice and range of opportunities to get to and from school at the discretion of the parents or carers. It will give a greater flexibility than a menu of choices currently on offer as well as support to parents to make the best choices to achieve the desired outcomes for children and young people.

Health and Wellbeing implications and Risks

The risks to the mental well-being of staff will be affected trying to manage and maintain the current process and maintain the cost implications

Trying to promote physical activity through walking to school and reducing taxi usage will impact on the health and wellbeing of those children who are physically able to walk to school

ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS

With the proposals on the Home to School we aim to reduce the number of taxis being utilised on a daily basis and there reduce the emissions that result from this reduction supporting cleaner air quality.

BACKGROUND PAPERS