

Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee
Meeting to be held on Wednesday, 31 January 2024

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Caring for the vulnerable;
Delivering better services;

School and Post 16 Transport
(Appendices 'A' – 'C' refers)

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Brief Summary

This report is to provide an update on the County Council's Home to School Transport Policy which is currently being revised to reflect new statutory guidance issued by the Department for Education.

Information is also provided regarding the publicity campaign run in the Autumn Term 2023 encouraging parents to 'Think Transport' when making their primary and secondary school applications. Updates have been included in respect of the School Transport Review that link to some of the recommendations arising from the School Place Planning (Mainstream and SEND) and School Transport Inquiry Day.

Additionally, information is provided on the Post-16 Transport Policy with the provisions made in Lancashire and associated costs.

Recommendation

The Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee is asked to reflect on the information provided in the update and consider how to further support this area of work.

Details

Home to School Transport Policy

The County Council's current Home to School Transport Policy is based on the DfE statutory guidance, Home to school travel and transport guidance that was issued in July 2014.



The Home to School Transport Policy is reviewed annually and considered by Cabinet each spring term. New DfE Guidance; *Travel to school for children of compulsory school age. Statutory guidance for local authorities* was issued in June 2023; [Home-to-school travel - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/home-to-school-travel) As there have been no changes to the legislation governing home to school transport the statutory entitlement of pupils remains the same.

The revised guidance is much more detailed and seeks to clarify the local authorities' statutory duties and respond to issues raised through consultation and through regular meetings held with LAs and the DfE. The new guidance also seeks to help parents understand their rights with additional information on:

- considering if a parent can be expected to accompany their child
- encouraging independence for children with disabilities
- managing children's medical needs

For the first time, the statutory guidance also provides specific advice to LAs on how their policies and procedures should be reviewed to ensure transparent and fairness, with a checklist of what needs to be included in the home to school transport policy. In light of the new guidance, the Access to Education Team are undertaking a complete over haul of the County Council's Home to School Transport Policy so that it includes all 4 categories of eligible children;

- statutory walking distances
- special educational needs
- disability and mobility problems
- unsafe walking routes

For the first time, the mainstream and SEN transport policy will be amalgamated and there will be a clear introduction explaining what parents can expect to learn from the document.

The new policy will also enhance the advice available to parents by:

- clearly explaining terms such as 'home address' and 'nearest suitable school.'
- clearly explaining how a child eligibility will be assessed, including information on how distances will be measured and how route safety is assessed.
- clearly explaining the ways in which travel is provided.
- clearly explaining the eligibility of children with special educational needs, a disability or mobility problems and how they will be assessed on an individual basis.

The new Lancashire County Council's Home to School Transport Policy will be considered by Cabinet on 7 March 2024. Meetings are being held with the Inclusion Team and School Transport Team to ensure it is clear and easy for parents to understand.

Once the work is completed there will be Annexes with additional information for parents. There will be advice on how pupils should use, replace or amend their travel pass. There will also be more detailed advice for parents of children with special



educational needs, a disability or a mobility problem. The County Council's Unsafe Walking Route Policy is also being updated to reflect latest guidance.

Publicity Campaign

There has been a significant increase in the number of appeals for home to school transport being considered by the Independent Transport Appeal Panel. Appeals are submitted for varying reasons and across all age groups but there are a disproportionate number received from the parents of pupils transferring to secondary schools, who expected their child to receive free travel to their preferred school.

During the Autumn Term, members of the Access to Education Team attended most secondary school open evenings to advise parents on the admissions process and on entitlement to receive transport assistance. The admissions literature and the online application system, both encourage parents to seek advice from their local education office, if travel costs are part of their consideration when making a secondary school application.

Despite these steps, there was an increasing concern that these messages were not being heard and therefore a targeted publicity campaign was undertaken in the Autumn Term 2023 to try and increase parental understanding.

As part of this campaign several actions were taken, supported by the Communications Service:

- LCC website reviewed.
- School Admissions Posters / Year 6 flyers distributed with key message to 'Think Transport.'
- Press Releases.
- Social Media Campaign.
- Targeted Facebook advertisements.

A copy of the School Transport Communications Plan is provided at **Appendix 'A'**.

Update on the School Transport Review

An overview of the School Transport Review is provided at **Appendix 'B'**.

In terms of the short, medium and long-term goals there has been progress in the following areas:

- **Standeers on buses** – The terms and conditions have been revised on the LCC website which now advise customers that standing will be permitted on services which have a legal standing capacity.



- **Online applications & payments** – Progress is being made with Digital Services and the capability to take online Direct Debit payments is in development.
- **Information gathering** - Information on day-to-day passenger loadings is very limited. There has been some soft market testing with a number of operators to understand what might be on the market already.
- **Service and route planning** – 2 licenses have been obtained for QRoutes, which will support route optimisation and the rationalisation of services.
- **School Bus Fares** – School Transport questionnaire is in preparation with input from the Communications Team and Business Intelligence on the best way to publicise.

In relation to the recommendations from the School Place Planning (Mainstream and SEND) and School Transport Inquiry Day, it is clear that the ambition to provide sufficient places for all those who want to use the bus, would be extremely costly, whether that be for children of compulsory school age or including post-16 students as well.

The existing mainstream home-to-school transport services fulfil the county's statutory obligations to those children who qualify for transport assistance. There are certain areas where demand outstrips supply, and it is not possible to accommodate all non-statutory requests for transport.

If there is funding made available to introduce additional bus services or increase capacity on existing services, through Local Integrated Transport Settlements (LITS) or the Bus Service Improvement Plan for example, policy would need to be clear and justify what criteria is required to meet the threshold of funding extra capacity/services.

It is important to note that a number of governing bodies have made arrangements to provide their own 'private' services to attract pupils to their schools. There is a risk that these schools could stop funding their own transport and insist that the responsibility switch to the authority to fund their services as part of the scheme to 'provide sufficient places for all those who want to use the bus'.

The School Transport Team co-ordinates services across the commercial and subsidised networks, to ensure available resources are maximised. Commercial operators are engaged to promote service reviews and internally there is work done to incorporate school time journeys on subsidised public services.

Work is done to rationalise and optimise routes, so that our carbon footprint is reduced by using less fuel, reducing emissions and ultimately leading to cleaner air quality. There is also engagement with schools and publicity materials that are shared to promote safer travel and to encourage families to use alternative transport, walking, cycling, carpool etc.



Post 16 Transport Policy

The latest government guidance on Post 16 transport was published in January 2019; [Transport to education and training for people aged 16 and over - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/transport-to-education-and-training-for-people-aged-16-and-over)

The guidance states that each Local Authority has a duty to publish an annual transport policy statement specifying the arrangements for the provision of transport to facilitate the attendance of young people receiving education or training. This links to the Authority's duty to promote effective participation, as travel can be a barrier to young people remaining in education or training.

Alongside the mainstream provisions of this policy, there is specific guidance provided by the Inclusion Service with advice on transport for SEN/EHCP young people. This extends to those up to 25 years of age.

Entitlement.

The County Council has discretion to determine what transport and financial support is available to help young people participate and this is detailed in the Post 16 policy (**Appendix 'C'**) In Lancashire, there are two discretionary schemes being operated to encourage participation.

Through the Young Person's Transport Scheme, LCC purchases and issues commercial bus passes to eligible young people aged 16-18. The young people are eligible if they are either Not in Education, Employment or Training [NEET] or on an apprenticeship scheme managed by one of the following approved colleges/training centres:

- Accrington & Rossendale College
- Nelson & Colne College
- Burnley College
- Lancashire Teaching Hospitals
- Lancaster & Morecambe College
- Runshaw College

Talkzone currently manage the NEET applicants, who apply for passes through a worker at their local Youth Zone. Applicants are required to complete an application form, which is then forwarded on to the Public and Integrated Transport Team, who will issue a pass based on their journey requirements.

Passes are currently procured from the following operators:

- Stagecoach
- Transdev
- Preston Bus
- BlackpoolTransport
- Arriva



All passes are issued for one month. Talkzone/college/training centres receive a renewal list, fortnightly. If required, a further pass is issued.

Last year (2023) 2368 passes were issued to either NEET or Apprentices aged 16-18, the total cost was £146,021.37.

If the Council intended to extend this provision, the variable costs would increase, depending directly upon the number of passes issued.

Appendices

Appendices 'A' – 'C' are attached to this report. For clarification they are summarised below and referenced at relevant points within this report.

Appendix	Title
Appendix 'A'	School Transport Communications Plan
Appendix 'B'	School Transport Review Powerpoint
Appendix 'C'	Post 16 Transport Policy

Consultations

N/A

Implications:

The Home to School Transport Policy will be determined by the County Council's Cabinet on 7 March 2024.

Financial

Whilst there are no direct financial implications as a result of this report, for context the 2023/24 budget monitoring position at Quarter 2 is a forecast overspend of £6.4m, predominantly in relation to home to school transport for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). This financial pressure, in addition to further additional demand forecast in the 2024/25 financial year, has been reflected in the updated Medium Term Financial Strategy reported to Cabinet in January 2024.

Risk management

N/A

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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N/A

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate



N/A

