

DONCASTER METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

MONDAY, 27TH JUNE, 2022

A MEETING of the CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER, DONCASTER on MONDAY, 27TH JUNE, 2022 at 4.30 PM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Leanne Hempshall

Councillors Laura Bluff, Steve Cox, Susan Durant, Charlie Hogarth, David Nevett and Rob Reid

Co-optees – Antoinette Drinkhill (Church of England Education Representative)

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

- Leanne Hornsby - Assistant Director, Education, Skills, Culture and Heritage
- Kim Holdridge – Service Manager (School Transport)
- John Raine – Project Officer – Locality Delivery and Early Help

		<u>ACTION</u>
1.	<u>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u>	
	Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tim Needham and Bob Anderson.	
2.	<u>TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT, IF ANY, TO WHICH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</u>	
	There were no items where the press and public should be excluded.	
3.	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>	
	There were no declarations made at the meeting.	
4.	<u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS</u>	
	There were no public statements made at the meeting.	
5.	<u>HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL ASSISTANCE POLICY 2022-2027</u>	
	The purpose of the report was to provide background and obtain approval for a revised Doncaster Council Home to School Travel	

Assistance Policy 2022–2027. It was explained that the provision of travel assistance was a contributing factor to the Education and Skills Strategy 2030 and Doncaster Delivering Together to enable all children and young people to achieve their full potential.

Impact on Families Where Bus Pass was Removed – Concern was raised that the removal of bus passes could prove to be a considerable burden to some families.

Members were informed that there was a duty on the authority to provide travel assistance for pupils who meet a distance criteria to their nearest school. It was commented that when parents move houses then children were no longer attending the nearest school.

It was verified that this was for future provision and assurances were provided that a child who had moved this year into year 10 and received a bus pass would still receive it in year 11.

It was acknowledged that there were exceptional circumstances, some of which being outside the parents control. In those instances, parents would be advised to contact the authority as part of an appeals process and if the situation was considered an exceptional circumstance, then a bus pass would be provided. It was noted that that there was no intention of taking away from those in need of urgent help and appeals would be considered on a case by case basis.

It was clarified that in the event that a suitable school was named on an Education Health Care Plan (ECHP) then the authority would need to consider individual circumstances and the ability of the child to travel (and what form of travel was best). It was explained that if the named school was considered suitable then some sort of travel assistance would be considered depending upon the circumstances.

Special Educational Needs Disability (SEND) Provision - A comment was made based on the identified saving of £113k over a 3 year period. It was felt that if SEND parents were to also incur a charge, this could then indicate that the majority of budget spent on school transport lies within the SEND area and therefore suggested that further SEND provision was required within certain communities.

The Assistant Director, Education, Skills, Culture and Heritage indicated that this would be looked at as part of the SEND transformation journey. The Panel was reminded that SEND would be considered as part of their workplan, in addition to the white and green papers that would help the Panel consider that wider SEND provision mapping and whether there was the right provision in the right places across the Borough.

Safeguarding - A Member raised concern about whether taxi and bus driving staff and escorts were Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checked and whether this was kept up-to-date. It was also asked what safeguarding actions were put in place and what training, advice and

guidance was made available.

It was confirmed that any taxi/mini bus driver or escort that worked on routes that Doncaster Council directly contracted were all subject to an enhanced DBS check and that they would not be allowed to work on directly contracted transport without it.

It was clarified that those DBS checks needed to be under 3 years old at the start of route. It was recognised that certain routes continued for some time meaning that some DBS checks were 6-8 years old at the end of the route (although they would have been working on that route for the duration of the period).

Concerning contracts that the Council had with contractors, it was explained that there was a clause in place where new or existing cautions or convictions needed to be disclosed to assess ongoing suitability. It was continued that taxis drivers, through their license, was required to have enhanced DBS checks, which it was believed needed to be reviewed every 3 years. Members were told that the Council's own internal driver escorts all have DBS checks when they commence employment with the Council. Finally, it was explained that public transport and the public network was not subject to those regulations, as that service was not under the authority's control.

Regarding training, it was explained that with around 400 vehicles everyday and 200 escorts, turnover was high, and therefore safeguarding certificates were not required on routes, it was added that all taxi drivers have undertaken child exploitation training as part of obtaining their badge. Reference was also made to Awareness Sessions undertaken by all owner contractors to provide them with the tools to train their staff. These sessions included elements of safeguarding and advice on who to report to.

It was further commented by a Member with past experience of taxi driving, that communication between schools transport and taxis could often be fragmented with little in place to provide protection. Members were assured that all driver escorts would need to have a DBS check although having a previous conviction would not necessarily rule them out.

It was recognised that although not all vehicles had escorts, if one was needed in advance or as part of route, it would be put in.

Financial Considerations – Members heard that in terms of parental contributions in manageable instalments (which was no longer going forward), this would have been looked possibly as a monthly or termly option for parents. It was added that if this would be considered then full consultation would be undertaken with parents.

Regarding concessions for benefits, this would have looked at low-income reduction for those on low income.

Environmental Impact - A Member raised concern regarding the

potential environmental impact of more cars being on the road and hoped that this had been acknowledged. It was recognised that there was an opportunity to work with sustainability team and the future policy to see what this potential would look like.

Catchment Areas/Distance - Members were informed that where the nearest school was full and a school had been allocated by the authority, then the child would be provided with travel assistance provided that they met the distance criteria.

It was explained that travel assistance was not provided Post 16 for mainstream regardless of choice of school (this had been removed in the past). It was recognised that the 6th form provision might sometimes provide support the young person with transport assistance.

Concern was raised where children had been moved due to a managed move to another school, or for example, a breakdown in a relationship. It was explained that in the event of a managed move, where arranged between two schools, this would be for the schools to provide.

If the move was in relation to an exclusion through the authority, providing the child meets the distance allocation, they would then be eligible for travel assistance.

Finally, in other circumstances such as a relationship breakdown, the parent would have the option to appeal against the decision should they feel there was an exceptional circumstance over and above the policy.

Concern was raised that this could mean that attendance targets might not be met.

Assurances were provided that there was capacity in place to support appeals coming through.

In terms of who funds exclusions, Members were informed that there had been a reduction of 8. It was explained that the needs of the child would be considered on a case by case basis.

Consultation - Regarding the consultation process, Members were informed that questions had been developed around those areas that were primarily changing. It was explained that the consultation document had been developed on the proposals in consultation with communication team.

Concerns were raised regarding feedback on how understandable the questions were. It was explained that such comments had been made around the short form survey, which was a compacted version of the long form survey. It was explained that the long form survey was a longer document with more information and therefore provided more guidance. Members also heard that such views had been left anonymously and therefore officers were unable to go back to the

individuals who had made them.

In terms of how inclusive the consultation had been, it was clarified

- that there had been a due regard statement throughout the process;
- that there had been internal communications undertaken with all schools and asked that they pass that consultation information onto all parents;
- that those pupils that the authority currently transport with needs, (and their families) were written to twice during process initially pre and then with an opportunity to undertake it virtually during consultation.
- Contacted all out of area special schools that the authority currently transport to and provided them full copy of consultation document to review.

Good Practice - Members were informed that the authority had looked at what had been used in other authorities to see what they did include or did not include which had been taken account in the revised policy. As a result, the policy was now clearer on participation age versus the statutory school leaving age, which was not in the Council's existing policy.

The Young Adviser in attendance stressed the importance of services being provided being accessible for all families especially in view of the cost of living crisis. It was explained that families that fall just below the low-income criteria would be directed through the appeals process, where they have been refused to provide those families with an opportunity to explain their individual circumstances and provide more information.

Resolved that the Panel;

1. Support the revised Home to School Travel Assistance Policy;
and
2. Note the results of the consultation;
 - a. In light of the consultation, to note the proposed changes and clarification to the existing 'Home to School Transport' Policy.
 - b. Note the phased removal of bus passes issued on a "no extra cost" basis with effect from September 2023.
 - c. Note the phased removal of bus passes issued to pupils moving house during school years 10 and 11 with effect from publication of the policy.
 - d. Note the proposal to issue and publish the revised Home to School Travel Assistance Policy (Appendix 3).