

<b>CHILDREN AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>	AGENDA ITEM No. 6
<b>2 NOVEMBER 2022</b>	<b>PUBLIC REPORT</b>

Report of:	Jonathan Lewis, Service Director Education	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Councillor Lynne Ayres - Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, Skills and the University	
Contact Officer(s):	Fran Cox – Assistant Director Education Capital and Place Planning	Tel.

**TRANSPORT TRANSFORMATION**

RECOMMENDATIONS	
<b>FROM:</b> Jonathan Lewis	<b>Deadline date:</b> N/A
<p>It is recommended that the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee:</p> <p>1. Review and approve the proposed Transport Transformation Strategy</p>	

**1. ORIGIN OF REPORT**

1.1 This report is submitted to the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee following a request from the Committee at the group representatives meeting.

**2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT**

2.1 The purpose of this report is to obtain the views and approval of the Committee on the Transport Transformation Strategy.

2.2 This report is for the Children and Education Scrutiny Committee to consider under its Terms of Reference Part 3, Section 4 - Overview and Scrutiny Functions, paragraph No. 2.1 Functions determined by Council :

1. Children's Services including
  - a) Social Care of Children;
  - b) Safeguarding

2. Education

2.3 This report links to –

- Corporate priority:
  - Improve educational attainment and skills
  - To drive growth, regeneration and economic development
- Children in Care Pledge: Support children in care to have a good education.

### 3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	<b>NO</b>	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	<b>NA</b>
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### 4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

#### 4.1 Statutory Responsibilities

Parents and carers have a duty under the Education Act 1996 to ensure that their children attend school and to make the necessary travel arrangements, including accompanying them where appropriate on their journey to and from school. Parents and carers are also responsible for their children until they arrive at school and after they leave at the end of the school day.

The Education Act 1996 places a duty on local authorities to make such travel arrangements they consider necessary to facilitate the attendance at school for 'eligible children'. Eligible children are categorised as;

- those who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school as a result of mobility issues associated with their Special Education Need and/or Disability (SEND)
- those living outside of statutory walking distance beyond 2 miles if below the age of 8 or beyond 3 miles if aged between 8 and 16)
- some children in receipt of free school meals
- children of parents in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credits
- some post-16 students
- children who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to their nearest suitable school because of the nature of the route is deemed to be 'unavailable' (unsafe) to walk

#### 4.2 Discretionary Powers

Local authorities also have discretionary powers to go beyond their statutory duties and to provide transport for children who are not entitled to free transport. In doing so, they must consult with parents and must act reasonably when determining their travel policy.

#### 4.3 Current Picture

There are currently 2 separate transport functions in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough, governing and providing services for their own local authority area. Both teams are line managed by the same Head of Service and sit in the shared People Directorate.

Both teams are operating in very challenging circumstances and whilst there is some joint work between the two teams, there is increasingly a need for a joined- up approach given the shared statutory duty and the increasing demand for efficiency.

Both teams oversee and provide the **eligibility, procurement** and **delivery** of transport services across the policy areas covered within the People Directorate. This is a large span of service delivery and not one that is replicated in many local authorities, especially those of the size of Cambridgeshire.

The Transport Teams in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough provide transport for the following policy areas:

- Home to School Mainstream Transport (including post 16 and Fair Access Protocol placements)
- Home to School SEND Transport (including post 16)
- Children's Social Care
- Adults' Social Care

Transport delivery across both LAs also contributes to the Climate and Environment Strategy and the Social Value Policy.

#### 4.4 Key Issues

This report seeks to propose to committee the adoption of a Transport Transformation Strategy in order to lead and guide the work needed to be undertaken over the next two years in Peterborough to ensure outstanding provision of transportation services.

The strategy document, included in appendix A has been produced in collaboration with those involved in the delivery and interface with transport services in both councils.

The document aims to provide a factual 'scene setting' of the current data. It then outlines a number of areas of pressure that are being experienced, not only by Cambridgeshire and Peterborough but nationally. The strategy then proposes a number of key strands to be focused on in the transformation of the transport delivery in the current climate we face. The key areas of pressure are outlined below.

##### 4.4.1 Areas of Pressure

###### Delivery

The current delivery capacity within both teams is not sufficient and will need to be restructured with consideration of additional capacity and greater joined up between the two teams to maximise efficiency. In PCC there are currently 7 members of staff responsible for managing the school transport services, managing approximately 2,000 pupils, 233 vehicles of a value of £5m.

Transport officers are responsible for the eligibility assessment, procurement and delivery of transport for children and young people. This is not a model which is widely used by local authorities. It is more commonplace to separate roles and responsibilities to allow for the concentration of expertise and effort in the different, unique aspects of transport delivery.

It is intended to look at the team structure and the systems and processes that support them to ensure they are better equipped with more capacity to deliver an outstanding level of service provision for our children and their families.

###### Eligibility

Policies across the scope of delivery mandate need to be reviewed in light of the current context. Policies will be reviewed alongside each other and in consultation with key stakeholders to ensure that they are continuing to provide a clear and appropriate framework to determine eligibility.

How we communicate our policies to parents when choosing a mainstream school will be a key focus of the review. As well as ensuring that we work with special schools, the SEND services and Pinpoint to ensure parents and carers of children and young people with SEND are fully aware of the eligibility criteria and decision-making processes around transport. It is also vital that all of the different options for transport are made clear to both professionals and parents and carers.

The current decision-making systems around eligibility for high-cost transport arrangements are increasingly insufficient to govern financial growth. Decisions should not be made by the transport teams in isolation of good, child focused discussion with lead professionals around levels of need and the best value outcome for the child or young person.

Good practice is taking place within children's social care in relation to multi-agency decision making and this type of joint conversation needs to be embedded into all policy areas across both authorities.

## Cost

Increasing costs is a significant area of pressure for Peterborough and key activity within the action plan will need to address areas identified where savings and cost reduction can be achieved. Rises in costs are in part due to inflationary pressures and increased costs of fuel. They are also due to the significant growth in both the mainstream pupil population and the SEND growth.

Whilst the authority must be clear about its statutory duty to provide transport to those who are eligible, the current increased spending forecast is increasingly unmanageable financially for the authority. In speaking with other authorities, this pressure is felt across the country.

This is very much not about whether the authority delivers on its statutory duty, rather about how it achieves better value for money.

A review of solo routes, and prioritization of all routes must be a priority of the review in order to achieve better value for money. Activities such as volunteer drivers, independent travel training and other emerging innovative strategies must be prioritized and built into policy reviews in order to manage this significant area of pressure.

## Growth

The growth in the numbers of pupils with SEND accessing transport to their school needs to be managed and addressed through various mechanisms. Children with SEND are often transported alone and for longer distances than we would like to access a school. SEN transport costs have increased more than 12%, compared to an 8% growth in their numbers, and less than 8% rise in mainstream transport costs during that time. The average cost of school transport is £2,460 per pupil per year. However, transport for pupils with special needs is higher at almost £4,000 per pupil pa.

It must be stressed that providing high quality transportation to an educational establishment remains an utmost priority for all children with SEND who are eligible. We are keen to work closely with families and special schools to explore how this can be provided differently in a more resilient way to prevent the impact of the current market – which is what we are experiencing at the moment.

## Procurement

There is now a joint Dynamic Purchasing System in place which is good progress. A review now needs to be undertaken with both the Procurement Services as well as the Commercial Team to determine the correct systems for managing the procurement of transport on a daily basis.

We would like to explore different options for the delivery of certain transport functions where there is a high volume of routes and passengers. The market is changing and responding the national climate on a daily basis and there needs to be scope within the transformation plan to review all market options to ascertain best value. There is council obligation to move to greater use of electric vehicles and the infrastructure that's needed to support this will mean that procurement of transport solutions will need to be consistently reviewed in the years to come.

## **5. CONSULTATION**

5.1 None at this stage

## **6. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT**

6.1 It is clear that the above activity proposed as part of the strategy needs to deliver measurable impact for all service users and the council. First and foremost, the team that we rely on to provide outstanding delivery of services need expanded capacity and the right systems in order to achieve the priorities being outlined in the strategy.

A full and thorough review of the policy suite needs to lead to reduction in route length, increased access to local educational provision and improved efficiency in delivery for families. May of the strands of work will need to generate savings in the form of a reduction in route cost per pupil. This will be achieved through a variety of mechanisms to be scoped and determined within the action plan underpinning the strategy.

As a key budget and statutory duty for the council there is also an intention to deliver improved sustainability in delivery as part of the modernisation of the service. This alongside improved eligibility and decision-making governance will also provide decreased financial risk profile

## **7. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION**

- 7.1 It is a statutory requirement that local authorities provide home to school transport for eligible children and young people. It is a council imperative that we look to do this more efficiently in order to provide a more reliant model for our communities.

## **8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 8.1 It has been considered as to the value and appropriateness of considering Cambridgeshire and Peterborough alongside each other or separately when considering passenger transport.

The conclusion of both local authorities is that consideration of Peterborough and Cambridgeshire together provides maximised efficiencies given the high level of cross over between the two locations and the identical pressing issues both face.

## **9. IMPLICATIONS**

### **Financial Implications**

- 9.1 It is envisaged that the above activity will provide savings to the council once implemented. An invest to save transformation business case has been submitted to the Corporate Leadership team in order to seek specialist input to realise route and delivery efficiency which will generate savings. It must be noted however that whilst areas of saving and efficiency are possible, this is within a context of rising demand and inflation.

### **Legal Implications**

- 9.2 The Council has statutory duties relating to the provision of transport assistance. The legal parameters relating to home to school/college transport for children and young people of statutory school age are set out in Sections 508, 509 and schedule 35B of the 1996 Education Act as amended by the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

Sections 509(1) and (2) place a duty upon local authorities to provide free transport where necessary to facilitate the attendance of children and students at schools and institutions both within and outside of the further and higher education sectors.

### **Equalities Implications**

- 9.3 The following bullet points set out details of significant implications identified by officers:
- Prevention of rural isolation from education provision.
  - Education transport is provided to all who are entitled under the Education Act 1996 as amended by the Education and Inspections Act 2006

### **Rural Implications**

- 9.4 Prevention of rural isolation from education provision.

## **Carbon Impact Assessment**

9.5 Strategy implementation will have minimal impact on the council's carbon emissions. May be some positive impact through route optimisation.

## **10. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

10.1 None.

## **11. APPENDICES**

11.1 Appendix A - Transport Transformation Strategy