



# Northumberland

## County Council

### **CABINET**

**17<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2023**

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#### **School Transport Review Outcome Options**

**Report of:** Audrey Kingham - Service Director Education & Interim DCS.

**Cabinet Member:** Guy Renner Thompson – Portfolio holder for Children’s Services.

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#### **Purpose of Report**

At SLT on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022 the full range of recommendations resulting from the system wide review of home to school transport were shared.

In response to this, SLT requested a further paper to provide a summary with greater detail on the range of options considered during the review on where the transport service best sits within Northumberland County Council.

This report provides the options as requested for evaluation and alongside this request’s approval for the specific initiative to establish NCC delivered Independent Travel Training provision using start-up funding from the Council Transformation Fund.

#### **Recommendations**

Cabinet is recommended:

1. To consider the range of options put forward for transport models and where the transport services best sit within Northumberland County Council, providing feedback on the options so that preferred option can be considered within the formulation of the new corporate structure.
2. To approve the proposal put forward as part of the wider home to school transport review to establish NCC delivered Independent Travel Training provision within Children’s Services to deliver ITT directly to transport users with SEND, supporting members of this user group toward independent travel, and working with schools and providers to grow ITT provision within their settings. It is proposed that a case will be put forward for Council Transformation Fund to support the start-up period of this function in year 1 and 2 of circa £50,000 per year but that in year 3 the savings yielded will more than cover the ongoing staff costs. It is proposed that this will commence with two roles but will have capacity for growth.

## Links to Corporate Plan

The review of Home to School Transport is in strong accordance with the **Living & Learning, Enjoying & Connecting** and **How** priorities of NCC Corporate Plan 2021-24.

## Key Issues

1. Home to School Transport within Northumberland County Council has and continues to experience a growing range of challenges, including the budgets for transport being significantly underestimated. These ongoing challenges resulted in the request for a system wide review of the governance of school transport, including where the service best sits within the Council. A Terms of Reference (Appendix 01) was agreed between Children's Services and Local Services prior to the review commencing, this setting the context and focus of the review. At SLT on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2022 the full range of recommendations resulting from the system wide review of home to school transport were shared. In response to this, SLT requested a further paper to provide greater detail on the range of options considered on where the home to school transport service best sits within Northumberland County Council. These options can be found in the background section of this report.
2. Independent travel training was previously delivered by Children's Services some time ago but was ceased during restructure under a previous administration. Independent travel training is of enormous benefit to young people with SEND attempting to develop independence and supports a reduction in the quantity and complexity of SEND transport as well as contributing to a reduction in those moving on to need support from the Adult Social Care system as they become young adults. Given the long and often single occupant travel pattern of SEND pupils it does not take the realisation of many independent travellers to financially justify an independent travel trainer role and to begin to realise significant savings. For the reasons set out above, commencing the implementation of this initiative as identified in the home to school transport review is considered a priority and the request made for approval to commence this work which will include seeking start-up funding from the Council Transformation Fund as part of a spend to save investment.

The complete home to school transport review report is attached (appendix 02).

## Background

The range of options put forward for transport models and where the transport services best fit are set out below including the most significant advantages and disadvantages associated with each model:

**Option 1: Moving all transport for purposes of education to School Organisation & Resources within Children's Services, transport for purposes other than education remaining within Local Services.**

This option proposes that all transport for purposes of education would move to Children's Services (SEND Home to School transport, Mainstream Home to School Transport, Post 16 Education transport and Children's Social Care Transport).

Local Services would retain all transport for purposes other than education (Public Transport, Adult Care Transport, Demand Responsive Transport, Dial a Ride and Community Transport).

It is proposed that two operational level sub-teams would be created from the existing team of transport network officers, each team focusing upon Children’s Services or Local Services activity, with each sub-team resourced proportionately to demand in each area.

It is proposed that transport management would move to school admissions, joining up customer facing admissions with transport applications. Transport contracts and compliance would sit within the education business management team alongside other education finance, contracting and procurement processes. Transport management resource would be released proportionally for a number of hours/days per week to oversee the public transport sub-team in Local Services, maintaining the essential interdependencies between school transport and public transport.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Potential for home to school transport to be used to directly contribute to achieving Children’s Services priorities of reducing inequality and putting children and families at the centre of decisions which will be less transactional via maximum service integration of education and education transport.	Management of 2 discrete transport network officer sub-teams must ensure administrative duplication does not occur for example in procurement and contract management.
2	Responsibility for budget and transport eligibility decisions brought into closer alignment using School Admissions, Special School Placement Panel and long-term place planning data more effectively to reduce unplanned budget pressures in year.	Measures must be taken to ensure essential links which drive efficiency and value for money between education transport and public transport are maintained including continuing to ensure the needs of non-entitled children are accommodated by public transport.
3	Clear alignment of responsibility for policy, budget, planning, decision making and performance - all sitting within Children’s Services.	Some degree of disruption will be encountered in restructuring passenger transport and school organisation and resources.
4	Transport management team will be supported by, and be able to access resources of, the larger infrastructure of School Organisation & Resources to drive continuous improvements and greater integration of education and transport for education – single points of failure will be reduced.	Must remain sighted upon government policy for Bus Service Improvement Plans and the emerging emphasis placed on local bus service developments including how resource will be distributed.
5	Integration with School Organisation & Resources enables transport management capacity to continue to oversee non-education transport and to maintain the essential links between education transport and public transport.	

6	This option is anticipated to deliver the greatest level of integration of processes for education and education transport so is expected to offer greatest opportunity to deliver value for money in the medium to long term.	
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## **Option 2: Closer Joint Working Model between Passenger Transport Team & Children’s Services.**

This option proposes that the passenger transport team would remain as it currently is in Local Services and as currently constituted but with an improved relationship between the two service areas which will be aided by a service level agreement to formalise and redefine the roles, responsibilities, governance and developments that Children’s Services and Local Services will jointly deliver.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Opportunity to allow Children’s Services resource to supplement the work of the passenger transport team, including providing greater pupil place planning data.	Risk of perception that this model is of little difference to current model which will limit the impact upon relationships and arrangements which may be delivered by other options.
2	Maintains current level of focus on the overlap between mainstream school transport and local bus service provision where many school children travel to school on commercial and supported local bus services.	Risk that similarity of arrangements will limit the impact of joining up processes which in turn will not yield results in reducing unplanned budget pressures.
3	Avoids disruption associated with moving and splitting teams.	Will require clear governance and management arrangements to deliver the improvement action plan which must clearly set out allocation of responsibilities and resources and whether each responsibility lies within Children’s Services or Local Services.
4	Creates a clearer client-agent relationship between the passenger transport team and its corporate clients (i.e. Children’s Services) underpinned by SLA outlining service standards.	
5	Maintains current focus upon government policy for Bus Service Improvement Plans and the emerging emphasis placed on local bus service developments.	

## **Option 3: Children’s Services take on full responsibility for ALL transport, including Public Transport, Adult Care Transport, Demand Responsive Transport, Dial a Ride and Community Transport.**

This option proposes that Children's Services would take full responsibility for all of the current transport commissioned by the passenger transport team, including transport for purposes of education and transport for purposes other than education. It would mean the passenger transport unit as it is currently constituted moving in its entirety into School Organisation and Resources. Local Services would no longer hold responsibility for any of the transport commissioning it currently undertakes.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Potential for home to school transport to be used to directly contribute to achieving Children's Services priorities of reducing inequality and putting children and families at the centre of decisions via maximum service integration of education and education transport.	There are no examples of this model in operation in any other local authority as far as can be ascertained where <u>ALL</u> aspects of transport (incl Public Transport) sit fully within Children's Services. This would therefore be an unproven model.
2	Opportunity to allow Children's Services resource to supplement the work of the passenger transport team, including providing greater pupil place planning data.	May not take into account the wider work other than home to school transport that the integrated passenger transport team carries out (particularly for public transport inc supported public transport bus services).
3	Continuing with the existing integrated passenger transport team structure could maintain the benefits of service integration e.g. thinking corporately when designing mainstream school bus services which may also serve the general public.	This model would require Children's Services management to have a full understanding of local public transport operation. It is unlikely given their other duties that they would be able to focus on the public transport and wider transport system in the County.
4	Enhances/shortens important communication channels around school transport.	
5	Potential for School Organisation & Resources to contribute to the reduction of single point of failure risk.	

#### **Option 4: Local Services Transport Unit model continues in its current form.**

This option proposes that the Local Services transport unit model currently in place will continue to operate in Local Services and as currently constituted – this is the 'do nothing' option.

	Advantages	Disadvantages
1	Continues as an integrated unit with full knowledge and understanding of all types of transport provision across the County	Little or none of the required opportunities or developments will be realised.
2	Avoids disruption associated with moving and splitting teams.	Doesn't alter the relationships and communication channels between the various stakeholders.
3	Continuity of service provision and senior management support that is currently provided by Technical Services Management	The 'do nothing' option would be perceived as acceptance that there is no need for action.
4	Current transport unit arrangement is consistent with many local authorities, evidence from other authorities does not consistently support that moving away from this arrangement delivers any long term benefits.	It is already acknowledged by all stakeholders that there is a need to enhance outcomes by adopting a different operating model going forward

## Implications

<b>Policy</b>	Directly related to NCC home to school transport policies and SEND Strategic Action Plan.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	It is proposed that a case will be put forward for Council Transformation Fund to support the start-up period of Independent Travel Training in year 1 and 2 of circa £50,000 per year but that in year 3 the savings yielded will cover the ongoing staff costs.
<b>Legal</b>	<p>Pursuant to Sections 508B and 508C of the Education Act 1996, local authorities must ensure that suitable travel arrangements are made for all eligible children to facilitate a child's attendance at school.</p> <p>The government has also published statutory guidance which local authorities are under a duty to have regard to when carrying out their duties in relation to home to school travel and transport.</p> <p>The Local Authorities (Functions and Responsibilities) (England) Regulations 2000 confirm that the matters within this report are not functions reserved to Full Council.</p>
<b>Procurement</b>	Neither evaluating & concluding transport models or implementing independent travel training have any procurement impact.
<b>Human Resources</b>	<p>Implementing independent travel training will require new roles to be created.</p> <p>Options with potential for restructuring staff between Local Services and School Organisation and Resources will require HR oversight/support.</p>
<b>Property</b>	No implications.
<b>Equalities</b> (Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> N/A <input type="checkbox"/>	Please see Appendix 03.
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	None.
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	This report has considered Section 17 (CDA) and the duty it imposes and there are no implications arising from it.
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	Some expected outcomes of the recommendations are enhancements to service user satisfaction levels,

	service users have been consulted as part of the wider home to school transport review.
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	Independent travel training has the potential to move pupils away from single occupancy transport providing a small reduction in carbon emissions.
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	Independent travel training brings lifelong wellbeing advantages to pupils with SEN once greater independence is developed.
<b>Wards</b>	All wards.

## **Background Papers**

Appendix 01 – Terms of Ref – January 2022.pdf



Terms of Ref -  
January 2022.pdf

Appendix 02 – Strategic Recommendations - Rev 9.0.doc



Strategic  
Recommendations - F

Appendix 03 - H2ST Recommendations - Equalities Impact Assessment - Rev 01.pdf



Appendix 03 - H2ST  
Recommendations - E

## **Report Sign Off**

	Full Name of Officer
Monitoring Officer/Legal	Suki Binjal
Executive Director of Finance & S151 Officer	Jan Willis
Relevant Executive Director	Audrey Kingham
Interim Chief Executive	
Portfolio Holder(s)	Guy Renner-Thompson

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