

## TRAFFORD COUNCIL

**Report to:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 11<sup>th</sup> January 2017  
**Report for:** Consideration  
**Report of:** Executive Member Children's Services

### Report Title

Executive Response: Home to School Transport – Task and Finish Group Update

### Summary

The recommendations set out in the report of the Home to School Transport – Task and Finish Group October 2015 have all been implemented and a further progress report is detailed below.

The new All Age Travel Assistance Policy came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> June 2016 with full implementation from 1<sup>st</sup> September 2016. The impact of the Policy is reported below.

### Update

#### 1. Recommendations

##### **Recommendation 1** – Journey times impacted by buses queuing at schools

The executive member should look at the broad financial impact of contractors extending the journey time through long waits at schools and additionally, work with schools and parents/carers to explore reducing such occurrences where there are not valid logistical reasons.

*Trafford Transport Co-ordination Unit (TTCU) continues to work with schools to try and ensure that minibuses and taxis queuing at schools is kept to a minimum. All runs are re-commissioned ready for each academic year and emphasis is placed on enabling children to arrive at school at an appropriate time and ready to learn whilst making the most efficient use of seats and resources. The number of vehicles transporting 110 pupils to Pictor Academy has reduced by one to 13. This number will reduce over the next four years as the number of primary special places is more evenly spread.*

*However opportunities for service improvements are identified throughout the year. Commissioned transport to Longford Park was rationalised in summer 2016 with the support of the Head and parents. Changes were made to the way in which the contract was procured and awarded particularly in seeking competitive bids as one lot for all the vehicles required instead on a vehicle by vehicle basis. This meant that*

*fewer vehicles are required and the Contractor is better able to plan and co-ordinate the journeys and drop off times.*

*A review of the journey planning software system is underway as the current system requires significant upgrading.*

### **Recommendation 2 – Releasing Information at Tender**

Scrutiny felt that there was scope for exploring with Trafford Parents Forum the potential for a protocol to be devised that protected the child's details, but allowed the parent/carer to permit release, where they felt those details were important to the tender process. It was felt to be an issue upon which there could be co-production with Trafford Parents Forum.

*The TTCU actively seeks information from parents and also from schools about a child's needs, particularly when the child has complex medical and/or behaviour needs. This information is used when commissioning transport and also to identify the most suitable form of travel assistance. For some young people independent travel training is a better solution that aids their independence and transition into adulthood.*

### **Recommendation 3 – Clarifying DBS responsibility**

Since Scrutiny has found ambiguity in the statutory guidance, and has learned through the press of a nearby council recording DBS checks of drivers, it recommends obtaining definitive guidance from the DfE on this point.

*The position remains the same as detailed in the previous Executive Response dated 27<sup>th</sup> January 2016 "It has not been possible to obtain 'definitive guidance from DfE' who do not specify requirements in relation to DBS checks for drivers. However legal advice is clear that Trafford's approach is appropriate and it is in line with our requirements of all external contractors working with children and young people. It should be noted that passenger assistants employed by the Council and subject to Council employment checks are present on each of the transport runs with vulnerable children and young people and drivers are not travelling alone with pupils."*

*A new system of quality assurance check are carried out by the TTCU at Contractors' premises and on their vehicles to verify that documents, policies, procedures and vehicles are in order and in accordance with the contract and Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency requirements.*

### **Recommendation 4 – Safeguarding Information to Parents**

Scrutiny endorses the point made by Trafford Parent's Forum that parents and carers should be informed of the responsible person for safeguarding within the operator's organisation.

*This recommendation is accepted. This information is to be included in the next version of the All Age Travel Assistance Policy to be issued in May 2017 following the Policy annual review and consultation.*

### **Recommendation 5 – Risk Assessment**

Scrutiny has seen Birmingham City Council's generic risk assessment for Home to

School Transport and believes overall that such a risk assessment enhances the assurance parents/carers feel in using the service and recommends a similar model is used in Trafford.

*The generic risk assessment was updated in October 2016 and is undertaken daily by Passenger Assistants and can involve receiving information and advice from parents and schools about pupils' needs which may change. It is used to ensure the safety of pupils, Passenger Assistants and drivers for example through making physical adaptations to vehicles and allocation of seats so pupils are given sufficient space to help manage their behaviour.*

### **Recommendation 6 – Training**

It is therefore recommended that the training requirements be revisited to ensure consistency within the delivery of this, e.g. clarity within written materials etc., and checking that all aspects defined within the statutory guidance are covered and delivered appropriately

*There is a comprehensive programme of training for Passenger Assistants and the TTCU team. This includes generic induction training, monthly Passenger Assistants' team meetings to reinforce the Council's standards and procedures, e-learning e.g. managing challenging behaviour, safeguarding, moving and handling and basic life support and classroom based training on Autism and Epilepsy. A programme of bespoke training is being delivered by staff from Trafford special schools including training on hidden disabilities, managing behaviour and to advise on a pupil's specific needs.*

### **Recommendation 7**

Trafford explores the feasibility of co-production of policy with Trafford Parents Forum.

*The new All Age Travel Assistance Policy was subject to two public consultations and Trafford Parents Forum was commissioned to undertake specific parental consultations. The Forum provided substantial input into the production of the Policy. The Policy is subject to annual review and Trafford Parents Forum will be part of the review process.*

*A draft Co-Production Charter between the Council and Trafford Parents Forum covering all aspects of co-production for children and young people with special education needs or who are disabled (SEND) is being considered by the SEND Board and its Communication and Engagement working group, both include representatives from the Forum. There are regular meetings between SEN Service Managers and the Parents Forum to discuss wider SEND policies and issues, including travel assistance.*

### **Recommendation 8**

The most consistent call was for improved communications with parent/carers – early notice of changes. There had also been times at Trafford when there'd been a lack of empathy when the call was first answered, for the parent/carer's predicament.

*There has been positive feedback about Passenger Assistants and the TTCU team. In preparation for the relocation of Brentwood School from September 2016 the*

*team worked hard to keep parents informed about the changes, including changes to eligibility for those pupils who may live closer to the new site. The journey times for many students has reduced following the relocation of the school and college.*

*Following the public consultation with parents about the new Policy it was suggested that photographs of Passenger Assistants is sent to families: this has proved to be of particular benefit for pupils who have difficulties with transition when there is a permanent change of Passenger Assistant. The TTCU Manager has attended meetings with parents and schools to help resolve issue of behaviour on transport to support the continuation of that provision.*

## 2. Impact of All Age Travel Assistance Policy

- 1. Children starting reception in September 2016.** These are children who are not of compulsory school age but have been included in the Policy. There are 23 pupils of reception age eligible for travel assistance under the new policy but would not have been eligible previously. Of the 23 pupils, 7 would have been eligible from January 2017, 4 would have been eligible from April 2017 and 12 would have been eligible from September 2017. This is an additional cost to the Council.
- 2. Pre-School Children aged 2-4 years.** These are young children attending a nursery assessment place at a Trafford special school. As these nursery children only attend for half a day there is a requirement to pick up or drop off these children at lunch time. It is difficult to recruit Passenger Assistants to work at lunch time as many PAs have other jobs. If their child is eligible for travel assistance parents are charged £200 (or £100 if on low income) per term. Although 8 applications have been received - 6 were eligible. Despite transport being arranged 4 of the parents decided not to use the transport and made alternative arrangements. This has resulted in a loss of time for the TTCU. The other two applications were made in November and cannot be accommodated on existing "runs". The additional cost of transport for one child is £3.8k p.a. as two runs have been recommissioned into one larger run, but one that still costs more than the two previous runs, to accommodate the need to pick the child up at lunch time. The additional transport cost for the other child is £7.6k p.a. plus the cost of employing an additional Passenger Assistant. This is an additional cost to the Council which is not mitigated by the charges to parents of a maximum of £600 each p.a.
- 3. Providing travel assistance to primary age children from low income families attending a denominational school.** This is a new discretionary offer under the new Policy. It brings the primary sector in line with the secondary sector as the Council has a statutory duty to provide travel assistance for children from low income families attending a denominational secondary school. A cohort of Partington pupils from low income families attends Little Bollington C of E Primary School (Cheshire East). Following a consultation meeting with these Partington parents, and the difficulties with public transport arrangements in the area, the TTCU agreed to provide a Passenger Assistant on a public service vehicle provided by Network Warrington, which runs between Partington and

Little Bollington C of E Primary School (Cheshire East). The cost of providing travel assistance is modest at approximately £5.5k p.a. Parents and school staff have said that the "Partington bus" is having a positive impact on the Partington Community and is adding social value. As part of the scheme parents have bought bus passes which they can use to enable them to take trips in the school holidays, it has brought the community together through fund raising events to support the scheme. It has been particularly important for 3 families in need and children on the child protection register.

- 4. Students aged 16-19 years with SEND.** Since September 2016 34 eligible students have been provided with a seat on a vehicle and or offered independent travel training. This will cost the Council approximately £187k but will receive an estimated £21k from charges to parents for the academic year 2016/17. Additional time is needed to check the eligibility of applicants as professional evidence is now required to support the application as to the reason why travel assistance is necessary to facilitate attendance at education or training.
  - 5. Adult learners.** There are 54 adult learners who are eligible for travel assistance in order for them to access learning. Adult learners are assessed by social care and if deemed eligible for travel assistance this has to be provided free of charge in accordance with legislation. Until September 2016 a charge was levied; this has now resulted in a loss of income of £41k per academic year.
  - 6. Implementation of charging for home to school/college travel assistance.** This is a new feature of the Policy and applies to pre-school age children and students aged 16-19 years. A new system has been implemented and this has created additional work for the TTCU to administer applications, undertake financial checks, agree payment terms and deal with parental enquires.
3. Other Issues
- 1. Delamere School changed their start and finish times,** resulting in the opening hours changing from 9.20 am to 9.00 am. Previously the TTCU utilised fewer vehicles as they were able to use vehicles elsewhere as a "double run" due to Delamere's later start times. From September, the TTCU were unable to do this which resulted in a requirement for 2 extra vehicles plus passenger assistants at an additional cost of £25k p.a.
  - 2. Runs to new establishments.** Due to changes in the Trafford College offer to post-16 students some students are now travelling to colleges outside Trafford to access learning. This has resulted in new transport having to be commissioned; although there has been a decrease from 18 students to 2 students being transported to Trafford College costs have increased, as students have subsequently gone to colleges which are further afield. The Orchards is a new primary special school in Trafford meeting the needs of the increasing number of pupils with SEN requiring specialist provision as identified in the SEN review of 2013. It will take 4 or 5 years for the geographical allocation of places for primary aged pupils to reach the planned 80 school places at each of the three generic primary special schools. Until then there will be a requirement to transport children across Trafford, currently in specialist provision, who may not attend their nearest special school.

**3. In term applications** are received throughout the academic year and have don't just have resource and budget implications. For example, in September 2016 there were an additional 20 applications this means that new "runs" may have to be commissioned and/or children re-allocated other seats to maximize the efficient use of vehicles and recruit additional Passenger Assistants in order to transport the new pupils. The TTCU continue to get applications each month and there is a rolling programme of reviewing runs and allocation of PAs.

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