



Schools and Learning Select Committee
2nd December 2009

Special Educational Needs Transport Task Group Review

Purpose of the report: Progress report

This report is submitted to the Select Committee to update them on progress being made on the agreed actions and recommendations from the Special Educational Needs Transport Task Group Review.

Introduction:

1. At the Corporate Management Select Committee's Finance Task Group in June 2008, Members raised concerns regarding the Council's ability to control the spend within the Special Educational Needs Transport budget. It was agreed that a joint task group of the Children & Families, Corporate Management, Schools & Learning and Transportation Select Committee be established to review this issue.
2. Approval from the Committees for the establishment of the Task Group was provided in September and October 2008. The Group met for the first time in December 2008.
3. The aims and objectives of the Task Group were to:

Aims

- To establish the statutory position as to the statutory requirement to provide transport and to understand whether the Council currently provides the statutory requirement for SEN Transport or whether it provides more than required
- To identify the need for home to school transport for children with special educational needs
- To identify what the process is for identifying the most effective and supportive way of transporting children with SEN from their home to their school
- To identify who should be responsible for the budget, and what controls they needed to be able to manage it in the next municipal year.

Outcomes

- A standard policy outlining the Council's service including a user-friendly how-to guide for service users and officers
- A set of contract rules for service providers that ensure that contractors are accountable for their actions – including a 12 month review
- Agreed efficiency savings are made in the 2008/09 year (-£0.9m) & 3%

efficiency savings in 2009/10.

4. The Task Group was clear that following the review, the recommendations made should allow Surrey County Council to achieve the following:
 - A cost effective, high quality service that is sustainable that meets the needs of the individual children concerned.
 - Contracts that are designed to ensure that contractors are accountable for the service they deliver.
5. The Group met four times and considered issues relating to the draft Special Educational Needs Strategy and how this would impact on the budget.

Conclusions:

6. The Task Group made six recommendations that were accepted by The Executive. These recommendations and actions to date are set out below:
7. Any future Special Educational Needs Strategy needed to include the full projected cost implications for each option considered to ensure that Members are considering all the implications of the options.
 - a) The revised draft Strategy has acknowledged that Home to School Transport is an important factor in considering proposed changes to special educational provision in Surrey. The draft report to Cabinet shows that on average the per pupil costs per annum are as follows:

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|--------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| i) Surrey Special School | Ave cost per pupil pa = £ 5,323.29 |
| ii) Surrey Specialist Resource | Ave cost per pupil pa = £ 6,806.45 |
| iii) Out County Placements | Ave cost per pupil pa = £10,592.65 |

Should the Cabinet agree the SEN Strategy then during the life of the Implementation Plan each specific proposal will include clearly calculated cost implications for Home to School Transport.

8. A review of the SEN Home to School Transport Policy be carried out, to include
 - More detailed guidance for parents and officers on interpreting the Policy
 - The development of a more robust policy on the behaviour expected of the children and young people being transported to and from school
 - The implications of not providing transport if the risks of transporting a child or young person is considered to be too great, and what other alternative arrangements can be made bearing in mind the Council's duties in defined circumstances, including not to discriminate on the grounds of disability
 - a) A scoping document is being drafted at this time to enable a project management team to tackle this task. It is expected a draft revised Policy could be available in two months.

9. A review be carried out into how the Council can support parents to transport their own children to school and that this approach be consistently promoted to all parents across the county.
 - a) The Review of the SEN Home to School Transport Policy, as above, will include this issue.
10. Options for the introduction of Independent Travel Training (ITT) into the special education needs school programme and for take up by parents be considered where appropriate.
 - a) Surrey has appointed an independent travel trainer through the Surrey Student Transport Partnership. The travel trainer is currently working in 5 special schools in Surrey and with about 30 pupils. From this pilot work it will be possible to estimate the likely cost benefit of rolling out this programme to relevant Surrey special schools and resource centres. Surrey, on behalf of the Surrey Student Transport Partnership, also commissioned Halcrow consultancy to undertake a wider feasibility study into both funding opportunities and the expansion of the ITT scheme in July 2009. Surrey was looking for the consultant's assistance in developing options to formulate a 5-10 year business plan for ITT. The business plan would identify the resources needed, cost implications and cost savings that could include Year 10 students at Special Educational Needs schools. The draft report is due shortly.
11. It considers whether the cost of employing a medic within the authority to carry out the assessments of whether a child requires a medical escort outweighed the cost of continually re-training doctors on the procedures.
 - a) Initial investigations have centred on approaching Surrey CC's Occupational Health provider. Discussions have been held with their responsible doctor about reviewing children & young people's case files where parents/carers ask for medical escorts. This would be 'Surrey's' view and would either support or reject the request. The doctor has concluded that if a paediatrician representing parents has suggested a need for a medical escort it is unlikely that another paediatrician would contradict that view. Officers will be having further extensive discussions with Surrey NHS paediatricians about this issue and where appropriate involve risk management strategies.
12. Officers need to ensure that all transportation contracts relating to special educational needs are conditional on good performance so that the Council have a greater control relating to the performance of the contractors.
 - a) Contracts already have a 'poor performance' clause, which is activated as necessary. It is estimated that up to 20% of contracts are changed monthly, of which a significant number will be for 'poor performance'.
13. It considers a feasibility study of the Council adopting alternative ways of operation for both transporting children and young people with or without special educational needs.
 - a) Procurement are working with the TCC to undertake an option analysis of three options to transform and improve the delivery of transport services:

Option One: Sole Provider for SEN Schools

In 2008/09 Procurement/TCC instigated a pilot that enabled a single transport provider to deliver all school transport requirements, rather than the previous model of each school having multiple service providers. This has proved very successful in reducing cost and improving quality and has now been implemented at more than six schools. TCC / Procurement are now evaluating the benefits and risks of implementing the business model at all remaining schools.

Option Two: Implement "Call off" Framework Contracts

Under this option Service Providers would tender for an area or type of work rather than individual routes. This would potentially enable increased economies of scale and reduce costs due to its ability to support non-SEN transport services, e.g. transporting foster carers.

Option Three: Create in-house Service

This option would include purchasing a number of specialist vehicles required for the transport of SEN children, which could be leased to contractors delivering transport under contract to the Council. These vehicles would be direct replacements of a number of those vehicles lost to the County Council at the end of the Atkins Contract, which are not current available in sufficient numbers through the contractor base in Surrey.

All options represent potential for increased savings but also risk of delivery. The option analysis will therefore recommend either one option or indeed a blended approach of all three. The option analysis is expected to be complete in early 2010.

Equalities Implications

14. A full Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out on the SEN Strategy and consideration of its findings will be given during the proposed implementation where it affects SEN Home to School Transport.

Implications for the Council's Priorities or Community Strategy/Local Area Agreement Targets

15. The SEN Strategy is supportive of the Council's Priority "Protecting vulnerable children and young people", a priority in the Community Strategy to "improve learning, health and employment outcomes for children and young people, particularly the vulnerable and disadvantaged and is also supportive of targets in the Local Area Agreement about narrowing the performance gap for vulnerable children and young people.

Recommendations

16. Members are asked to note the progress being made against the agreed recommendations from the Task Group.

Next steps:

17. Officers will continue to develop projects and report to Members as required to demonstrate progress, allay fears and improve outcomes for children and young people.

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Sources/background papers: Draft SEN Strategy 2010-2014