

# Cabinet

## Dorset County Council



Date of Meeting	05 December 2018
<p><u>Cabinet Member(s)</u> Andrew Parry – Cabinet Member for Economic Growth, Education, Learning and Skills</p> <p><u>Lead Director(s)</u> Nick Jarman – Director for Children’s Services Andrew Reid – Assistant Director Schools and Learning</p>	
<b>Subject of Report</b>	<b>Amendment to Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Transport Policy</b>
Executive Summary	<p>The Council has a statutory duty to provide SEND transport and therefore has very little scope for reducing costs beyond changing behaviour. Between May 2015 and May 2018 there has been a 49% increase in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) issued and approximately half of these required travel assistance. This increase has put the budget into deficit.</p> <p>Provision of a bespoke door-to-door taxi service is no longer affordable as the default option for most users. Moving to a default offer (for those who do not opt for a Personal Transport Budget (PTB)) of a taxi to/from a designated pick-up point will make the use of a taxi marginally less attractive whilst staying within statutory obligations. It is necessary if we are to reduce costs and provide greater equality between mainstream home to school transport and SEND transport.</p> <p>There is a real need to provide an environment that promotes the independence of SEND children as they move through their journey towards adulthood. A short journey to/from a designated pick-up point can be an important first step to independence whilst promoting other options for getting a SEND child to/from school.</p>
Impact Assessment:	<p>Equalities Impact Assessment:</p> <p>The move to drop-off points can be made under the existing wording although a consultation is still advisable. The EQIA was published on 08 November 2018.</p> <p>Use of Evidence: A 49% increase in the number of EHCPs issued over a 3-year period (May 2015 – 2018). Approximately 50% of these qualify for free travel.</p>

	<p>Budget: Whilst difficult to accurately predict, it is anticipated that savings in the range of £0.46M to £1.04M are possible.</p> <p>Risk Assessment:</p> <p>Having considered the risks associated with this decision using the County Council’s approved risk management methodology, the level of risk has been identified as:                  Current Risk: MEDIUM                  Residual Risk: MEDIUM</p> <p>Outcomes:</p> <p>Promotion of the personalisation agenda and greater independence for SEND children, budget savings.</p> <p>Other Implications:</p> <p>This policy marks the beginning of a culture change that is likely to be challenged by some of the families affected.</p>
<p>Recommendations</p>	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Approve the promotion of personalisation, independence and setting the right conditions for the transition to adulthood when considering the choice of home to school transport most appropriate for a SEND child.</li> <li>• Approve the requirement for new SEND applications to be processed using a designated pick-up point (where risk assessed to be possible). This will happen under a strict application of the existing policy wording from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019 but will, nevertheless, be subject to consultation.</li> <li>• Approve the amendment to existing policy to say that transport to/from a pick-up point (the nearest bus stop) will be the default setting for all home to school transport (both SEND and mainstream). The amendment will mean that users of the door-to-door taxi service would be asked to change from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019. This allows time for full consultation (and completion of an Equalities Impact Assessment) with families and children.</li> </ul>
<p>Reason for Recommendation</p>	<p>Provision of appropriate and affordable transport for SEND children whilst putting personalisation, independence and setting the right conditions for the transition to adulthood at the heart of SEND travel policy.</p>
<p>Appendices</p>	<p>N/A</p>

Background Papers	Home to School Transport Assistance Eligibility Policy for Children and Young People Attending School 2019-2020
Officer Contact	Name: Andrew Reid Tel: 01305 224770 Email: <a href="mailto:Andrew.J.Reid@dorsetcc.gov.uk">Andrew.J.Reid@dorsetcc.gov.uk</a>

1. **Issue.** The Council has a statutory duty to provide SEND transport. Between May 2015 and May 2018 there has been a 49% increase in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) issued and approximately half of these required travel assistance. Provision of a bespoke door-to-door taxi service is no longer affordable as the default option for most users. Making this option less attractive whilst staying within statutory obligations is necessary if we are to reduce costs and provide greater equality between mainstream home to school transport and SEND transport. At the same time there is a real need to increase the independence of SEND children as they move through their journey towards adulthood. This issue can be addressed by changing one sentence within the existing Home to School Transport Assistance Eligibility Policy for Children and Young People Attending School 2019-2020.

2. **Existing Policy.** Paragraph 2.3 (Page 19) of the Home to School Transport Assistance Eligibility Policy for Children and Young People Attending School 2019-2020 states:

*Every effort is made for children to be collected and dropped at a point close to their home. However, some pupils may have to walk a reasonable distance to and from their home/school to meet the vehicle. Where this is not possible the LA may arrange transport to and from the pick-up/drop off points if;*

- *A primary aged (4 – 11) child lives more than 0.75 miles from the nearest point,*
- *A secondary aged (11 – 16) child lives more than 1 mile from the nearest point.*

*Parents and children are responsible for being at the pick-up point in good time to access the service.*

*Parents are responsible for their children’s safety in getting to and from the notified pick up/drop off points (including awaiting or leaving transport) or to and from the vehicle, if they are picked up at home. Younger children should be accompanied, and parents must ensure that they carry their bus passes (if applicable).*

3. **Proposed Policy Amendment.** Currently all children with SEND who are transported to school via taxi, minibus etc, arranged by Dorset County Council are collected from their home address, and returned to their home address at the end of the day. In contrast, children on mainstream transport are expected to catch their transport from a central pick-up point. There is no statutory basis for this difference in approach. At the same time Dorset County Council wants to maximise the take-up of Personal Travel Budgets (PTBs) as these offer greater flexibility and empowerment whilst significantly reducing the cost to the Council. This option requires that all children (SEND or otherwise) would access local authority arranged transport from a pick-up point. This already applies to mainstream transport. The proposal is that, subject to risk assessment, SEND children would now be collected from their nearest bus stop (as long it is within 0.75 or 1 mile, depending on age<sup>1</sup>).

---

<sup>1</sup> Children will remain entitled to travel assistance to their pick-up point when it is located 0.75 miles

Any variation from this default setting would be based on an assessment of risk rather than parental preference. It is proposed that, with effect from 01 September 2019, the sentence:

*Every effort is made for children to be collected and dropped at a point close to their home.*

Is replaced with:

*Subject to risk assessment, transport to/from designated pick-up points is the default setting for all children in receipt of home to school transport.*

4. **Recommendations.** It is recommended that the Council:
  - Approves the promotion of personalisation, independence and setting the right conditions for the transition to adulthood when considering the method of transport most appropriate for a SEND child.
  - Approve the requirement for new SEND applications to be processed using a designated pick-up point (where risk assessed to be possible). This will happen under a strict application of the existing policy wording from 1st January 2019 but will, nevertheless, be subject to consultation.
  - Approve the amendment to existing policy to say that transport to/from a pick-up point (the nearest bus stop) will be the default setting for all home to school transport (both SEND and mainstream). The amendment will mean that users of the door-to-door taxi service would be asked to change from 1st September 2019. This allows time for full consultation (and completion of an Equalities Impact Assessment) with families and children.
5. **Timing.** Subject to consultation, new applications will be processed under strict application of the existing policy wording from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2019. Existing users of the door-to-door taxi service would be asked to change in response to the amended policy from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2019. Authority to start the consultation is required now.
6. **Benefits.** The expectation that families will take their children to a pick-up point is needed to change behaviour, making the current door-to-door taxi service less attractive in comparison with other travel options. The benefits are:
  - Mileage costs will be marginally reduced as the transport will not be travelling so far.
  - Travel costs will also reduce as there will be less waiting at addresses for children who will already be up and ready for school.
  - More families will opt for a PTB once the door-to-door transport option is taken away.
  - Children will learn to become more independent, as they will be required to leave the house in the morning to access their travel solution from another location, instead of sitting at home waiting. This change in attitude has the potential to deliver real long-term benefits for families, children, and the Council.

---

away for primary, and 1 mile for secondary. This does not include those children where they have expressed parental preference for a school further away from their catchment school.

7. **Anticipated Savings.** It is difficult to precisely quantify the savings, as there is no evidence to suggest that any other local authority has tried this. However, the change is expected to have the following effects:

- **Reduced Mileage and Time for Contractors.** It is anticipated that overall mileage will decrease by 2%. This equates to £100K for a full Financial Year.
- **Behaviour Change Leading to Parents Choosing PTBs (New Applications).** Whilst difficult to predict, it is estimated that this could deliver savings in the region of £200,000 to £400,000 across a full year. This is based on more families choosing to take a PTB on new referrals (where they have never had any travel provided by the local authority). We expect that approximately 60% of families would choose a PTB, against the current rate and historic rate of between 31% last year, and 38% currently. This would place a further 50 to 60 children on a PTB. The average cost is approximately £8K for a travel solution including a Passenger Assistant (PA) or £4K for a PTB alone. This would give rise to a saving (cost avoidance) of between £200K and £240K annually.
- **Behaviour Change Leading to Parents Choosing PTBs (Existing Children).** It is expected that existing parents moving to PTBs could save in the region of £160K to £640K over a full year. This is based on 5% to 20% of families converting to a PTB i.e. 40 to 160 families out of total of approx. 800. This could generate actual savings against current costs of between £160K to £640K for a full year.

8. **Impact on Families and the Council.** There will undoubtedly be real impact on children and their families. They will perceive this initiative as an unnecessary reduction in the service offered by the Council. It may cause hardship for those with more than one child (in terms of getting one to the pick-up point whilst the other stays in the home) but it will level the playing field and, will in many cases, be an important step towards independent living. It is, however, important to note that independent travel training will be a key element of the offer to any family affected by these changes.

9. **Risks and Advantages.**

Risks	Advantages
More challenge from families	Provides equality with mainstream students
Increase in transport appeals	Promotes greater independence for children – it is a significant step towards independent living
Some children may not find it as easy to attend school	Promotes greater accountability for parents
Costs of defending the decision in tribunals and Judicial Reviews	Reduces the cost of travel for the local authority
Reputational damage to the Local Authority	Meets statutory obligations

10. **Summary.** The change to pick-up points for SEND children from the nearest bus stop, will have several significant advantages / benefits to the children and to the Council. It will promote a change of behaviour in families, and reduce the cost of travel for the Council, whilst still complying with the statutory regulations and guidance. There will always be a need to allow for exceptional circumstances for some children, but to expect children and their family to go to a designated pick-up/drop-off point is reasonable and will promote both personalisation and greater independence.

