



Children & Learning Overview & Scrutiny Committee (Special)

4 JULY 2011

Subject Heading:

Proposals for the provision of travel assistance to school for children with SEN – Requisition of Cabinet Decision

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In accordance with paragraph 17 of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Rules, a requisition signed by two Members representing more than one Group (Councillors Keith Darvill and Gillian Ford) has called in the decision of the Cabinet dated 15 June 2011. The text of the requisition appears at the end of this report:

CABINET DECISION

On 15 June 2011, Cabinet agreed changes to the policy and practice relating to the provision of travel assistance to school or college for children and young people with special educational needs (“SEN”). The changes seek to ensure that a high quality service can continue whilst making efficiency-savings, broadly through an end to the assumption that SEN pupils will receive assistance to and from school only from a de facto taxi service.

The specific changes are as follows:

- The adoption of the revised policy on travel assistance (detailed in the Cabinet report which is attached as an appendix to this report) which embodies the basic principles which are set out in recommendations 2 to 6.
- 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

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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.
- To enter into contracts for travel training, mobility assessments and route delivery with the voluntary sector or private sector where business cases are agreed with the Lead Member.

Reasons for the decision:

The reasons for the decision as outlined in the Cabinet report attached were 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:

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- 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.

Other options considered and rejected:

As detailed in the Cabinet report attached, the following other options were considered and rejected.

Do nothing

This was not a viable option given the financial pressures faced by the Council.

Increase the maximum target journey time from 60 minutes to 75 minutes, in line with national guidelines

This was rejected due to the potential adverse impact on children.

Outsource the entire current provision of home-to-school transport

This was rejected as it did not address efficiency issues and would have hindered wider ambition to increase independence wherever possible.

Use private hire taxis for home-to-school transport as an alternative to the Council's PTS buses

This was rejected as (i) soft market testing indicated that this would not result in any significant savings; (ii) there would be a negative environmental impact; and (iii) concern over having a large number of vehicles entering school premises at the start and end of the school day.

Cease provision of travel assistance to 22-25 year olds attending Further Education Colleges as no legal duty to do so:

This was rejected, however, travel training will be promoted for these young people and the Council will work with Colleges around the curriculum and timetabling.

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Offer of a mileage payment to parents who resume responsibility for taking their child to and from school

This was rejected as (i) concerns raised over fairness as many parents do already take their own children to school and do not expect payment; and (ii) deemed ethically unsound as, if parents are able to take their child to school, they should not be moved to do so only for potential financial gain.

REASONS FOR REQUISITION

The reasons are detailed as follows:

1. To allow the relevant Overview & Scrutiny Committee opportunity to examine the consultation responses received.
2. To examine the impact on service users on the withdrawal of the pick up service from alternative addresses.
3. To consider in greater detail the proposal of meeting points for children currently transported by the Councils Passenger Transport Service ("PTS").
4. To consider financial impact on Passenger Transport Service
5. To benchmark against neighbouring boroughs ensuring parity in service.
6. To consider the health and safety legislation in relation to the introduction of meeting points for children.
7. To consider potential impact of governments ongoing review for home to school transport
8. To consider contingency arrangements due to staff absence, adverse weather conditions etc.
9. To examine the role of the voluntary and private sector in delivering travel training, mobility assessments and route delivery.
10. To discuss the funding streams for the delivery of travel training, mobility assessments and route delivery.

Appended to this report is: Cabinet Report on Proposals for the provision of travel assistance to school for children with SEN, 15 June 2011.

Minute of the Cabinet Decision – 15 June 2011

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee considers the requisition of the Cabinet decision and determines whether to uphold it.