

Select Committee on Children's Services –23 March 2011

Report of the Acting Director of Children's Services

Children's Travel and Transport Team

Purpose of Report

1. To inform Select Committee on Children's Services on the work carried out by the Directorate of Children's Services Travel and Transport Team (CSTT).

Background

2. The Children's Services Travel and Transport Team is made up of 4 full time and 2 part time members of staff based in Kings House. The team have responsibility for assessing entitlement and arranging the transport for:
 - Pre-school assessment units
 - Home-to-school – Special Educational Needs (SEN)
 - Home-to-school (mainstream)
 - Home & Hospital Tuition Service (Cherry Tree)
 - Children's Social Care
 - Home-to-school
 - Supervised contact
 - Secure accommodation
 - Social activities
 - Post 16 home-to-school/college
 - Management of the Offsite Educational Visits and Journeys Service
 - Work in partnership with Directorate of Urban Environment Road Safety to promote and enhance Independent Travel Training.
3. The services provided ensure that the Council complies with its statutory duties relating to educational provision, disability rights, court orders, safeguarding, and improving children's educational and other outcomes.
4. Transport is provided from a bank of authorised contractors who also provide passenger assistants registered and cleared through Children's Services Travel and Transport. Contractors are invited to quote for routes and awards are based on the best value price offered. The only exception being 2 routes maintained by Pens Meadow School and crewed by school staff – these routes have high risk children allocated that may require the administration of medication during the journey.
5. Transport requests are submitted via an on-line form that includes a child's profile, a risk assessment and justification for the request. Applications are assessed in line with the entitlement criteria identified in the relevant transport

policy. Policies have been developed to ensure that Dudley Metropolitan Borough Council statutory duties are met but not exceeded.

Key issues and responsibilities

6. The numbers of children requiring pre-school assessment is steadily rising and has recently resulted in the commissioning of an additional assessment unit. This group of children often have complex medical conditions and are likely to move on to Old Park, Pens Meadow, Penn Hall, The Victoria School (Birmingham) or Chadsgrove (Catshill).
7. Specialist transport such as tail lift vehicles and bespoke seating is often a requirement. Passenger Assistant for these routes are provided by the contractors with the exception of one unit that provides members of staff because of the complex needs of the children. Children/staff ratio's are high and routes are necessarily low on passenger loading which has an impact on cost.
8. Special Educational Needs Home-to-School transport remains the bulk of travel and transport provision commissioned by the Directorate of Children's Services. Around 760 pupils are transported on 190 school days to specialist provision. Most transport is to local Special Schools, Pupil Referral Units and specialist centres for Language and Visual Impairment. A limited amount of transport is provided to those children travelling out of borough to specialist provision in Birmingham and Wolverhampton.
9. Mainstream Home-to-School transport accounts for 170K of the transport budget. Approximately £70,000 is spent on bus passes for children who are entitled under distance criteria identified in the Education Act 1996 ss444(4) or as amended by the Education and Inspections Act 2006. The balance is spent on taxi's and minibus and coaches for children who are unable to walk to school accompanied by an adult as necessary. The reasons that transport is authorised are varied but generally confined to:
 - Unsafe walking route
 - Child has a medical condition that makes walking unsafe.
 - Parent has a medical condition and no other family members available to accompany the child.
 - Temporary incapacity such as broken leg
 - Route set in place under an agreement – Pedmore Bus & Bishop Milner Bus.
10. Home and Hospital Tuition Service now called the Cherry Tree School accounts for 98K of the transport budget. Children attend generally part time under a permutation of mornings, afternoons, whole days and certain sessions only each week. Minibuses bring the children to school under a single operators contract. The recent Schools White Paper identified that children educated otherwise will be entitled to a full time education rather than the current statutory 5 hours minimum provision. This has the potential to significantly reduce the travel and transport costs of this group of children if implemented.

11. The Children's Services Travel and Transport Team set in place and monitor the provision of transport for the 11 district teams of Children and Families Social Workers. Transport is mainly requested to meet the assessed needs and directions of a Court Order and is mainly to enable children to continue to attend a school in line with their care plan or directed by the court. This often entails travel from an out of borough placement back into Dudley. Transport to contact also accounts for significant expenditure and Social Workers have a checklist to work through before seeking the approval of their line manager and requesting a taxi. The checklist ensures that all alternative solutions have been considered prior to a request being made. Travel for this group of children is arranged over 365 days of the year. To facilitate this the Transport Manager and Officer are also available on a goodwill basis out of hours on duty mobile phones.
12. Post 16 home-to-school/college transport has to date formed a small part of the transport function with a budget of 30K for transport and Circa 70K from Central Government for post 16 sustainable travel initiatives. As a result of recent changes to legislation, including the duty on the Local Authority to publish the travel and transport arrangements in place for Learners with a Learning Difficulty or Disability up to the age of 25. The responsibility for assessing entitlement and setting in place the travel and transport arrangements for this group of young people will transfer to the Children's Services Travel and Transport Team from September 2011. The budget will be circa 230K from 2011 and eligibility criteria are being reviewed to ensure that only those learners who do not have the ability (mobility vehicle for example) are provided with transport support in the form of a taxi or minibus.
13. The Offsite Educational Visits and Journeys Service is part funded by the Directorate of Children's Services transport budget and an agreement with the Schools Forum. This on-line service coordinates the risk assessments of off-site educational visits for Dudley children who undertake visits arranged by schools, Youth Services, children's centres and Duke of Edingburgh Awards. A Transport Officer manages the day to day provision of the service and a management review group is chaired by the Transport Manager.
14. Independent Travel Training is seen as the most effective means of reducing travel expenditure. A pilot scheme is running at Halesbury School with individual children being targeted with great success. The Children's Services Travel and Transport Team is working with both Directorate of Urban Environment and Connexions to develop a robust and effective scheme that targets the year 9 transition interview with parents and children as the starting point for travel training. The intention is to raise awareness amongst parents that travel training is available and that taxi transport is not automatically offered year on year at both school and college.
15. Aligned with the transfer of the responsibility for arranging Post 16 travel is a plan to record and challenge incidents that travel training is refused when there is reason to believe that a child has the potential for successful Independent Travel Training. If we can raise the awareness of parents that taxi travel from year 10 through to college will be only offered in the most exceptional circumstance then this may assist in the drive towards greater independence

and reduced travel costs. A single route closure of a taxi transporting 5 children with an escort at circa £65.00 per day would generate the resources to fund 53 annual travel passes.

16. A new initiative under development is the “Travel Buddy” scheme where a supervising adult is provided to travel on foot or public transport with a child who would otherwise need a taxi to attend school. The aim of the scheme is to prevent commissioning a taxi to meet statutory duties and reduce costs while promoting a healthier lifestyle.
17. In almost every service area budget pressures are high and a constant review of the transport in place is necessary to control expenditure. Benchmarking is undertaken routinely and the expenditure of comparable authorities is checked against section 52 data available from the central government web site. The Children’s Services Travel and Transport Team have consistently been able to evidence that statistically Dudley Council has been in the lower 4th percentile of Local Authorities spend on Children’s Transport and remain there at this time.
18. Through consultation and efficient communication the vision of Children’s Services is to drive forward sustainable opportunities to reduce dependency on expensive taxi transport. This will be achieved by effective assessment of entitlement and need. Robust transport policies ensuring that the Local Authority meets statutory duties. The development of initiatives such as travel training and travel buddies. Ensuring that policy is communicated to parents, carers, schools and colleagues who provide advice and guidance on entitlement. Regular reviews of transport in place and working with stakeholders to promote independent travel at every opportunity.

Appeals Procedure

19. When a request for travel or transport assistance is refused by the Transport Manager because it does not meet policy constraints the parent or carer is notified of the decision and given details of the review procedure. A review, when requested, is carried out by a Divisional Manager to ensure that policy has been applied correctly and to establish that there are no other considerations that were not taken into account when the original refusal was made. If the refusal is upheld then the parent or carer is notified in writing and given details of how to apply for an appeal.
20. Legal and Democratic Services coordinate the appeals process which is heard by a panel of Councillors. The appellant has the opportunity to make personal representation at the appeal to support their case. The Transport Manager represents the Local Authority and substantiates why a request for travel or transport support has been refused. A panel of three Councillors will then deliberate on a decision which is communicated in writing by Legal and Democratic Services. The panel may rule in favour of the appellant in exception to policy if they feel that the individual circumstances merit travel or transport support. Decisions are binding and support is set in place if directed by the panel.

Finance

21. The 2010/11 Net Local Authority Transport budget is as follows:

- Home to School Transport (Mainstream) - £152,300
- Home to School Transport (Special) - £2,380,920
- Transport – Home and Hospital - £99,400
- Transport – Children’s Social Care - £701,600
- Awards – Home to College Transport - £30,900

Total £3,365,120

The Dedicated Schools Grant also contributes £30,500 towards the Offsite Educational Visits and Journeys Service.

Funding of £75k was made available from the Young Peoples Learning Agency for 16 – 19 Transport.

Law

22. The services provided ensure that the Council complies with its various statutory duties relating to educational provision, disability rights, court orders, safeguarding, and improving children’s educational and other outcomes.

Equality Impact

23. This report takes into account the Council’s Equality and Diversity Policy by promoting the travel and transport opportunities available to children and young people, including those with a learning difficulty or disability, who need to access education or social care.

Recommendation

24. It is recommended that:

- Select Committee note this report and endorse the work that Children’s Services do with this group of young people
- Select Committee promote and support the work being undertaken to establish sustainable alternatives to taxi transport including Independent Travel Training and the Travel Buddy scheme.



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