

Decision Maker: Children, Education and Families PDS

Date: 8 September 2020

Decision Type: Non-Urgent Non-Executive Non-Key

Title: SEN TRANSPORT - SUPPORTING CHILDREN AND FAMILIES IN COST EFFECTIVE WAYS

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Chief Officer: Jared Nehra, Director of Education

Ward: All wards

1. Reason for report

- 1.1 To outline the potential efficiency gains from a review of SEN Transport operations in Bromley.
 - 1.2 To highlight the potential benefits to children and families accessing SEN transport support.
 - 1.3 To seek agreement to explore the introduction of demand management initiatives, including personal transport budgets, independent travel training and maximise flexible approaches to procurement and transport delivery options.
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2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

The Education, Children and Families PDS is recommended to:

- (i) Support a parental consultation and equalities impact assessment of proposed policy changes to open up opportunities to roll out successful SEN transport improvements.
- (ii) Support the introduction of SEN Transport initiatives, including the use of Personal Transport Budgets and Independent Travel Training initiatives.
- (iii) Agree to the commissioning of short term, focused professional support, to secure engagement from the SEN community for the delivery of transformation of SEN Transport and encourage a shift away from commissioned transport.
- (iv) Support the transformation efficiency savings, increasing to £298k in 2022/23.

Impact on Vulnerable Adults and Children

1. Summary of Impact: Introducing the projects has the potential to significantly improve the long term prospects for Children and Young people with SEN in the borough whilst at the same time supporting families and driving efficiencies in the delivery of transport services.
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Corporate Policy.

1. Policy Status: Existing Home to School Transport Policy : minor revisions
 2. BBB Priority: Children and Young People / Supporting Independence
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Financial

1. Cost of proposal: £20k professional fees
 2. Ongoing costs: £26k (BR6 grade + on-costs) and travel trainers £24k
 3. Budget head/performance centre:
 4. Total current budget for this head: £
 5. Source of funding: **Invest to save**
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Personnel

1. Number of staff (current and additional):
No staff are currently engaged specifically in this activity, it would require a minimum of one administrator with financial experience to deliver the PTBs it may be possible to repurpose activity within the existing staffing cohort for this delivery longer term but initially a dedicated position would be required.
 2. If from existing staff resources, number of staff hours: 1FTE
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Legal

1. Legal Requirement: There is a statutory requirement to provide transport assistance to school in some circumstances, the Council must also maintain a Transport Policy. Following the consultation it will be appropriate to formally review transport policy if there is evidence to suggest the Council adopt the proposed initiatives.
 2. Call-in: Applicable Not Applicable: Further Details
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Procurement

1. Summary of Procurement Implications: N/A
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Customer Impact

1. Estimated number of users/beneficiaries (current and projected): A 10% shift from commissioned transport to bespoke family led arrangements is possible which would realise real benefits to those families and learners whilst driving efficiency gains for the Council. It is proposed to undertake a consultation with parents of children that access SEN transport.
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Ward Councillor Views

1. Have Ward Councillors been asked for comments? Not Applicable
2. Summary of Ward Councillors comments:

3. COMMENTARY

- 3.1 Statutory Guidance on Home to School Transport was last introduced in 2014, however the Government held a consultation between July and October 2019 which indicated a number of changes may be coming into effect and it is therefore appropriate that Bromley Council review its current policy and plan for the introduction of some of the proposed changes ahead.
- 3.2 Government is keen to see that learners are appropriately supported to reach their full potential both academically but also in the development of the necessary life skills enabling them to successfully engage in society as a whole.
- 3.3 An initial desktop exercise as part of the Transformation Programme has shown that a number of other Councils have successfully developed schemes in support of their learners which have both promoted independence and learning whilst at the same time driven efficiency gains to the services concerned.
- 3.4 Officers consider that similar opportunities could be explored through the introduction of schemes in the borough concentrating on initiatives which reduce demand for commissioned transport the options considered are set out below:

3.5 Initiative 1 - The Introduction of collection points where appropriate

- 3.5.1 The introduction of collection points has some potential to improve the life skills and self-esteem of learners. Building familiarity with the use of bus stops, developing safe walking skills and introducing the health benefits of a short walk at the beginning and end of the school day.
- 3.5.2 Experience elsewhere would suggest there is significant resistance to this change from parents who will be required to accompany their children to their collection point and proper engagement with families is required. It is important to recognise that the needs of learners must be carefully considered to identify those that can engage.
- 3.5.3 This initiative has the potential to reduce some journey times for travellers however the potential for financial savings is limited and the negative impact on families already in very challenging circumstances can be significant. It is not proposed to take this option forward.

3.6 Initiative 2 –Introduce Personal Transport Budgets, where financially advantageous to the Council and to the benefit of families.

- 3.6.1 This scheme is different to ‘personal budgets’, it is specifically a transport initiative aimed at those learners eligible for transport assistance for whom the LA has a duty to transport to school. Parents are offered a fixed fee based on distance from school for them to make their own arrangements to take their child to school on the understanding that they will be transported in a safe and legal way and arrive in a fit state to learn.
- 3.6.2 This initiative is only offered where it is financially advantageous to the Council, so if a seat is available on an existing vehicle the payments will not be offered. It has the potential to drive significant savings as an alternative to commissioning hired transport, and there is no restriction on how the money is spent provided it is used to facilitate the family enabling their child to access school. (i.e. it may be used to pay a family member to watch over a younger sibling, if this then provides an opportunity for the parent to accompany their older child to school)
- 3.6.3 Initial research will need to be undertaken to identify the appetite for such a scheme amongst eligible families and also to set an appropriate value to the amounts paid based on distance.

These can range from between £2000 and £5000 pa and paid monthly with payments recovered from future months if poor attendance ensues.

3.7 Initiative 3 – Develop Independent Travel Training

3.7.1 Most Councils have introduced some form of Independent Travel Training for SEN learners but these have been met with varying levels of success. It requires the support of schools, families and young people concerned.

3.7.2 These are really important life skills for these learners that will go on to benefit them for the rest of their lives. It is important that families can have confidence in the practice and support of trainers and that young people are able to learn at their own pace until such time as they are safe to travel independently using public transport.

3.7.3 The cost of delivering this initiative ordinarily outweighs the levels of savings that might be achieved from the provision of transport as it requires significant 1:1 contact time. The significant benefits though hard to quantify financially, will come in later years delivering savings to adult social care budgets as these children develop essential life skills for the future.

3.7.4 There is a current contract for Independent Travel Training with break clauses. Officers will review the current contract and consider the potential to develop an in house travel training offer to maximise savings.

3.8 Conclusions

3.8.1 The limited benefits associated with introducing collection points whilst potentially having significant detrimental impacts on families has resulted in a proposal not to progress this initiative further in Bromley.

3.8.2 The advantages of developing a Personal Transport Budget beyond the offer of basic mileage payments offers significant opportunities for all parties to benefit. The council experiences reduced costs, children have reduced anxiety, parents have greater flexibility and schools receive children ready to learn and able to engage. It is proposed to implement this initiative into formal policy at the earliest opportunity.

3.8.3 The advantages to learners of developing the independence to travel safely is something they can benefit from throughout their lives. Whilst financial benefits are seldom realised within the first year, the compound savings are significant, and this initiative should be progressed with our chosen partners evaluated and if necessary, explore alternative in-house delivery models in the future if this could realise greater efficiency gains.

4. IMPACT ON VULNERABLE ADULTS AND CHILDREN

4.1 Progressing the two identified initiatives, has the potential to greatly improve the life experiences of vulnerable children and adults in Bromley and ease the pressures on families supporting vulnerable learners. We will work with families and providers to support the introduction of these proposals.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The current Transport Policy need not be formally changed to adopt these initiatives, however it has not been reviewed for some years and would benefit from being updated and consulted upon in order to conduct an appropriate equalities impact assessment prior to its formal adoption.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Please see table below

Projections show possible compound savings based on a cohort of 850 learners and £5m spend

	20/21 Academic Year		21/22 Academic Year		22/23 Academic Year		Total Savings £'000
	No. of learners	Saving £'000	No. of learners	Saving £'000	No. of learners	Saving £'000	
PTB	40	-60	60	-150	80	-210	-420
Independent Travel Training	15	-38	30	-113	45	-188	-339
Delivery costs							
External Support	Professional services	20					20
Staff	1FTE Admin+TT Trainers	50	75		90		215
Software/Equipment	Licences	10	10		10		30
Net Efficiency Gain	0.7%	-18	4.2%	-178	6.6%	-298	-494

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 1 FTE to administrate the financial elements of the PTB service

7.2 Operational efficiency gains can deliver the other aspects of the initiatives subject to existing transport staffing establishments and associated budgets transferring in full.

7.3 Options and costs for independent travel training to be reviewed during 2020/21.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Introducing revised transport policy will require a formal consultation and the development of an equalities impact assessment.

9. PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

N/A

Background Documents:	Transformation - Desktop Review of SEN Transport See Appendix 1 below
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Appendix 1

Transformation Programme

Desktop Review of SEN Transport – Deliverable efficiency gains

1. Drivers for change

1.1 Government Statutory Guidance on Home to School Transport Policy was last updated in 2014. However, during the course of 2019 the DfE consulted Local Authorities, parents and appropriate groups on proposed changes to the Home to school Transport duties setting out clear expectations on councils and parents. This consultation closed in October last year and it was anticipated that revised statutory guidance would be released in early 2020.

1.2 Unsurprisingly, in the circumstances, the focus of government has been elsewhere and this has not yet come to fruition. It is anticipated that there will be clear expectations placed on parents to clarify what is expected but also on LAs to ensure eligible children get the support they need.

2. Eligibility vs OLA vs statutory minimum

2.1 The existing Bromley SEN Transport Policy came into force on 1 September 2015. It is a well drafted document offering only the statutory minimum of provision which is presented in a clear and concise way that parents will be able to easily understand. It is less generous than some other LAs and sets out in no uncertain terms the expectation that parents should take responsibility for enabling their child to access school. It refers to the use of collection points, setting out this expectation clearly, therefore a more robust approach to the use of collection points without the need for significant formal policy changes is available. However, implementation of these new arrangements would require consideration of equality implications and it would be prudent to ratify/determine an updated policy prior to implementation.

3. Cost vs OLA comparison & cost avoidance

3.1 The average cost of travel per learner in Bromley compares favourably with similar LAs. The table below compiled in January 2020 demonstrates this clearly:

	Lewisham	Enfield	Hillingdon	Bromley	Bexley	Southwark	Havering	Islington	Lambeth
Population (2018 figures)	303.5k	334k	305k	331k	247.3k	317.3k	258k	240k	326k
Number of CYP with an active EHCP?	2613	3098	2504	2482	2055	2277	1062	1340	2600
How many of these CYP are receiving travel assistance?	759	873	890	857	648	668	470	449	547
Percentage of EHCPs receiving Travel Assistance	29.04%	28.17%	35.54%	34.50%	31.53%	29.30%	44.25%	33.50%	24%
How many are going out of borough to school / college?	233	203	143	198	228	107	98	101	161
Do you have internal vehicles or use external providers, or both?	Both	Both	Both	External	External	External	Both	Both	External
Do you have students in taxis on their own	81	61	64	76	45	35	93	58	34
Approx spend?	£5.5m	£7.5m	£6.8m	£5.25m	£3.35m+	5.35m	£3.5m	£3.85m	£4.2m
Personal Budgets / Direct Payments for Travel	32	120	71	34	120	119	36	42	67
Average cost per student	£7,246	£8,591	£7,640	£6,126	£5,169	£7,934	£7,446	£8,574	£7,678

3.2 Bexley is the only borough showing better average costs per learner which likely reflects the smaller size of the borough, resulting in shorter journeys but also a higher number of travellers having accepted a personal transport budget/payment.

4. Bromley collection point analysis

4.1 A desktop exercise was undertaken to identify potential efficiency gains if a more robust approach to the use of collection points were undertaken. This focused on two special schools identified as those most likely to generate savings potential.

4.2 The exercise indicated a potential cost saving of circa £30k that would be generated from the Borough's most suitable schools to introduce collection points given the children's need types. It should also be noted, that from the point of a contact award on this basis, the savings opportunities would be reduced because transport requirements are not a constant and require ongoing adjustments through the school year. This represents a small proportion of the routes into the Borough's special schools however the remaining schools would be unlikely to present any significant opportunities for children to access collections points due to their complex needs.

4.3 A significant adverse impact would be anticipated on families from the introduction of this proposal.

5. Personal Transport Budgets (PTB)

5.1 LA schemes offering PTBs vary considerably from Council to Council, the scheme in Bromley which is effectively a mileage payment has proportionately poor take up, and there will be two key factors in this – parents do not consider it a value proposition and/or families may not have the support networks or flexibility to enable them to participate.

5.2 Up to 10% of eligible SEN children could reasonably be expected to transition to a monthly personal transport budget payment.

5.3 The average cost of current transport is about £6k per learner but the average cost for those on an established PTB could be less than £3k per child. A transfer of 10% could potentially deliver up to 85 children across to a PTB, this would cost in the region of £255k but save a similar amount, because the cost of PTB would be roughly half the current average spend per learner.

5.4 Further analysis would be required around lengths of journeys undertaken by the existing cohort, insight into the 'types' of families and their abilities to engage in such an approach and the capacity for route reductions as a result of take up.

6. Independent Travel Training (ITT)

6.1 Most Councils (including Bromley who currently commission this service) have introduced some form of Independent Travel Training for children and young people who have SEN. ITT delivers important life skills for these learners that will go on to benefit them for the rest of their lives.

6.2 The cost of delivering ITT ordinarily outweighs the levels of savings that might be achieved from the provision of transport as it requires significant 1:1 contact time. The benefits come in later years, delivering savings to adult social care budgets as these young people develop essential life skills for the future.

6.3 Well run teams do well to break even against the cost savings they generate in their first year but the younger that learners are engaged in the programme, the better the compound savings effect, so this should form part of a broader transport offer.

7. Savings including invest to save – IT systems, permanent recruitment & external set up support.

7.1 Analysis of savings indicates that by Year 3 net savings of £298k are achievable from options 2 and 3. To maximise potential, Bromley should update its software systems enabling the re-optimisation of routes with ease when learner circumstances change.

7.3 There is a need to design and implement engagement programmes (for schools and parents) and formal consultation – this is essential to optimise the success and pace at which numbers can be grown through each of the initiatives.

7.4 It should be noted that these savings will seek to reduce the impact of continued growth in numbers of SEN eligible learners year on year. The savings are unlikely to reduce overall spend, but will help the Council mitigate the cost of future growth in numbers.

7.5 *It should be noted that the recent government announcements relating to the funding of TfL and the withdrawal of free transport for Under18s, may further impact transport savings potential. This recent decision is a live situation and is being closely monitored by officers and the Deputy Leader.*

8. Options Appraisal

8.1 Option 1 Introduce Collection and Drop-Off Points for SEN Learners

Positive Considerations

This has the potential to generate savings in the region of £30k. It has the potential to bring marginal health benefits and support the development of life skills. In addition it has the potential benefit of reducing journey times for learners on larger vehicles.

Negative considerations

This will have the most significant negative impact on families already in challenging circumstances, having to adjust what can be an already complex set of routines to ready their child for school. By adding the requirement for them to also walk their child to a bus stop or other designated collection point will impact on their child but also potentially restrict parents' opportunities to work. It can pose additional risks associated with managing children's conditions and behaviours when waiting at public bus stops. Not recommended.

8.2 Option 2 Introduce Personal Transport Budgets

Positive Considerations

This has the potential to cut the average cost of transport for those that can engage by up to 50%. It is low risk in that it simply offers an enhanced payment opportunity to give families freedom to manage their own access to school arrangements. Children avoid the anxiety of unfamiliar transport and arrive at school in a ready state to learn. Parents and schools benefit from better family contact and engagement. The LA only offers the scheme where it is financially advantageous to do so.

Negative Considerations

Some families might feel aggrieved where they are refused the budget because it is cheaper for the Council to transport them in another way. Payments will be reduced with poor attendance, it therefore requires schools to provide attendance records weekly. There are additional costs associated with administering the scheme and managing the financial payments and it can be difficult to recover overpayments which may result if schools do not share attendance data in a timely fashion.

8.3 Option 3 Develop an In-House Independent Travel Training Team

Positive Considerations

Independent Travel Training introduces effective life skills for learners and can return significant financial savings on a compound basis in future years. The existing arrangements have not delivered an effective return. By managing the service in-house there will be greater control over targeted activity, the opportunity to better engage with schools and secure their support with families in engaging learners and quality control the service delivery. If the transport eligibility function is to be transferred to Education it would be timely to develop the team with this additional responsibility in mind.

Negative considerations

This is a service already contracted out and would require a break from the exiting contract (recently extended to ensure service continuity, but with break clauses). It would require the direct employment of staff which is likely to increase unit costs of delivery. It is a difficult area to recruit into and would require the development of all operational paperwork, training and ongoing development of staff. It may be possible to derive better results from more effective working with the existing provider and therefore prudent to explore this before taking the decision to bring the whole operation back in house.

8. Recommendations – depending on options adopted

8.1 Commission external support to undertake detailed route optimisation and lead the communications strategy with Parents and Schools to explore the effective use of collection points in Bromley (introducing revised PTB and ITT schemes at the same time).

8.2 Undertake a review of operational structures and processes to better meet future service demands generated by the Transformation Programme.

8.3 Develop a distance based, fixed fee, Personal Transport Budget offered along similar lines to those used in other LAs. Increase staffing capacity to administrate the scheme under future MTFS proposals.

8.4 Expand the existing Independent Travel Training offer, with a view to training a minimum of 15 learners per year to access public transport to school.

8.5 Undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment and issue a revised SEN Transport Policy in accordance with these recommendations.

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