

Parent/Carer Transport Forum – 8 November 2018

Q&A sessions, Comments and suggestions



SURREY

SESSION 1 – OVERVIEW OF THE TRANSPORT COORDINATION CENTRE (TCC)

Q:	What is happening with CCTV in vehicles and the parent portal?
A:	We are still looking at CCTV but there are significant issues with data protection and information governance, particularly given the large number of companies that we work with. The portal is in the forward workload programme of the council's IMT department, and it is hoped that development may happen next year, resources permitting.
Q:	How do you get feedback from schools?
A:	Every school in the county has an assigned contract manager from the Contracts & Control Team, and schools know to contact their contract manager with any issue. All feedback is recorded, both positive and negative, and forms part of the monthly discussions with each operator. Each school will have at least one formal visit per year, and more if there are specific issues etc.
Q:	Many parents do not know how to contact the TCC to raise an issue, or are nervous about doing so
A:	As stated in the presentation, it is important that issues or concerns are raised with the team as and when they occur, so that appropriate action can be taken to resolve the issues and prevent any problems escalating. In terms of any negative feedback, then this will be communicated to the operator anonymously where possible. We will continue to look at different ways of collecting feedback, including the possibility of a further survey next year.
Q:	Is the mandatory training on safeguarding and disability awareness available to parents to attend, as it would be useful to see what the training comprises?
A:	The training isn't available to parents as you have to pay for it. It may be possible for the course outline to be made available to parents – this will be looked into.
Q:	Transport this year has been a nightmare. We used to get information about changes, but we only heard very recently despite completing forms in August and the Contact Centre is not putting callers through to the right people – why is this?
A:	August and September are very busy months for the TCC as, historically, we get a significant number of late requests at this time. This year the numbers were greater than ever and, unfortunately, the situation was compounded by a new process of referral and eligibility assessment which did have teething issues. We apologise for the inconvenience caused. There is a new SEN admissions process being put in place and we are discussing with that team how we can get the information we need earlier and so avoid the late rush of referrals and applications. By doing this, we hope to get information about transport arrangements to parents earlier in the summer. The TCC also works very closely with the Contact Centre and the feedback will be discussed with them.
Q:	I am new to transport this academic year, and I found it very difficult to know who I should be speaking to and frustrating when people did not get back to me. Could there be a specific person to contact who is area based?
A:	We purposely do not allocate officers on an area basis, as this can cause issues when people are on leave etc. We would prefer to have one team and one number for people to call and for a caller to be helped by whoever answers the phone. We will look at how we can better inform parents of the relevant contact details.

Q:	You had previously told us that you were moving to rolling contracts of 3 years to try and get better continuity of operators – did this happen?
A:	Yes, generally we now have 3 year contracts in place. However, we cannot guarantee that there won't be any changes during the contract as these will be outside of our control. For example, additional passengers may require a change in the size of vehicle, or a passenger assistant, which the existing operator is not able to provide. If you want to know contract dates of any particular route, then please ask the TCC.
Q:	What are the criteria for the provision of a passenger assistant?
A:	As per the travel assistance policy, there is no automatic entitlement but there are a range of factors that will be taken into consideration, including age, distance travelled and the SEND of the children/young people.
Q:	Are passenger assistants only provided for under 18s?
A:	There is no automatic entitlement for a passenger assistant based on age, nor an upper age limit – any provision is dependent on the needs of each individual passenger, but age will be one of the factors considered.
Q:	Is there any stipulation on the age of vehicles used on council contracts?
A:	For private hire vehicles, it will depend on the specific criteria of the individual licensing authorities (the 11 district and borough councils) – these are mostly standard, but there are some differences. Minibuses are different in that they are licensed by the Traffic Commissioner and there is no age limit on for the vehicles. However, the Traffic Commissioner does have a strict maintenance regime which operators must comply with.
Q:	Does the council do their own checks at all schools?
A:	The Contracts & Control team is responsible for all enforcement/compliance issues. As it is a small team, the priority is to cover the schools that are in Surrey, but they do try and get to other out of county establishments if possible.
Q:	There needs to be clarity around the application process – how will families know how to apply?
A:	It is hoped that we can simplify the process for families in the future. As stated in the presentation, the SEND Travel Assistance Team is building a relationship with the new Admissions Team and, by working closely with them, we aim to improve the service for everyone. Once the process is finalised, there will be a comprehensive communications piece to inform families of what they need to do.
Q:	We know a passenger assistant who claims they are not paid enough when additional passengers are added to the route – who pays them and who do they go to if they have an issue about this?
A:	All passenger assistants are employed by and paid by the transport operators, so this is an issue between the employer and employee and the council is not able to intervene.

SESSIONS 2 – SEND TRAVEL ASSISTANCE TEAM

Q:	Does the SEND Travel Assistance Team have an SEN caseworker, as certain things need caseworker sign off? How does this work?
A:	There is not specifically a caseworker in the team, but many do have previous casework experience. How it works is that the team has to go back to the relevant SEN team for approval for any change that occurs an additional cost, as SEN is the budget holder. However, this is likely to change going forward as the role of SEN caseworkers and the SEND Travel Assistance Team are reviewed.

Q:	Who decides whether a child is at its “nearest qualifying school”?
A:	It is currently the SEN caseworker, but will be the new Admissions Team for key stage transfers for 2019/20.
Q:	A parent was told her child had an EHCP, then was advised by the caseworker that it was a mistake. Support is needed getting to college, but is not entitled as has no EHCP (and presumably cannot access Independent Travel Training) – where does the family go to get help?
A:	Help may be available outside the policy in individual exceptional cases. Speak to officers at the end of the event, and they will try to help.
Q:	Is there a post 16 contribution for transport?
A:	There is no charge currently, but this may be introduced again in future.

SESSION 3 – INDEPENDENT TRAVEL TRAINING

Q:	Can a family which is currently taking the Travel Allowance switch to Independent Travel Training?
A:	Yes
Q:	How long is the ITT programme?
A:	There is no standard length, the training is tailored individually to each child/young person – but it is expected that the programme will be between 6 and 12 weeks on average, but it could be longer if necessary.
Q:	How will referrals for ITT happen?
A:	The referrals will come from a variety of sources including families themselves, schools, and the SEND Travel Assistance Team, when they are having conversations with parents about eligibility and the options available.
Q:	Can you please clarify the email address for ITT, as it is different on some of the leaflets circulated?
A:	Apologies for any confusion, the contact details have changed since some of the earlier leaflets were produced. The correct email addresses are: For further information about the programme - shirleymoralee@hctgroup.org To make a referral - sendtravel.assistance@surreycc.gov.uk

SESSION 4 – SEND STRATEGY CONSULTATION

Q:	How are you planning to meet the demand for involvement of education psychologists?
A:	We will be bringing in additional external agencies to assist, and we are also enhancing the job descriptions of our education psychologists which will allow them to do the job they value and improve their job satisfaction.
Q:	You said in the presentation that Surrey is high spending on SEND compared to other authorities – is this spend per child or total spend?
A:	It is spend in all areas, including spend per child with SEND. The issue is that other authorities are spending less and have more positive feedback about their services; whilst Surrey is spending more but we are being told that our services are not adequate. The outcomes need to be better in Surrey and we are learning from best practice in other local authorities.

Q:	Why are good maintained specialist schools having their budgets cut if you are trying to increase capacity in the county? If there are not enough places in county schools, then you must be paying a lot of money for independent school places?
A:	Nationally, funding for SEND has not increased in line with demographic change, changing needs or increasing demand. Within the strategy, there is a proposal to review the commissioning, including the funding model for specialist provision.
Q:	In terms of the planned expansion programme, part of the success of some special schools is that they are small and therefore able to provide a particular caring and supportive environment – so there is concern that pressure to add places will fundamentally change the nature of these schools? Short-term fixes won't work, medium and long term plans are needed surely?
A:	The Council is not able to open new schools, any proposals for new schools must be done through the Free School application route (and two new Free special schools have been approved). However, in order to increase the number of places in addition, this must be done through existing schools. Any changes are done working with the school this impacts on and the local school community.
Q:	You talked about engagement and co-design going forward – but what parental involvement has there been up 'til now on developing the SEND strategy for consultation?
A:	We have worked closely with Family Voice, and we know we need to do more engagement and co-design with families in Surrey. The draft strategy has also been informed by the SEND Ofsted inspections, the recent POET survey and a range of other sources.
Q:	There is concern that the consultation questions are structured in such a way that does not allow meaningful feedback – how can we ensure our true feedback is captured?
A:	Please use the free text boxes to give your feedback – this will be given weight in the analysis of responses.

COMMENTS AND SUGGESTIONS

- A parent gave positive feedback about her own experience. Her child has had transport for 18 months and the service has been outstanding and she feels she has always had great support. The relationship with the taxi company, and their staff, is wonderful. This was reiterated by another parent.
- Parents were asked about future events. Parents would like the option of a day and evening session in future. There wasn't support for a drop-in style event, they like the format of presentations and the Q&As. Officers expressed concern that some of the information would become repetitive. There was a suggestion that the agenda should go out with the invite, so parents could see what was going to be discussed and decide on attendance.
- Parents liked the idea of a leaflet for parents outlining the key aspects of travel assistance and contracted transport.