

	<b>Cabinet</b> 17 June 2024
	<b>Report from the Corporate Director  of Partnerships, Housing and  Resident Services</b>
	<b>Lead Member(s) – Cabinet Member  for Environment &amp; Enforcement  (Councillor Krupa Sheth)</b>  <b>Cabinet Member for Children,  Young People and Schools  (Councillor Gwen Grahl)</b>
<b>Travel Assistance Policy – update on formal consultation</b>	

<b>Wards Affected:</b>	All
<b>Key or Non-Key Decision:</b>	Key
<b>Open or Part/Fully Exempt:</b> <small>(If exempt, please highlight relevant paragraph of Part 1, Schedule 12A of 1972 Local Government Act)</small>	Open
<b>List of Appendices:</b>	Three Appendix 1: Travel Assistance Policy Appendix 2: Consultation Feedback Summary (survey) Appendix 2.1 Consultation Feedback Summary (coding)
<b>Background Papers:</b>	None
<b>Contact Officer(s):</b> <small>(Name, Title, Contact Details)</small>	Pauline Jones, Head of Strategic Support <a href="mailto:Pauline.Jones@brent.gov.uk">Pauline.Jones@brent.gov.uk</a>

## 1.0 Executive Summary

1.1 This report provides a progress update on the development of the new Travel Assistance Policy (as detailed in Appendix 1 of the report). It includes a summary of the responses received to the recent public consultation carried out and seeks Cabinet approval, prior to final publication.

## 2.0 Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 That Cabinet note the consultation response and subsequent changes to the drafted policy.
- 2.2 That Cabinet provides any comments or feedback on the updated policy.
- 2.3 That Cabinet approves the Travel Assistance Policy for final publication.

### **3.0 Detail**

#### **3.1 Cabinet Member Foreword**

- 3.1.1 Home to school travel assistance exists to support children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or disabilities who may find it difficult to travel to school or college without the help of assistance from the local authority. The Council's provision of travel assistance is an essential part of enabling this ongoing access to education.
- 3.1.2 The Travel Assistance Policy aligns especially with the following Borough Plan priorities:
  - A Cleaner, Greener Future
  - The Best Start in Life
  - A Healthier Brent
- 3.1.3 The Travel Assistance Policy forms part of Brent's Long Term Transport Strategy and Healthy Streets programme. The policy encourages more active travel, including walking and cycling, in order to support children and young people to have healthy lifestyles.
- 3.1.4 The policy also works to make sure that access to education is fair and equal for children and young people with SEND and continues to support opportunities for post-16 skills development for young people with SEND.

#### **3.2 Background**

- 3.2.1 In June 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) released new guidance in respect of travel to school for children of compulsory school age. This triggered a review of Brent Council's current Travel Assistance policy, which dates back to 2013. The Council has also taken into account the DfE's January 2019 statutory guidance for young people in post-16 education.
- 3.2.2 In response to this new guidance, the Council drafted a new Travel Assistance policy. The draft policy was submitted to senior management and Lead Members prior to approval being given to launch a public consultation in February 2024.
- 3.2.3 The public consultation took place over a 6-week period, from 4<sup>th</sup> March until 14<sup>th</sup> April 2024 and a summary of the feedback from the consultation can be found in Appendix 2. Activities carried out as part of this consultation to ensure all key stakeholders were offered an opportunity to provide feedback were:

- Social media promotion of the proposed strategy and routes to provide feedback.
- An online feedback survey where the draft policy was shared.
- Face-to-face engagement with over 40 parents/carers via four online drop-in sessions and four in-person drop-in sessions.
- Focus groups with key external partners.
- Internal promotion of the consultation through Viva Engage and internal screens.
- Promotion of the consultation via online flyers, letters/emails and SMS sent to all parents/carers.

3.2.4 The Policy has been attached as Appendix 1 along with a summary of the responses received to the recent public consultation carried out (Appendix 2) with final approval now being sought for publication.

#### **4.0 Current Service Feedback**

4.1 The below sections summarise feedback from the consultation drop-in sessions and online survey.

##### **4.2 Positive feedback**

4.2.1 Many parents only had positive things to say about the Brent Transport service. In particular, examples of good management and effective communication about changes to the service were highlighted. Several parents communicated that text messages or SMS were well-received for this objective.

4.2.2 Also central to many parents' positive experiences of Travel Assistance was a strong rapport and sense of trust between themselves and the staff on motorised transport, especially those who engage well with the children and young people on the service (drivers and escorts).

4.2.3 Another positive theme of note was that the Travel Assistance service was key for several families in enabling different members of the family to access education, employment and/or training.

##### **4.3 Negative feedback**

4.3.1 On the other hand, several areas for improvement were also highlighted.

4.3.2 Many parents feel that journey times on motorised transport are too long, leaving children and young people overstimulated by the time they arrive at school or home.

4.3.3 Another key theme was that changes or disruptions to the service have been poorly communicated to parents. Parents report that they are frequently not made aware of delays in transporting their child(ren), changes to staff and escorts, and changes to pick-up and drop-off times.

- 4.3.4 Concerns were also raised around the quality of training that staff who provide Travel Assistance receive. Parents fed back that they would be keen to have details of the training undertaken by the staff.
- 4.3.5 Some parents are dissatisfied by Brent's mileage allowance. The reasoning given for this was that the allowance does not account for time to get onto transport, time spent in traffic, or petrol costs.
- 4.3.6 A final area of review was for travel assistance arrangements to be more flexible. Several families felt that combined support offers would be a welcome change, especially in facilitating children and young people's access to extra-curricular activities after school. For example, one family said they would like motorised transport in the mornings for home-to-school transport but would like to arrange their own transport for school-to-home transport with the support of a Personal Travel Budgets.

## **5.0 Consultation response and amendments made to the policy.**

### **5.1 Applications and Appeals**

- 5.1.1 Feedback on the revised application and appeals processes largely centred on wanting more clarity around how decisions are made and to whom the new policy applies.
- 5.1.2 Parents found the idea of an impartial panel to be a good idea, and the clearer and shorter timeframes for decisions to be helpful.

## **6.0 Feedback on Additional Sections of the Revised Policy which have been amended.**

### Context section

- 6.1 Most parents consulted felt that this section was well-written. Their main request was for the wording of the final paragraph to be reviewed in order to emphasise that the Council acknowledges that independence might not be possible for many children and young people. This has been actioned.

### Part 3: Young Persons of Sixth Form Age

- 6.2 Parents felt that Part 3 of the proposed policy did not consider broader reasoning why a young person might wish to attend a school/college outside of the borough. Packages of support and how an educational setting might otherwise meet a young person's needs were highlighted as examples of such reasoning.

### Behaviour and Conduct section

- 6.3 Parents' feedback was that the policy should be clearer about the kinds of behaviour to which it refers. There was a tension between wording that meets the needs of children who have been subjected to challenging behaviour, and

wording that meets the needs of children who have enacted challenging behaviour.

- 6.4 There were also concerns raised about the application of this section of the policy to children and young people with complex needs but no EHCP.
- 6.5 Other parents were keen to see clear procedures for dealing with bullying, harassment, and abuse on motorised transport.

## **7.0 Independent Travel Training**

- 7.1 Almost all consultation attendees agreed there was a strong appetite for an Independent Travel Training programme (ITT), especially in conjunction with developing better access to community spaces for young people with SEND. This is also reflected in the survey feedback, with 80% of respondents fully or somewhat agreeing with the Council's approach to promote independence through the development of an Independent Travel Training Programme.
- 7.2 The main caveat to positive sentiments around ITT was anxiety around expectations of independence for all children and young people. Parents were concerned that ITT would not be suitable for all children and young people, and assurance was provided that we acknowledged that all children would not be in a position to partake in the training programme.
- 7.3 There was a significant amount of feedback on the content parents wanted to see in the programme, and how this information might be best delivered to young people. Many parents and carers were keen to be involved in the ITT programme to continue supporting their children's learning after the training's end.
- 7.4 Consultation sessions were undertaken with young people at Woodfield School and The Village School. The young people were enthusiastic about independent travel. They were keen to learn how to overcome disruptions or unexpected events during journeys.
- 7.5 As part of the consultation process, young people said that they want to progress from school to college and then from college to university. Parents have also said that 'being healthy' is an important aspect of young people's futures. Initiatives such as Independent Travel Training could be implemented to support the transition from school to college and to support the commitment Brent Council has made in the SEND strategy to provide travel training.
- 7.6 There are several health benefits of walking; enabling a child to walk to and from school will affect a sustainable and significant increase in physical activity. Some of the benefits of this include physical development such as strengthening muscles and bones, maintenance of a healthy weight and improved cardiovascular health.
- 7.7 The development of the Independent Travel Training programme sets out to further develop independence skills, improve the confidence and self-esteem

of our young people, and ultimately reduce the strain on parents/carers and support services by equipping young people with the skills they need for adulthood. These skills also crucially include how to make journeys safely, taking into account risk and danger awareness, and also encourage healthier choices such as walking and cycling as opposed to single-occupancy car journeys. Access and movement throughout the borough are supported by Boroughwide and Nuisance Vehicles Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs). PSPOs aim to mitigate nuisance and dangerous behaviours, such as racing, causing obstructions, littering, and aggression.

- 7.8 Travel assistance is one part of a package of support offered to children and young people with SEND in the borough through the Local Offer. The Local Offer provides information, support and advice on a number of topics including:
- Finding the right school or college.
  - SEND support in mainstream education.
  - Local health services, including occupational therapy and support with mental health and emotional wellbeing.
  - Social care services for children and young people with SEND and support for parents and carers.
  - Financial support for children with SEND and their families.
  - Activities, clubs and sports for children and young people with SEND.
  - Short breaks and respite for families.
- 7.9 Workshops are taking place to determine the next steps for ITT, including liaison with Procurement, the development of a business case, and securing of funding from Public Health grants.

## **8.0 Transport for London (TfL) Support**

- 8.1 Brent Council and Transport for London's Local Communities and Partnerships Team have been in contact to discuss how TfL might be able to support the provision of travel assistance in the borough. However, there are many existing TfL accessibility arrangements upon which the Council might build. These include, but are not limited to:
- Travel Mentoring service, where travel mentors offer practice journeys and guidance for planning and making journeys.
  - Travel Support Cards, which help people to communicate any assistance or information requirements they have to staff.
  - Mobility Aid Recognition Scheme, which helps passengers to check if their mobility aid is suitable to travel on buses.
  - Freedom Passes and concessionary travel.
  - Planning a step-free route.
  - Staff training on providing assistance to passengers, including guiding visually impaired customers by the arm and helping wheelchair users get on and off trains.
  - Provision of accessible resources including maps and guides.
  - Taxicard, which is a subsidised scheme for people using taxis and minicabs.
  - Community Transport and Dial-a-Ride, which can provide door-to-door transport for people who cannot use mainstream public transport.

- National Passenger Assist service, which allows passengers to request an assistance booking in advance.

8.2 In addition to the above, there are a number of funding schemes available that the Council may wish to make use of, including 'Liveable Neighbourhoods,' 'Cycle training funding,' and 'Bus Priority.'

## **9.0 Proposed Key Changes to the Policy and Delivery Model**

9.1 Travel Assistance is currently referred to in Brent as "transport". The existing School Transport Policy developed with partner boroughs in the West London Alliance already emphasises the importance of inclusion and independence in Travel Assistance programmes.

9.2 Identifying travel support needs, and the management of parent expectations should begin at the point of initial assessment and in the development and then re-assessment of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). The identification of alternative travel support, and the benefits of travel training should be considered for adult passengers by the Independent Travel Training programme as well as SEN Support Team.

9.3 The proposed changes and development of the new Policy has been carried out in collaboration with colleagues in Children and Young People and Neighbourhoods and Regeneration. The proposed Policy has also been discussed at Children and Young People's Operational Children's Services Leadership Team on several occasions and updates have been implemented accordingly.

9.4 As well as the formal consultation process, officers have attended several parent-carer forums. Discussions about the proposed policy have been constructive and helpful feedback has been received which has fed into the draft policy. The policy aims overall to support the offering of a wider range of travel assistance options, including Independent Travel Training (with a travel pass on completion) and Personal Travel Budgets, which recognise that children using the service have differing levels of need and that families' arrangements may require differing levels of flexibility.

## **10.0 How the policy affects the whole family.**

10.1 The London Borough of Brent Travel Assistance Policy for 0-25 in Education sets out to support eligible children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to attend educational settings, reduce the proportion of children and young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET), and promote independence in order to better prepare young people to enter adulthood feeling confident and engaged in their futures.

10.2 The transport arrangements provided by the Council support families to ensure their children can attend school/college. This provision helps to ensure that, among others, families that are structurally disadvantaged are best supported to achieve punctual school attendance:

- Families with multiple children, each with individual school arrangements.
- Families where parents/carers have commitments to work, education or training.
- Families where parents/carers are disabled or have complex needs.
- Families from low-income households.
- Families where parents/carers are young people themselves.

## **11.0 Stakeholder and ward member consultation and engagement**

11.1 These details have been set out above.

## **12.0 Financial Considerations**

12.1 The Brent Transport Service budget for 2024/25 is £13.2m.

12.2 A programme of works which align with the changes set out in the proposed policy are anticipated to result in a reduction of costs to support the current budget pressures in the department. Any savings will be incorporated into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy as part of the budget setting process.

## **13.0 Legal Considerations**

13.1 Under section 508B of the Education Act 1996 local authorities have a duty to ensure that suitable travel arrangements are made, where necessary, to facilitate attendance at school for eligible children. Schedule 35B of the Act defines eligible children – those categories of children of compulsory school age (5-16) in an authority’s area for whom free travel arrangements will be required. These include children living more than the statutory walking distance from the nearest suitable school and children who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school (accompanied as necessary) due to SEN or disability or mobility problems or due to the nature of the route to school. There is a power to make travel arrangements for other children under section 508C of the Act. The authority is required to have regard to the statutory guidance in relation to the discharge of its functions under sections 508B and 508C.

13.2 The statutory responsibility for transport for 16–19-year-olds (who have started a course before their 19th birthday) rests with local authorities. Local authorities have a duty to prepare and publish an annual transport policy statement specifying the arrangements for the provision of transport, or otherwise that the authority considers necessary, to make to facilitate the attendance of all persons of sixth form age receiving education or training.

13.3 The sixth form age duty applies to young people of sixth form age and young people with EHCPs up to age 25 where they are continuing a course started before their 19th birthday. The Post-16 transport and travel support to education and training statutory guidance for local authorities published in January 2019 states that a transport policy statement must be published by the local authority by 31st May each year and must be clearly dated showing the academic year to which it applies.



## **14.0 Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Considerations**

- 14.1 The Council must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate discrimination, harassment, and victimisation.
  - Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
  - Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it, pursuant to s149 Equality Act 2010. This is known as the Public Sector Equality Duty.
- 14.2 The Public Sector Equality Duty covers the following nine protected characteristics: age, disability, marriage and civil partnership, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, and sexual orientation.
- 14.3 The purpose of the duty is to enquire into whether a proposed decision disproportionately affects people with a protected characteristic. In other words, the indirect discriminatory effects of a proposed decision. Due regard is the regard that is appropriate in all the circumstances.
- 14.4 The proposals in this report have been subject to screening. There are no proposed strategic delivery changes to the approach to delivering special needs transport that would cause any adverse equalities impact. A further equalities impact assessment will however be undertaken as part of a subsequent report seeking authorisation to formally implement any changes to the delivery model and/or policy.

## **15.0 Climate Change and environmental Considerations**

- 15.1 Independent and active travel not only has positive benefits to the physical and mental wellbeing of service users, it also has a positive impact on the environment as it reduces the number of vehicles completing overlapping trips. A shift towards active travel would ensure that the policy changes more closely align with the council's existing environmental sustainability objectives and key strategy documents such as the Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy, Air Quality Action Plan, Long Term Transport Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Active Travel Implementation Plan.
- 15.2 Enabling service users to travel on public transport will mean fewer in-house buses will need to be bought, operated, and maintained. At present these buses are diesel, and although electric alternatives are being explored it is unlikely that affordable options will be available at scale within the next few years. It should also be noted that electric buses will still have a whole-life carbon cost owing to the production process, but this would be considerably lower than the emissions caused from the existing level of diesel journeys, and electric buses would have a significant positive impact on improving air quality in the borough.

15.3 Delivery of the updated policy could also reduce the number of point-to-point trips completed by contract carriers. The exact environmental impact of these journeys is hard to calculate owing to the multitude of different vehicles being used. We do know in general terms however that per passenger these routes are likely to have a higher carbon output than in-house buses owing to the smaller number of service users per vehicle. There may also be a long distance between the contractor's origination point and the pick-up and drop-off locations.

## **16.0 Human Resources/Property Considerations (if appropriate)**

16.1 This report has no impact on staffing or property.

## **17.0 Communication Strategy Considerations**

17.1 A communication plan has been developed, which incorporates a clear communication strategy and demonstrates how we plan to engage those who will be affected by the new Policy.

17.2 The plan will utilise channels such as the Head Teachers' bulletin to communicate the upcoming changes with schools.

17.3 Workshops will also be held with frontline staff involved in the coordination of travel assistance, such as social workers, healthcare professionals, and customer services officers, to inform them of the changes to the policy. This will especially centre on the ways in which travel assistance is offered to children and young people.

17.4 All service users will be informed of the upcoming changes and provided with details on how they will be affected. Communication assets will include a summary report on the outcomes of the consultation period, an FAQs document, and updated information on the Local Offer website.

17.5 The messaging throughout will be clear and concise with a focus on promoting independence and a healthy active lifestyle.

### **Report sign off:**

**Peter Gadsdon**

Corporate Director – Partnerships, Housing and Resident Services