



Executive Advisory Panel on Forward Together for Children's Services

Minutes of the meeting held at County Hall, Colliton Park,
Dorchester, Dorset, DT1 1XJ on Monday, 2 October 2017.

Present:

Kate Wheller (Chairman),
Katharine Garcia and Byron Quayle.

Other Members in Attendance:

Cllr Deborah Croney (Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Education, Learning and Skills).

Officer Attending:

Patrick Myers (Assistant Director - Design and Development), Ed Denham (School Admissions Manager) and Jason Read (Democratic Services Officer).

(Notes: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Executive Advisory Panel on Forward Together for Children's Services).

Apologies for Absence

18 Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Steve Butler and Cllr Susan Jefferies.

Code of Conduct

19 There were no declarations by members of disclosable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

SEN Transport Clause

20 The Panel considered a report that outlined proposed changes to the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) transport eligibility criteria. As a result of work being undertaken in relation to SEND, it had become necessary to clarify the authority's position on support to SEND learners who required transport to the school designated on any Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) they had in place. There was also a need to clarify passenger assistance roles as a result of increased pressure within the overall SEND Travel budget. The report outlined proposed changes that would allow for greater discretion in how the authority made decisions about the type of transport provided allowing the circumstances of parents and carers to be taken in to account.

The report clarified that all children were eligible to Local Authority provided transport to school if their nearest or catchment school was beyond 2 miles (Reception to Year 4) or beyond 3 miles (Year 5 to Year 11). This criteria applied to all children who were attending a mainstream school regardless of their SEND or whether a child had an EHCP (or Statement). Those children who were attending a base provision (Complex Communication Base or Social Emotional Mental Health Base) as the named provision on an EHCP, would be provided with transport assuming it was the nearest suitable base with places and they were eligible due to the distance criteria. It was noted that the Local Authority did not have a duty to provide Local Authority funded Home to School transport for Post 16 students. However, there may be some entitlement to travel assistance from the Local Authority where a student was subject to an EHCP or had significant SEND if a professional assessment clearly indicated that a young person would not be able to access public transport to a place of

learning because of their SEN or disability, or that child was within 3 miles of school but a professional assessment clearly indicated that the young person would not be able to walk to their place of learning as a direct result of their SEND or disability.

It was noted that there would have to be a degree of flexibility involved if parents were unable to obtain the information required from professionals prior to the child starting school. However, there would be ample time between the allocation of school places and starting at the school for parents to do so. The Panel agreed that the message to both parents and schools would have to be clear and concise in order to offer full transparency of the policy.

Councillors asked why Dorset County Council applied a 3 mile distance criteria (Year 5 to Year 11) whilst many other authorities applied a 5 mile cut off. It was suggested that given the rural setting of Dorset and the difficulties with public transport, a 5 mile criteria would be more suitable. Officers clarified that the criteria could be reviewed, but it would depend on the cost implications associated with increasing the distance for eligibility.

Councillors asked if there was any scope to financially compensate parents and carers for hours taken away from their working day if they were to volunteer as passenger assistants, as this would be cheaper than hiring a permanent passenger assistant. It was clarified that there could potentially be some scope for arrangements such as these, but this would be a piece of work that would be undertaken separately.

It was agreed that the views and suggestions made by the Panel would be incorporated in the final version of the report scheduled to be considered by Cabinet on the 18 October 2017.

Noted.

Meeting Duration: 10.00 am - 10.45 am