

Minutes of Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board

**Monday 27 September 2021 at 5.00pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Shackleton (Chair);
Councillor Chambers (Vice Chair);
Councillors Chidley, W Gill, Hinchliff, Smith and Webb.

In Attendance: Councillor Anandou.

Officers: Katharine Willmette (Interim Director – Children's Services);
Sue Moore (Group Head Education Support Services);
Alexander Goddard (Democratic Services Officer).

33/21 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors E A Giles, Hughes and McVittie; and co-opted members K Heeley, K Kujawa-Sogbesan and C Ward-Lewis.

34/21 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made.



Scrutiny Review of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport Models

At its meeting on 2 August 2021 the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board had agreed to undertake a review into Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Transport Models (see Minute No. 23/21). A scoping document was agreed and a cross-party Working Group, including members of the Budget and Corporate Scrutiny Management Board had been established to carry out this review.

It was acknowledged that the Review needed to be carried out at pace in order to ensure suitable transport provision could be procured by February 2022, when the current interim arrangements would cease. To this end, the Chair of the Scrutiny Board directed the members of the Working Group to each take responsibility for a specific workstream that had been identified in the scope of the Review. Members carried out a range of research including collating data from local, regional and national sources; speaking to a range of officers and stakeholders (including parents and school staff); and liaising with other local authorities.

Members' findings had been discussed by the working group and had resulted in a range of recommendations. The Board discussed and agreed recommendations across three broad categories – matters pertaining to contracting of SEND Transport in February 2022 following the end of the existing interim arrangements, longer-term considerations and general matters. These would be reported to the Cabinet for consideration at the earliest opportunity.

The Chair placed on record her appreciation for the way in which members had supported the review in an efficient manner in the face of challenging timescales. She also expressed her gratitude to the officers who had supported the review. Members also spoke about the positive way in which the Chair had lead the review.

In response to comments about SEND Transport contract issues surrounding DBS checks in Birmingham City Council, officers reiterated the advice provided at the Board's meeting on 23 August



2021 (Minute No 26/21 refers) on the additional measures in place in Sandwell that prevented the same issues happening locally through officers checking DBS reports directly. The Board was also advised that these checks were carried out annually and the Council was also informed about any reportable matters relating to drivers during the year so that appropriate action could be taken if necessary.

Resolved:-

- (1) That the Director – Law and Governance arrange for the following recommendations to be submitted to the Cabinet for consideration:
 - (a) That the Cabinet reviews the administration of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport to ensure consistency of approach and that resourcing is adequate in light of increasing demand on the service.
 - (b) That the Cabinet ensures that the Parent Group for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is communicated and consulted with on any changes to the Transport service and, where possible, the views of affected children and young people are also sought.
 - (c) That the Cabinet ensures that Education Health Care Plan assessments are carried out without delay to ensure early identification of recommended provision, including Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport requirements.
 - (d) That the Cabinet re-evaluates child to adult ratios for minibuses to ensure that they are appropriate and reflect assessed risks and needs on a case by case basis.
 - (e) That the Cabinet continues, and seeks to increase, the Independent Travel Training Programme.



- (f) That the Cabinet refreshes awareness campaigns relating to Personal Budgets and the Independent Travel Training Programme to ensure all families are aware of the options available.
- (g) That the Cabinet reviews Early Years provision in each town, which may help reduce transport costs.
- (h) That the Cabinet reviews time lengths of journeys to ensure that children are not needing to travel for more than 50 minutes in normal circumstances.
- (i) That the Cabinet considers how place provision strategically located throughout the borough can be used to minimise journey times.
- (j) That the Cabinet considers the following in relation to the contracting of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport for February 2022:-
 - (i) providers should ensure drivers and Passenger Assistants are trained, and accredited where appropriate, in First Aid, non-verbal communication, use of safety harnesses and manual handling. In addition there should be Advanced Passenger Assistants who are specifically trained to provide emergency medication on transport, including but not limited to administering pre-loaded EpiPens or pre-loaded buccal midazolam devices;
 - (ii) a market position statement be prepared, encouraging competition from a wide range of suppliers;
 - (iii) small and medium enterprises should be afforded opportunities to tender for the contracts;



- (iv) mainly whole school provision should be the preferred approach;
 - (v) some harmonisation of provision should be considered to balance effective management of contracts whilst retaining a diversified group of providers;
 - (vi) the model for provision should avoid the increased risk associated with awarding contracts to a small number of providers.
- (k) That the Cabinet undertakes a trial scheme for providing Passenger Assistants in-house, or in partnership with schools, as part of the contracting of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport and that a full analysis is carried out on the trial scheme to determine its effectiveness.
- (l) That the Cabinet investigates the feasibility of taking Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport provision in-house, this should include risks, costs, benefits, potential timescales and suitable performance indicators, and it should include the following options:
- (i) full Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport service in-house;
 - (ii) combined provision with existing Adult Social Care Transport;
 - (iii) only Passenger Assistants service provided in-house.
- (m) That the Cabinet ensures that, however the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport service is provided in future, Passenger Assistants:-
- (i) must be trained, and accredited where appropriate, in First Aid, communication with non-verbal children; and
 - (ii) during their induction and onboarding a clear and strong emphasis should be



- placed on relationship building between the Passenger Assistant, the family, the school and the transport provider;
- (iii) also include Advanced Passenger Assistants who are specifically trained to provide emergency medication on transport, including but not limited to administering pre-loaded EpiPens or pre-loaded buccal midazolam devices;
 - (n) That the Cabinet investigates with partners how children with Autism Spectrum Disorders can receive earlier diagnoses which can help improve outcomes, including around transport needs, for that group.
 - (o) That the Cabinet ensures that research relating to Special Educational Needs and Disabilities is considered whenever it is available to identify potential areas of improvement in Sandwell's service provision.
- (2) That the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board is kept informed about the process for commissioning Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport in Sandwell.
 - (3) That Post-18 Provision for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities be included in the work programme for the Children's Services and Education Scrutiny Board.

Meeting ended at 6.11pm

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