

Manchester City Council Report for Resolution

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| Report to: | Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee - 20 July 2022 Executive – 22 July 2022 |
| Subject: | Review of Home to School Travel support including draft policies and developing a new approach to improve service delivery |
| Report of: | Director of Education and Head of Access and Sufficiency |

Summary

This report sets out the proposal to adopt two Home to school travel support policies. These proposals would apply to all applicants for pupils starting at reception in primary schools and year 7 at secondary schools in September 2023. It will also apply to young people entering post 16 or post 19 provision in years 12 and 14. All children and young people will have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to be eligible for support.

This paper recommends the approval of the Home to School travel support policies and that the new policies are to be applied to applicants applying in reception, Year 7 and years 13/14 during 2023/24 school year and subsequent year groups of pupils as they enter each phase. It is further recommended that any new applicants applying during the 22/23 academic year from the point the policy is determined are also assessed under the new policies.

Applications for travel support for pupils in remaining year groups will not be affected.

The reports also describe the current Home to School transport service (HTST) and outlines a service improvement programme which will support the successful implementation of the revised policies.

Recommendations

The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to: -

- (1) Consider this report and comment on the policies proposed and the phased implementation of the new policies.
- (2) Consider the work to date on the wider service improvement programme.

The Executive is recommended to: -

- (1) Consider the recommendations of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.
- (2) Agree in principle the following documents appended to this report, and to authorise the Director of Education to consult on the proposed implementation of them:
 - a) Home to School Travel support policy for 5–16-year-olds

- b) Home to School Travel support policy for post 16
- c) Home to School Travel support summary document
- (3) Authorise the Director of Education to consider any responses received to the consultation and to agree to the implementation of the proposed policies appended to this report if she considers it appropriate to do so.
- (4) Consider the work to date on the wider service improvement programme and agree to progress the identified areas of improvement.

Wards Affected: All

Environmental Impact Assessment - the impact of the issues addressed in this report on achieving the zero-carbon target for the city

Promoting more efficient ways to travel to school will reduce carbon emissions
 Maximising the capacity on existing buses and promoting alternative travel solutions such as walking/cycling will contribute to a reduction in carbon emissions and support healthy lives.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion - the impact of the issues addressed in this report in meeting our Public Sector Equality Duty and broader equality commitments

An Equality Impact Assessment will be completed as the programmed of work is progressed.

| Manchester Strategy outcomes | Summary of how this report aligns to the OMS/Contribution to the Strategy |
|---|---|
| A thriving and sustainable city: supporting a diverse and distinctive economy that creates jobs and opportunities | The ongoing growth of the City's education sector will continue to create opportunities for employment in schools and those businesses which are involved in the supply of good and transport services. |
| A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success | A sufficiency of high quality education provision which is easily accessible to families will provide future generations with the skills and behaviours to benefit from the City's economic success. |
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| A highly skilled city: world class and home grown talent sustaining the city's economic success | A sufficiency of high quality education provision which is easily accessible to families will provide future generations with the skills and behaviours to benefit from the City's economic success. |
| A progressive and equitable city: making a positive contribution by unlocking the potential of our communities | Schools are environments in which the diversity and talent of Manchester's children and young people is celebrated. Pupils are supported and encouraged to achieve their aspirations and maximise their potential |
| A liveable and low carbon city: a destination of choice to live, visit, work | Investment in modern, energy efficient and high quality transport solutions which are easily accessible and in the right place drives reductions in travel times and carbon across the estate of schools. |
| A connected city: world class infrastructure and connectivity to drive growth | Investment in existing and new transport initiatives will enhance the City's attractiveness to potential residents and contribute to the development of high quality neighbourhoods. |

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

Financial Consequences – Revenue

For Home to School Transport the gross budget 2022/23 is £9.7m. Making up this total are two distinct elements:

The cost of school transport (including Post 16 transport to FE Colleges), there are approximately 1,600 children with Education Health Care Plans aged between 5 and 25 years who access travel support through the Home to School Transport service. The vast majority of these children and young people, 1487, receive a transport solution that is either a shared bus or individual taxi arrangement to attend over 120 different schools either within or outside of Manchester.

The running costs of the Transport team.

The current budget is currently overspent mainly due to a big increase in demand for transport and provider price increases. The expectation is that the number of routes and children accessing the service will increase in the Autumn term. Operator availability and increases in the price of fuel has also significantly added to current funding pressures.

It is anticipated that by promoting inclusive opportunities to enable children and young people to travel to and from school or college independently or using family-based approaches like those used by other children and young people wherever possible, taking account of their age and needs will enable the service to achieve efficient use of public resources, delivering better outcomes and providing better value for money. Furthermore, a new approach to commissioning transport and

improved use of ICT to plan routes and most efficient use of transport will also provide a more efficient and better value service. The financial impact of the policy review will be monitored during implementation of the review.

Financial Consequences – Capital

None.

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report proposes new Home to School Travel Support policies for application to pupils in Reception to Year 11 and for pupils transitioning into post 16 or post 19 provision from the 2023/24 school year. The proposed policies will apply to subsequent year groups of pupils as they enter each transition phase and to any new applicants for transport support.
- 1.2 It includes definitions of key terms to enable the application of the agreed eligibility and the range of transport support offered by the Local Authority. It also provides details of the arrangements for appeal against a decision regarding the provision of home to school travel support.
- 1.3 Home to School Transport for children who do not have an EHCP is not covered by this report. Children and young people who live in other local authority areas but attend a Manchester school should apply for travel support to their home local authority.
- 1.4 The current Home to School Travel policies will be applied to all other current eligible children until they reach a key transition point (enter Reception/year 7 or post 16/19)
- 1.5 This report also describes the Home to School Transport service which is responsible for the implementation and delivery of the transport policies. The report outlines a wider programme of improvement works for this service.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Manchester's population has continued to grow from our 2011 census figure of 503,000, and our forecasts for population growth are estimating that by the mid-2020s the city of Manchester will have a population of circa 644,000. This population growth is driven by the continued, and forecasted continuation, of economic growth. It is within this context that ensuring travel solutions that are efficient and accessible to families will remain a critical component of the Council's work in improving outcomes for Manchester residents and delivering the ambitions outlined in our Manchester strategy, forward to 2025.
- 2.2 Nationally, the actual numbers and proportion of pupils with an EHCP have increased with the overall percentage now at 4.0% of the whole school population. Within the Manchester school population, the January 2022 census showed that 4.7% of the school population have an Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) (4,350 pupils). In Manchester the number of pupils attending special schools is growing and now stands at 2.2% of the total school population.
- 2.3 Section 508A of the Education Act places a general duty on local authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport. The duty applies to children and young people of compulsory school age who travel to receive education or training in a local authority's area. The duty relates to journeys to and from institutions where education or training is delivered.

2.4 In order to comply with home to school transport duties local authorities must:

- Promote the use of sustainable travel and transport
- Make transport arrangements for all eligible children

2.5 In Manchester this duty is discharged through the Home to School Transport service, which sits within the Access and Sufficiency portfolio in Education Services. Further details on the role of this service area are provided later in this report.

2.6 Currently there are approx. 1600 children with EHCPs aged between 5 and 25 years who access travel support through the Home to School Transport (HTST) service. The vast majority of these children and young people, 1487, receive a transport solution that is either a shared bus or individual taxi arrangement to attend over 120 different schools either within or outside of Manchester. There is only a small proportion of families who receive a personal budget or parental expenses to fund the family to take their children to school. The HTST service also holds a funding agreement with the Endeavor Federation of special schools for children with social emotional and mental health needs, who organise their own transport solutions for children attending their sites. The total expenditure on all of these travel solutions is approx. £8million per annum.

2.7 Currently the service also organises and delivers the transport for adult daycare setting and transport which is approx. 100 adults across 30 routes to the 3 daycare centres in Manchester.

3.0 Main issues

3.1 Manchester's Transport policy for children and young people with special educational needs (SEND) was last updated in 2015 when both the statutory transport guidance and SEND reforms took place. The policy incorporated the arrangements for all children and young people aged 5 to 25 years with an EHCP. Since this review the service has encountered challenges with meeting the demands of a growing EHCP population and the availability of local specialist provision when assessing applications for travel support. This has resulted in large numbers of children being transported to school on shared minibuses or individual taxi arrangements. The application and assessment process have not promoted the use of more sustainable travel solutions and have not supported enough young people to travel independently. Both families and schools have found difficulties with the application of the policy and the travel solutions available to eligible children.

4.0 Details of the proposed policies

4.1 The proposal is to separate the current policy into a 5-16 years and a post 16 policy. This complies with current guidance and best practice. It also allows for the polies to be clearer and easier for families to reference. The eligibility criteria to be used in the policies is set out in appendix A and B. One of the

main changes in both policies is the removal of a blanket criteria considering the distance between a child's home and their school. The proposed policies will look at the needs of the whole family and their ability to support their child or young person to travel to education.

4.2 Both policies are based on the following principles:

- A commitment to ensuring children and young people can fulfil their potential and that all children and young people with significant special educational needs or disability should lead lives that are as independent and as free from restriction as possible;
- Promoting inclusive opportunities to enable children and young people to travel to and from school or college independently or using family based approaches similar to those used by other children and young people wherever possible, taking account of their age and needs;
- Promoting sustainable, safe, healthy and appropriate travel solutions by working in partnership with parents/carers to support them with their legal responsibility to make sure their children attend school;
- A commitment to equality of opportunity and the celebration of diversity and an opposition to all forms of discrimination; and
- Efficient use of public resources, delivering better outcomes and providing better value for money.

4.3 Feedback from young people through different forums and through the recent OFSTED inspection has been consistent. Young people with SEND want to learn to travel independently and where possible travel to school or college in the same way as their peers. Young people express frustration that they do not learn these skills while at school and are therefore not confident about using public transport. They also often raise issues with us about accessibility and attitudes when using public transport which also undermines their confidence. Work to address wider access to travel training will be included in both policies and work to ensure that young people with SEND have a better experience of public transport when they are trained has been discussed with TFGM and work is underway to look at this. Young people have asked for example, whether the City Council will promote the use and recognition of the sunflower lanyard which is a discrete means of young people letting people know they have additional needs.

4.4 Consequently, the policies will introduce a number of new travel solutions to support this principle. The aim is for children and young people with SEND to be able to walk or cycle to school and to travel independently using our public transport to attend education provision. Travel by minibus or taxi will remain an option where families require this transport support.

4.5 The following factors will be considered when assessing transport entitlement for children aged 5 to 16 years:

- the age of the pupil;
- the distance of the pupil from school to home;
- whether the walking route is appropriate for the pupil;

- the SEND of the pupil;
- whether the pupil has physical, medical or a social communication difficulty that would prevent them from using public transport, even if accompanied by an adult;
- whether suitable and accessible public transport is available;
- whether the pupil may be vulnerable and at risk of danger if they use public or other transport;
- whether the pupil would be a danger to drivers, other passengers or the vehicle if using public or other transport;
- the efficient utilisation of resources;
- any other individual circumstance.

4.6 In assessing eligibility for students entering post-16 education and training for travel assistance, particular attention will be paid to the following criteria:

- Whether the student is currently in receipt of any funding from the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund and to what value.
- The location of the sixth form unit or college the student would like to attend. If this is not a local provision, the council would need to know that the course being taken is not available locally.
- Whether the sixth form unit is an extension to the school previously attended by the student and named in their EHCP.
- The distance from the student's home to their education or training establishment and the journey time.
- Whether the young person has SEND and/or mobility difficulties which would impede their access to their educational placement, either independently or otherwise, for example, a wheelchair user.
- Whether the young person has SEND which would make it unsafe for them to travel independently.
- Whether the public transport journey to the nearest suitable placement is too complex for the young person to be expected to travel independently.

4.7 These are not exhaustive lists. They are not presented in any particular order and are for guidance only. Satisfaction of one or more of the criteria does not automatically entitle a pupil with SEND to transport assistance. The fact that a pupil has an EHCP or attends a special school does not automatically entitle him or her to transport assistance.

4.8 The following points provide further clarification on the travel solutions available within the proposed policies:

1. Bicycle - A one off payment may be made when a child or young person, who is eligible for support under the Council's policy, would like to use or uses a bicycle to travel to school. This solution can also include a programme of independent travel training to ensure the young person is able to safely cycle to and from school if required.
2. Walking Bus - The Council is keen to reduce the number of vehicle journeys in and around the City, especially at peak times and reduce

traffic movements in close proximity to schools. A child/young person may be allocated a space on a walking bus scheme. These involve several children/young people walking to and from school under the guidance and support of a Passenger Assistant.

3. Travel Pass - This is a free pass for use on public transport. This may also be provided for a parent/carer or another travel buddy to support the child/young person to access education.
 4. Personal Travel Budget (PTB) – Support for meeting the costs associated with ensuring support to access education may be provided through a Personal Travel Budget. This includes a variety of flexible support options such as: access to funds for parent/carers to enable them to drop earlier and collect later, paying for a family member, mileage and use of a befriending service. Family based travel solutions could also be supported by a Personal Travel Budget.
 5. Supported public transport - It may be possible for a child or young person to travel on public transport if the child/young person has some assistance. Where parents/carers are unable to accompany their son/daughter, the Council may provide a Passenger Assistant, befriending service and/or a travel buddy.
 6. Manchester Travel Training Partnership - The Council has a responsibility to promote appropriate independence skills. All young people will be supported and encouraged to travel independently to and from school, when it is assessed as reasonable for them to do so. Where a young person is offered independent travel training the process will begin with an initial assessment of their skills and abilities. The training provided will be targeted to individual need and development. It is expected that where independent travel training is offered as a travel solution, a young person will take up this training.
 7. Driving Lessons - The offer of funded driving lessons where the young people is the correct age and this is the most cost-efficient option. Students can drive a car when they are 16 if they have, or have applied for, the enhanced rate of the mobility component of Personal Independence Payment (PIP).
 8. Travel Vehicles – In circumstances where no other solution is appropriate the Council may provide a vehicle to transfer a child and young person to and from school. Vehicles and drivers are provided by a suitably qualified, registered, commercial provider working to contractual standards set by the Council. All drivers will have an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service certificate.
- 4.9 It is proposed to implement the new policies on a phased basis, starting with children who will enter key transition points for the beginning of the 2023 academic year. It is also proposed that any new applicants applying for transport for the first time, once the proposed policies are determined, are also

considered under the new arrangements. All other children will continue to be considered under the current policy until they reach a transition point or no longer require transport support. Both policies will be subject to formal public consultation which will be held for 28 days from the beginning of the new school year in September.

5.0 Wider service Improvement

- 5.1 The Home to school transport service (HTST) is responsible for implementing Manchester's existing home to school travel policy and also manages the school crossing patrol service. The service was reviewed February 2020 following a redesign of the back-office staff where a new staffing structure was introduced, and back-office processes were redefined. There was no change to the roles or responsibilities of passenger assistants during this review and there continues to be 257 passenger assistants supporting children on their journeys to education.
- 5.2 In March 2020 just as the new back-office team was established, the country went into its first Covid 19 lockdown and this had a significant impact on the way we intended the new team to work. The service continued to provide an operational service throughout the pandemic but continues to have issues with the ability to arrange cover when dealing with sickness, shielding, and isolating staff. This has been particularly challenging due to age profile of this workforce and the challenges of them working in a confined space and not able to maintain social distancing etc particularly at times when infection rates in the City have been high within the school population. This has resulted in buses being stood down because of high numbers of staff shortages at times and difficulties with accessing cover for these absences. The pandemic has significantly impacted on the experience of parents/carers accessing this service.
- 5.3 More recently the service has encountered further issues with some contractors who are now struggling to recruit drivers and maintain sustainable transport companies due to the rises in fuel and cost of living increases. This is having a direct impact on children and their families and there have been instances where buses have been stood down and the Local Authority have been unable to support children to attend school due to being unable to identify replacement transport.
- 5.4 Manchester does not have an in house fleet and all vehicles are commissioned through an external framework. This framework is managed through the Children's Service commissioning team and the last full tender exercise was in 2017. There are approx. 500 providers on this framework which includes both mini buses and taxis. The providers also employ the drivers of the vehicles.
- 5.5 As an immediate mitigation to the loss of any further routes the service will conduct a review of current active routes and ensure that vehicles are being fully utilised and where possible allocate children to current routes. The Childrens Services commissioning team will hold discussions with current

operators to review their capacity to provide additional journeys in September and also review what support would be required from the Local Authority to ensure the journeys can continue into the next academic year.

5.6 As such it has been agreed that further work on the future operating model of this area is required and that there is a need to work in partnership with families and schools to ensure the service is meeting the needs of its users. The scope of this review should also include the roles of passenger assistants, the use of technology to improve service delivery, the operating model of transport operators and the future requirements of adult day care services. The service has commissioned support from an organisation with a track record of working with organisations through the design and implementation of change to coordinate this work and to ensure both the policy and revised operating model are fully coproduced and are delivered by the start of the 2023 academic year.

5.7 The key areas to be reviewed are:

- Communication and Engagement Review: how the service interacts with families and schools. Look at how to improve communication and provide regular updates on transport applications and solutions in a more efficient and effective way.
- Further design and implementation of changes to the operating model: Review the current service structure including the roles and responsibilities of staff. Design and implement a fit for purpose structure.
- Immediate route optimisation: Review current transport arrangements and ensure all routes are being fully optimised
- Prioritisation of reviews & consideration of alternative transport options
- Soft market testing and re-procurement: Support to stimulate the market ahead of the next full tender exercise
- Digital/ Technical assessment and implementation: Procure and implement ICT software solutions across the service area to ensure an efficient and effective delivery model.
- Design, consult and implement new strategy for passenger assistants: Review the roles and responsibilities of passenger assistants and design a future operating model

5.8 In response to several challenges which have arisen throughout the pandemic and more recently as well as issues raised, by service users and Ofsted following the Local Area's inspection of special educational and disability in November 2021, the service has already initiated a complete review of its policy and delivery model. Over the next 12 months new policies will be gradually implemented and a programme of improvements works will be progressed to enhance the service experience of families and children.

6.0 Recommendations

6.1 The Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is recommended to: -

- Consider this report and comment on the policies proposed and the phased implementation of the new policies
- Consider the work to date on the wider service improvement programme

6.2 The Executive is recommended to: -

1. Consider the recommendations of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.
2. Agree in principle the following documents appended to this report, and to authorise the Director of Education to consult on the proposed implementation of them:
 - a) Home to School Travel support policy for 5–16-year-olds
 - b) Home to School Travel support policy for post 16
 - c) Home to School Travel support summary document
3. Authorise the Director of Education to consider any responses received to the consultation and to agree to the implementation of the proposed policies appended to this report if she considers it appropriate to do so.
4. Consider the work to date on the wider service improvement programme and agree to progress the identified areas of improvement.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Proposed Home to School Travel support policy for 5-16 year olds
- Appendix 2 – Proposed Home to School Travel support policy for post 16
- Appendix 3 – Proposed Home to School Travel support summary document