

Durham County Council Children and Young Peoples Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Home to School Transport Update

20th September 2024

Purpose

- To update CYP OSC on the:
 - Background and Context
 - The Home to School Transport Programme Priority Areas
 - Progress made in each area
 - Next Steps

Baseline Numbers

- Currently 1,246 Home to School Transport Contracts
- Over 9,000 pupils receive transport services
- Over 300 hundred transport providers with a contract
- 378 pupils currently have Solo Transport
- Approx 500 pupils have a Passenger Assistant
- Pupils with SEND account for over 70% of expenditure.

National Context

- Joint paper in late 2023 from ADCS and ADEPT identified key issues as:
 - An outdated legislative framework underpinning home to school travel
 - An overemphasis on EHCPs to access support in the SEND reforms where choice of provision has an impact on distance travelled and cost.
 - Inflation and market pressures driving up costs further
 - The needs of children being transported are increasingly complex, which impacts cost.
 - Parental expectations have changed in recent years with an increase in the number of requests for individual transport.

Financial Context 2019/20 – 22/25

	2019/20 (£m)	2020/21 (£m)	2021/22 (£m)	2022/23 (£m)	2023/24 (£m)	2024/25 (£)
Budget	11.308	14.731	16.482	19.576	29.186	32.736
Outturn	14.434	15.55	18.555	23.422	28.650	
Variance	3.126	0.819	2.073	3.846	-0.535	

Durham's Response

- Undertook external review in 2021 which identified a range of potential changes to the Home to School Transport Service.
- In February 2023, Cabinet agreed to undertake public consultation on proposals
- Outcomes of the consultation reported to cabinet in June 2023.
- Cabinet agreed to progress a number of recommendations aimed at improving outcomes and efficiency of the Service.
- Corporate Home to School Travel Board and programme established under leadership of Corporate Director for CYPS.

The Home to School Transport Programme

- In June 2023, Cabinet agreed a programme to transform the Council's Home to School Travel arrangements. The focus of the programme was as follows:
 - (a) Review the provision of the Maintained Concessionary Schemes.
 - (b) Provide the most effective and cost-efficient transport.
 - (c) Promote independence skills of young people.
 - (d) Introduce a simplified process for providing personal travel budgets
 - (e) Review unsafe walking routes and existing travel routes across the County.
 - (f) Review procurement options in relation to impact on value for money and competitive pricing.

Review the provision of the Maintained Concessionary Schemes.

Focus of the Work

- The maintained scheme provides subsidised transport to a small number of schools (9) and pupils (467) in the county. The Young People do not meet eligibility criteria. The Council incurs a financial cost each year of around £200,000 for operating the scheme.

Progress

- The review has delivered a detailed analysis of each route and considered a range of associated factors.
- The findings of the Review were presented to Cabinet on 10th July 2024.
- Cabinet requested further work to be undertaken and brought back to a future meeting.

Provide the most effective and cost-efficient transport.

Focus of the Work

- To ensure that young people who need solo transport and / or a passenger assistant continue to receive this.
- Where young people can travel with their peers/use group transport that they should do this to help build social skills, confidence & independence.

Progress

- Introduced a more robust decision-making process for new requests in 2024.
- This provides for a detailed review of a child's transport needs and is undertaken with input from schools, parents and relevant workers.
- Working with Special Schools to look at how we review existing transport provision for some Young People.

Promote independence skills of young people.

Focus of the Work

- To develop an Independent Travel Training scheme to support independence
- To look at the feasibility of Introducing Pickup Points where appropriate

Progress

- A project scope has been agreed by the Home to School Transport Board for developing options in relation to Independent Travel Training.
- A Workstream is in place to review schemes in other areas, discuss with relevant schools and families and assess the best options for Durham to consider.

Introduce a simplified process for providing personal travel budgets

Focus of the Work

- To develop an updated Personal Travel Budget Offer to parents of young people with SEND who require solo transport and where appropriate those in rural areas.
- Durham rate of PTBs was 50% of that achieved by other similar Councils.

Progress

- A new PTB offer has been agreed with Cabinet which increases the payment for children with additional needs to 75p per mile.
- The payment is made in advance to parents and success is monitored through school attendance levels.
- Parents made aware of offer when they apply for transport

Review unsafe walking routes and existing travel routes across the County

Focus of the Work

- Review unsafe routes to identify those where capital improvement can make the route safe
- Review transport journeys to schools with a high number of routes.

Progress

- A small number of unsafe routes have been identified which will be reviewed by the Project Team later this year.
- New IT software will be trialled in October 2024 to map current transport routes to a small number of schools to identify potential efficiencies in journey planning and to inform future deployment.

Review procurement options in relation to impact on VfM and competitive pricing

Focus of the Work

- To support the transport market to effectively utilise Durhams procurement framework
- To look at alternative options which can drive greater competition.

Progress

- Pre-engagement and training sessions held with transport providers.
- Earlier notification of transport routes available to providers
- Pilot in the use of 'In House' transport as an alternative to commercially provided
- Development of new data dashboards to monitor activity across the Home to School Transport Service.

Next Steps

- Continue to progress with the Programme of work outlined and in line with Cabinet decisions, including:
 - To promote and monitor the take-up and impact of Personal Travel Budgets
 - To develop options for an Independent Travel Training Scheme
 - To continue to work with Providers to increase competition and ensure providers are supported in Council procurement requirements.
 - To trial new IT software and the impact it can have on route planning.

Questions