

**Durham County Council
Children and Young Peoples Overview and
Scrutiny Committee**

**Home to School Transport - Consultation
Outcomes and Recommendations**

22nd September 2023

Purpose

- To update CYP OSC on the:
 - Background to the Consultation
 - Consultation process and areas for consultation
 - Summary of feedback received
 - Proposed recommendations

Background

- Over 9,000 children use Home to School Transport
- Over 1,000 contracts are in place with over 300 providers
- Contracts have increased in more expensive areas of provision:
 - ✓ SEND Contracts increasing from 456 in Sep 2021 to 482 in May 23
 - ✓ Children In Care Contracts from 55 in Sept 2021 to 71 in May 23
 - ✓ Post 16 Medical Contracts from 122 in Sept 2021 to 133 in May 23
- In external review, Durham identified as out of step with other Councils and more generous in their offer

Financial Position 2018/19 – 22/23

	2018/19 (£m)	2019/20 (£m)	2020/21 (£m)	2021/22 (£m)	2022/23 (£m)
Budget	9.933	11.308	14.731	16.482	19.576
Outturn	10.795	14.434	15.550	18.555	23.422
Variance	0.862	3.126	0.819	2.073	3.846

- The budget for 2023/24 has been increased to £29.1 million, a further increase of £9.6 million on 22/23 budget.

Why are we overspending

- SEND Transport delivery, including the increased demand for Taxis and Passenger Assistants over recent years. Expenditure on SEND/other specialist transport represents 72% of the total expenditure on the service;
- National Regulations, such as Public Sector Vehicles Accessibility Regulations, which have required vehicles to meet additional specification requirements;
- Increasing contractor costs, driven by fuel prices, inflation and wage increases;
- Parental/School demands and expectations, including meeting the needs of a significantly increased number of pupils with Education, Health and Care Plans.

Consultation

- Cabinet agreed to a Public consultation - **27 February 2023 and 12 April 2023**, which was promoted as follows:
 - The Council's web site, social media, other online tools.
 - Council Libraries and Access Points
 - Local press including local TV News, radio and newspaper articles
 - Briefings to senior leader school forums
 - Notification to Providers of Transport Services.
 - Voluntary Groups and Partnerships

Who/How did we consult

- General Public/Parents/Transport Providers through 2 online events
- Online questionnaire
- Youth Council
- Extreme Group (young people with SEND)
- Making Changes Together (parents of young people with SEND)
- Primary, Secondary and Special School briefings to Heads
- CYPS OSC
- SEND Partnership
- Community Groups

Consultation Areas, Feedback and Recommendations

324 responses to online questionnaire

	Frequency	%age
Parent/carer of a child/children with additional needs	88	27.8%
Parent/carer of a child/children without additional needs	157	49.7%
Child or young person with additional needs	1	0.3%
Child or young person without additional needs	9	2.8%
Resident (not parent/carer of a child using home to school transport)	33	10.4%
Educational professional/governor	28	8.9%
Transport provider	12	3.8%
Other	8	2.5%

Consultation response from Parents

	Frequency	%age
My child receives school transport which we pay for	83	35.9%
My child receives free school transport due to an unsafe walking route	51	22.1%
My child receives solo transport with a passenger assistant	6	2.6%
My child receives solo transport without a passenger assistant	7	3.0%
My child receives group transport with a passenger assistant	34	14.7%
My child receives group transport without a passenger assistant	26	11.3%
My child does not get home to school transport provided by the council	46	19.9%

Proposal 1 - Review the DCC Concessionary Scheme

Consultation areas

- Increasing fares for the DCC concessionary schemes to help the Council meet more of the transport cost, including a proposed daily charge of £2.80 for a return journey
- Phasing out the DCC maintained concessionary scheme

Summary of Consultation Responses

- Majority of responses did not support the proposals to charge a higher fare, charge £2.80 or phase out the maintained scheme.
- **Key Points** - affordability, cost of living and level of increase, impact on school attendance.

Proposal 1 - Review the DCC Concessionary Scheme

Recommendations

- Agree a charge for the Standard and Maintained Concessionary scheme of £2.00 to align to the Bus Service Improvement Plan offer for the 2023/24 academic year
- Agree that in the event of the withdrawal of this fare in the future, that the annual charge for the concessionary schemes is aligned to commercial child travel fares.
- Agree in principle to phase out the Maintained Concessionary scheme subject to further appraisals of the options available to achieve this and their associated impact on stakeholders and Transport arrangements, with a further report to Cabinet on the findings and recommendations

Proposal 2 - Reviewing Single Person Transport and Passenger Assistants

Consultation Areas

- The efficient and effective use of single person transport and passenger assistants to meet the transport needs of children

Summary of Consultation Responses

- Majority of responses (over 70%) supported both of the proposals.
- **Key points** – children's needs change over time, VFM, child safety and best interests.

Recommendation

- Undertake a review of the needs of those individual children who are in receipt of single person transport and/or a passenger assistant to ensure that the most appropriate transport assistance relevant to their needs is provided;

Proposal 3 - Independence

Consultation Areas

- The introduction of an independent travel training scheme for children with SEND
- The introduction of use agreed pickup points for young people with SEND
- Simplifying personal travel budgets for parents of children with SEND and those in rural areas

Summary of Consultation Responses

- Mixed responses, reflecting that proposals are appropriate for some Young People/Parents but not for others.
- **Key points** – promoting independence and lifelong skills, confidence and socialisation, but child safety, impact on parents/young person to be considered.

Proposal 3 - Independence

Recommendations

- Review the existing Personal Travel Budget Scheme and promote this as a travel option to parents.
- Develop a Travel Training scheme in partnership with schools and parents.
- Undertake a trial of Pickup Points for Children with SEND to assess the effectiveness of this option, which is developed in co-production with a small number of Special Schools and parents.

Proposal 4 – Unsafe Routes/Route Review

Consultation Areas

- A proposal to review unsafe walking routes to make them safe wherever possible so that pupils can walk or cycle to school?
- Review travel routes so that the most cost effective and environmentally friendly journeys to school are provided?

Summary of Consultation Responses

- Strong Support for Proposals.
- **Key points** – promotes health and wellbeing, VFM, broader benefits for community / environment, but child safety, cost of improvements and distance are key factors.

Proposal 4 – Unsafe Routes/Route Review

Recommendations

- Review those routes which are currently assessed as unsafe to determine the feasibility of making them safe
- Review the current configuration of school transport journeys with an initial focus on those schools which have the highest number of vehicles and/or cost associated with transporting pupils to their school

Proposal 5 – Procurement

Consultation Area

- When reviewing and improving how we purchase Home to School Transport Services, what do you think are the key considerations that we should bear in mind?

Recommendation

- Review the suggestions and alternative procurement options raised during the consultation, especially those which can have the most impact on efficiency, effectiveness, safety and environmental issues

Next Steps

- The programme is being taken forward in accordance with the decisions of Cabinet.
- Feedback from the consultation is being considered in progressing the recommendations.

Questions