

# **Durham County Council Home to School Transport - Consultation**

**Children and Young People's Overview and  
Scrutiny Committee**

**10<sup>th</sup> March 2023**



# Purpose

- Outline background to the Consultation
- Set out the Proposals for Consultation
- Set out Consultation Timeframe
- Questions

# Eligibility & Number of Users

- Council has statutory duty to provide transport to eligible children
- Eligibility is summarised as follows:
  - Have special educational needs/disabilities/mobility issues
  - Live a set distance from their nearest appropriate school
- The Council also provides discretionary transport to approx. 570 children which are not part of the statutory duty.
- Over 9,000 children use Home to School Transport Services
- Over 1,000 contracts in place with over 300 transport providers

# Financial Pressures

- Approx. 50% contracts renewed for Sept 2022
- 33% as standard and remainder due to contractual issues or provider failure.
- 22/23 net budget is £19.5m. Net expenditure projection is £24.3m.
- Net Budget provision for 23/24 is approx. £29.2m
- Increase in Expenditure driven by:
  - ✓ contract inflation for new contracts
  - ✓ increase in demand

# National Context

- In a **CCN survey** of County Councils, it was evident that:
  - ✓ transport providers are retendering for contracts at around 20% higher.
  - ✓ Smaller firms are most impacted by rising fuel prices and workforce challenges. This is likely to impact on SEND school transport the most.
  - ✓ LA's are paying significantly higher rates rather than risk a provider pulling out of routes altogether.
  - ✓ Only one council out of 23 respondents said expenditure on SEND home to school transport was 'manageable'. Over half (14) said it was 'unsustainable'.
  - ✓ a direct correlation between the number of pupils in receipt of EHCPs and the increase in travellers on SEND home to school transport.

# Home to School Transport External Review 2021

- H2ST transformation programme set up in April 2021.
- External review of the Service commissioned in June 2021 and summarised opportunities as follows:
  - Better controlling and developing the supply market and managing a complex re-engagement, re-procurement, and routing overhaul exercise.
  - Resetting the culture of parental & school expectation to a service offering travel solutions (incl. personal budgets, promotion of independence) rather than a door-to-door service.
  - Improved strategic and tactical integration across the organisation.
  - Consideration of options to offer concessionary travel in a more effective way.

# Priority 1

## Review the DCC Concessionary Schemes

- **Description** - Concessionary Seats scheme is provided to pupils who are not entitled to free transport under the Council's statutory duty.
- There are 2 Concessionary schemes (School Scheme is out of scope):
  - 'Spare Seat' programme - 61 Children use this scheme. Daily charge is £1.63
  - Maintained Capacity – approx. 500 pupils on scheme (11 schools). Cost to the council in excess of £250,000 per annum. Daily Charge is £1.63.

## Proposals

- To increase the charge for the Spare Seat and Maintained Capacity schemes to £2.80 per day for return journey to align to market rate for Under 19 fare.
- Consult on phasing out of the Maintained Scheme & options for implementation.

# Priority 2

## Consider how we can more effectively and efficiently support the provision of single person journeys and passenger assistants

- **Description** - Single person journeys and passenger assistants are mainly provided for pupils in special schools. They are often taxi's, which is the most expensive form of transport.
- There are currently 376 single person journeys, which has increased from 286 in 2019.
- 93% of our SEND Routes have a PA, which is higher than other similar Councils at 64%.
- Significant increases in the cost and numbers of young people receiving single person transport with/without a passenger assistant.

### Proposals

- Consider the most cost effective & efficient way of providing transport services. This may involve considering alternative travel options to single person transport and passenger assistants for some children.



# Priority 3

## Develop independence skills of young people.

- **Description** – There are currently limited options in Durham to enable appropriate young people with SEND to travel independently.
- The existing Personal Travel Budget scheme is not encouraging parents to consider transporting their own children.

### Proposals

- Develop Independent Travel Training Scheme for older young people
- Consider the introduction of Pickup points.
- Streamline the Personal Travel Budget scheme to provide a more appropriate offer to parents of children with SEND and some parents in rural areas

# Priority 4

## Review unsafe walking routes and existing travel routes across the county

- **Description** – A child qualifies for free transport to their nearest suitable school where the shortest walking route(s) are assessed as unsuitable to walk safely. Around 500 children receive free transport for this reason.
- The 2021 Review also identified that the Council operates a high number of transport routes and these could be reduced.

### **Proposals**

- Review travel routes so that we are able to provide the most cost effective and environmentally friendly journeys to transport children to school
- Identify any routes currently unsafe and assess whether they can be made safe with capital improvements.

# Priority 5

## Procurement Approach

- **Description** - home to school transport services operate in a challenging environment of increasing demand, price inflation and contract costs. There are also challenges around the supply of transport and market competition in some geographical areas.

### Proposals

- Review how we commission services to ensure they are sustainable for the future as well as delivering value for money on routes and contracts

# Consultation

- The statutory guidance requires Local Authorities to consult on changes to their policy.
- A Consultation process started on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2023 and will run until 12<sup>th</sup> April 2023.
- The responses provided during the consultation will be analysed and the outcomes of the consultation presented to Cabinet in Summer 2023.
- Local authorities have statutory duty to provide transport when national eligibility criteria are met. Children eligible under the Councils statutory duty will continue to receive free transport.
- [www.durham.gov.uk/consultation](http://www.durham.gov.uk/consultation)

# Questions