

WLA Travel Assistance Policy for young people Consultation - Public Meeting on 22 January 2013

PRESENT:

Councillor Mary Arnold – Lead Member for Children and Families
 Sara Williams – Assistant Director, Early Help and Education
 Carmen Coffey – Head of Pupil and Parent Services
 Sharon Bourla – Brent Parent Partnership Service
 Duncan Matthews – Independent Travel Programme Manager
 Georgina Hendriksen – SEN Officer, Special Educational Needs Assessment Service (Minutes)

Parent - child attends Woodfield School.

MA & SW	<p>Welcome and introductions</p> <p>SW explained that the meeting was part of a wider consultation process and that the consultation closes on 10 February. CC suggested that current service users could be sent a text message reminding them of the closing date.</p>
SW & CC	<p>Opening comments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is no automatic entitlement to school transport. • Resources are limited and budget pressures are enormous. There is a high level of need across all of our services. • Other aspect – want to do what’s best for children and young people themselves. Sensitive issue. Can be challenging for families. Not just about saving money, but doing what’s in the child’s long-term best interests. • Safety underpins all of our policies, as does the need to be fair and transparent. • Confirmed that this meeting was not about whether the current transport service was a good or bad service, but about the policy of allocating transport.
	<p>Q and A</p> <p>Parent: What proportion of Brent children with statements of SEN are currently provided with school transport?</p> <p>CC: About 703 children, which is almost half.</p> <p>Parent: I presume that all children attending the Village receive transport?</p> <p>CC: I would think so, yes, and this is largely to do with mobility issues. Children attending the Village would not be able to travel independently on public transport.</p>

	<p>Parent: If a parent receives mobility allowance, is this taken into account when deciding eligibility for transport?</p> <p>CC: In other authorities it would be, for example if a parent had a mobility vehicle, there would be an expectation that this could be used to transport the child to school. However, the WLA's common policy we are currently consulting on does not take this into account.</p> <p>Parent: Do most children with school transport meet the distance requirements, and what are these?</p> <p>CC: Most, yes. The criteria is 2 miles for children aged 8 and under, and 3 miles for children aged 8 to 16, where they attend their nearest suitable school. We use discretion where the distance criteria are not met, based on individual circumstances, eg if parents have children in different schools that are far apart from each other.</p> <p>Parent: Is there anything in the new policy that mentions this exact scenario?</p> <p>CC: Not in the policy itself, but it is picked up on the application form. Additional information is requested in order that the right decision can be made at the 1st point of contact.</p> <p>Parent: Is there a similar level of discretion where another child in the family without special needs is attending a secondary school?</p> <p>CC: If there is a reasonable expectation that the secondary age child can make his/her own way to school, then it would be reasonable to assume that the parent/s can take the younger child/ren to school.</p> <p>Parent: Will the annual review of entitlement to school transport be done in conjunction with the annual review of a child's statement?</p> <p>CC: No, as annual reviews of statements are held at different times of the year, depending on when the statement was issued. Transport will not be based on this.</p> <p>We want to see other ways we can assist with school travel, not just the school bus, eg Oyster card (either for the parent and child, or just the child), or a mileage allowance.</p>
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Parent:

Have you tried that before?

CC:

Not in a formal way. It is set out on page 9 of the new policy.

The other issue is the traffic in Brent and for some children the journey to school can be very long and challenging. There could be a way to make their journey better, using alternatives to the school bus.

Parent:

I agree that is a good idea. What about trialling it? The school bus is not good for the child long term. It can also be difficult to arrange a suitable escort, which would not be an issue if the parent was transporting/accompanying them.

CC:

It is also difficult when the child is stood at the door ready to leave, but the bus is delayed due to problems with earlier pick-ups. If parents received a mileage allowance they could leave the house when they are ready and take a more direct route. Some children on the bus travel for a total of 3 hours every day, which is far from ideal.

Independent Travel Training has been very successful with pupils at Woodfield School, particularly when they transfer to Alperton in year 10. There was an example recently where the parent was very anxious at first, but their child is now able to do the journey himself.

SW:

For many children at Woodfield, it is a thrill for them to learn to travel independently.

Parent:

Children should be able to travel independently by the age of 18.

I do have one issue, and that is when children move into another borough and transport suddenly stops. There needs to be a transition arrangement.

CC:

With the set up of the WLA, we now know people in our neighbouring boroughs. I will pick this up at the next meeting. There could be a different decision, eg the child might have moved nearer to the school, but I agree that transition needs to be simpler.

SB:

If buying a property, parents know the completion date and can inform the transport department in advance, but if renting, moves can happen without much notice at all, or even be overnight.

Parent:

Location-wise, Woodfield and the Village are not accessible by public transport. There needs to be consideration of these issues in the Council's long-term planning of public transport. This needs to be seen as a serious issue, as there are children

	<p>travelling from all over the borough to attend these special schools. There is no public bus route to Woodfield.</p> <p>SW/CC: I agree, but unfortunately we cannot choose where these schools are located and have to do the best with what we have. This can of course be taken into account when looking at building new schools. There will also be a move to a more inclusive approach in mainstream schools in the future.</p> <p>CC: It should be noted as well that if transport eligibility is removed, parents will be given sufficient notice for them to be able to make alternative arrangements.</p> <p>The appendix to the report will contain people’s comments from the consultation. The closing date is 10 February and the next step will be for the executive to consider the draft policy it on 23 April. If agreed, it will then become Council policy and will be implemented without delay.</p>
	<p>Close</p>