

Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council

Schools Forum 6 February 2007

Report of the Director of Children's Services

**Briefing on the Transport Review currently being undertaken by the Directorate of
Children's Services Transport Team**

Purpose of Report

1. To advise Schools Forum of the Transport Review being undertaken following a request from Schools Forum at the previous meeting.

Discussed elsewhere

2. No

Action for Schools Forum

3. To be advised of the progress of the review to date.

Tony Wells

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In light of the projected overspend on the home-to-school transport budget a review of the current transport provision is being carried out. Under the review those children who are transported by the home-to-school service but do not meet the distance criteria as set out in the home-to-school transport policy are having their transport provision investigated and in some cases revoked. When a parent is notified that transport is to cease an appeal form is enclosed.

The aim of the review is twofold:

To ensure that provision is maintained for eligible pupils.

To carry out route evaluation with the intention of streamlining transport provision so that there is maximum use of seating capacity and a corresponding reduction in cost.

Progress of Review to date

90 pupils on the home-to-school transport service have been considered under the review. A summary of action taken to date is detailed below:

Action	Amount	Comment
Appeal upheld	20	Fast track system in place if information contained in appeal brings pupil within entitlement under transport policy.
Appeal denied	3	1 confirmed and 2 subject to a final check of walking route.
Under investigation	19	Appeal panel directed that school be approached to provide additional information prior to final decision by Director.
Pending agreement with CSC	2	Complex cases with CSC involvement that require agreement on funding.

To be put before panel in Feb	19	Appeals received since last panel held on 12 th Jan 07.
Appeal not received	27	Transport team attempting to make contact with parent. Once it is established that a parent has been contacted by the team failure to submit an appeal will be construed as an acceptance of the decision to cease transport.

The review of transport was put in place as the most effective means of reducing expenditure within the current financial year. The overspend was highlighted well in advance of December and attempts were made to reduce costs prior to a full scale review being carried out.

The circumstances that led to the shortfall in funding are not related to a single factor and include:

- a. An increase of out of borough day placements leading to an overall saving against residential placement but these have increased transport costs.
- b. Savings anticipated from changes to denominational entitlement not realised in this financial year.
- c. Increased fuel charges well above the basic rate of inflation.
- d. Increase in expensive transport provision for children with complex medical and physical needs.
- e. Additional "top up" funding now no longer available. This has been used to offset transport cost pressures in previous years.

Impact on other services

The overspend in transport is not anticipated to impact on other services. Savings have been identified for the 07/08 financial year including the complete contract re-tender which will allow for a rationalisation of routes and an overall reduction in cost.

Social implications

Each appeal against the decision to remove transport is considered individually. When an appeal is denied the family circumstances have been considered as has the legal obligation of the authority to provide free transport.

Future funding

Next year's budget has already been set although there is an ongoing review of the amount of funding available. Transport requests will be thoroughly vetted and more parents may have to appeal if they do not meet distance criteria but anticipate transport solely because the child attends a special school. The cost of transport is being checked with the transport team when SEN and pre-school services assess placements for children both in and out of borough.

Lessons learned

One of the issues highlighted in the transport review is that transport entitlement is not being regularly reviewed in line with home-to-school transport policy. The Transport Manager is to check each application to ensure that transport is provided in line with policy. The home-to-school transport policy is to be amended to reflect the greater degree of control that the transport manager will have when assessing applications.

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