Northumberland
County Council

Home to School Transport Review – Strategic Recommendations Report.

Context

School transport within Northumberland County Council has had several challenges throughout the pandemic to consider above the usual transport routines. The budget for SEN transport which is held by NCC SEND team has been significantly underestimated resulting in the request for a system wide review of the governance of school transport. The recommendations developed in response to review findings are set out in the following report.

Underlying detail which supports findings in this report can be found within appendices.

Northumberland County Council

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1. Passenger Transport Team background

The Passenger Transport Team comprises 14 staff members and currently operates within Local Services managing a diverse range of commissioned transport. The work of the team relates to two distinct functions for the Council. One being provision of transport for specific eligible groups on behalf of other Council services, such as home to school transport, SEN transport, alternative education provision transport, post 16 education transport, children's social care transport and adult social care transport, the other relating to provision of public transport for the general public through provision of supported bus services to supplement the commercial bus network. The team typically hold a portfolio of circa 200 approved transport suppliers, in the region of 150 suppliers being contracted to deliver transport at any one time. The vast majority of passenger journeys are

for purposes of education with circa 8000 children accessing transport to their place of education on a daily basis. From a budgetary perspective transport for purposes other than education is small in scale and in some instances ad-hoc by nature, for example within children's social care. The annual revenue expenditure on transport which is managed by the team is in the region of £18m of which circa 90% is directly related to transport for education purposes. It is worth noting that whilst travel for pupils with special educational needs accounts for under 20% of education transport it contributes to over 40% of education transport cost owing to the complex geography of journeys and unique individual needs. The average cost per pupil on mainstream transport being circa £1500 compared to over £5000 on average for SEN transport. It should be acknowledged that from both a budgetary and staffing resource perspective, transport other than that arranged for purely education purposes constitutes a significant and growing amount of the teams' workload including public transport network planning and development, procurement and contract management activity, supplier payments for providers of supported bus services as well as performing the co-ordination role of ensuring up to date timetable information. It is anticipated that workload in this area will increase further due to the transformative changes being implemented in bus passenger travel arrangements from April 2023. It is worth noting the overlap between local public transport services and mainstream home to school transport where many pupils travel to school on commercial and supported bus services, some commercial bus services are only viable because of home to school transport income streams. Decisions on funding home to school transport seats on a commercial bus service, commissioning a public bus service that includes a school journey or commissioning a closed-door school bus service need to be made taking the wider perspective to get the best value for all service users including the needs of non-entitled children using public transport. The passenger transport team are highly experienced in the delivery of this diverse range of transport and should be commended for the scale and complexity of the service they consistently deliver. Whilst there is no formal service user consultation mechanism in place currently, as an indirect measure of satisfaction of user groups, the level of complaints has been seen to fall year on year in response to the continuous improvements the team have been introducing incrementally as resources have allowed. During previous independent review the skills, knowledge and dedication of the team have been highlighted as a strength. Whilst the team has and continues to perform well with continued dedication in reliably delivering a significant volume and variation of commissioned transport, particularly during the challenges of the Covid 19 pandemic, the review has identified scope for further improvements to policy, process and systems that have potential to deliver financial, operational, safeguarding and user experience benefits. This scope including greater contribution from interrelated service areas that have potential to support pressure points within

the work of the team, freeing capacity of team members to focus on complex cases as well as reducing the pressures upon the passenger transport team which are evident at peak times. It is important to acknowledge the national issue facing school transport provision where the availability of transport operators and drivers is under increasing pressure and already beginning to erode reliability of home to school transport nationally.

2. Executive Summary

It is clear from review of the home to school transport system that the team involved are heavily committed to delivering a quality service to transport users and exhibit a significant level of knowledge and skills. The team work closely, their efforts regularly go above and beyond expectation and what they deliver collectively as a team is greater than the sum of its parts.

There has been continuous improvement of the service, but notwithstanding this, some systems and processes could be described as outdated, insufficiently joined up and resource hungry to operate which combined with the scale of the significant logistical operation, creates a service which is challenging to manage - particularly at peak times in the annual cycle. This has been seen to place pressure on staff at these times resulting in some officers working long hours and under pressure to compensate and to strive for continuity and quality. In some instances, the tools available to the team can result in a reactive approach to managing some aspects of the system. Operating in a way that relies so heavily on individuals steering the system also introduces continuity risk.

While systems and processes have been and continue to be subject to continuous improvement, such as more digitised processes for transport applications, investment in more disruptive process developments, including current transport management technologies, has potential to deliver more efficient ways of working. This would in turn allow officers to focus on greater levels of joined up working across interrelated functions and allowing greater concentration upon the more complex service user cases where team skills and experience could be best utilised in delivering a more customer-centred approach, aided by reduced administrative burden.

3. Findings & Recommendations.

Note: a full range of operational recommendations is also included at Appendix 06.

3.1. Terms of Reference Review Phase 01 – Policy.

Terms of Reference can be found in appendix 01.

Home to School Transport Policy.

In response to review of Home to School Transport Policy documentation and comparison of policy to central government guidance the policy is deemed fit for purpose and compliant with only minor updates required for structure and clarity which are not material to the policy. The passenger transport team regularly use the policy to inform decision making and to ensure operational compliance. Going forward however it is recommended that Children's Services lead policy development with the support of the passenger transport team where most recently the drafting of policy was conducted by the passenger transport team with Children's Services approval. A range of housekeeping, clarity and format recommendations have been proposed however, these can be found in appendix 02.

In response to semi structured interviews with comparable local authority areas NCC should consider a change in policy adopted by some local authorities who have realised savings by applying personal budget *proportionate* to the cost of commissioned transport arrangements, rather than by mileage rate, in some circumstances. This arrangement is put in place where criteria are met under exceptionally complex and high-cost circumstances, e.g. SEND or pupil redirections. Policy would also need to include circumstances where this arrangement may cease if transport arrangements returning greater value emerge, for example the emergence of a multiple occupancy vehicle in the geographic area where previously there were none.

During semi-structured interview with transport contracts and compliance manager the implications of pupil redirection and displacement emerging from school admissions processes and the resulting transport budget impact were explored, this totalling circa £340,000 in 2021-22. Children's Services should consider potential for policy developments with support from the passenger transport team to develop policy to control the impact of redirections resulting from admissions related issues where possible.

In response to semi structured interviews with comparable local authority areas NCC should consider a change in terminology within policy and supporting documentation. Some local authorities have moved away from the term '*Home to School Transport'* and instead often refer to 'Education Transport' to help shift any pockets of unrealistic expectation that transport will collect from the door of the home address and deliver to the school entrance. Continuing this cultural shift will contribute to resolving issues with any remaining minority of transport users who are less receptive to communal pick-up/drop off points on offer.

In response to review of Home to School Transport Policy documentation it is proposed that greater emphasis is placed upon annual policy update with version control applied to policy documentation, Children's Services should lead policy development with support from the passenger transport team. As part of the annual policy review annual service user consultation surveys should be carried out, replicating those conducted during the transport review. Consultation yielded valuable insights into the satisfaction of service users upon specific elements of transport provision (Appendix 07) and can be used to inform policy update. Transport review consultation results should be used as an initial benchmark and the outcome of the annual process should include a *'You said – we did'* briefing for service users raising engagement of residents in service developments.

In response to home to school transport service user consultation surveys (Appendix 07) it is clear that both the needs and satisfaction levels between those using mainstream and those using SEND transport are different between these community groups. For this reason, it is proposed that policy developments prioritise much greater representation of the SEND community, their needs and diversity, rather than SEND being briefly covered as is currently the case. More detail upon this proposal can be found under SEND Transport Policy below.

In response to aspirations of some schools it is recommended that consideration of devolving transport to budgets to schools or MAT's is considered based upon confidence to deliver.

Post 16 Home to School Transport Policy.

In response to review of Post 16 Home to School Transport Policy documentation and comparison of policy to central government guidance the policy is deemed fit for purpose and compliant with a small number of exceptions, the passenger transport team regularly use the policy to inform decision making and to ensure operational compliance. Going forward however it is recommended that Children's Services lead policy development with the support of the passenger transport team where previously policy was the drafting of policy was conducted by the passenger transport team

with Children's Services approval. A range of housekeeping, clarity and format recommendations have been proposed, these can be found in appendix 03.

As part of policy update, central government guidance recommends inclusion in post 16 policy details of any specific provision in place for those NEET or at risk of becoming NEET. This is not included in current NCC post 16 transport policy and should be included as a priority, this section should be co-produced with the passenger transport team and led by Children's Services careers team who monitor and work with NEET young people.

As part of policy update, central government guidance states that post 16 policy should set out how and when authorities propose to consult young people and their parents to inform the development of policy for the following year, also that the local authority must consult with stakeholders in developing post 16 policy. This approach is not represented in current NCC post 16 transport policy and should be included as a priority. Annual post 16 policy updates should be conducted with version control applied to policy documentation; Children's Services should lead annual post 16 policy developments. As part of the annual policy development annual service user consultation surveys should be carried out as recommended in central government guidance, these should replicate those conducted during the transport review allowing benchmarking.

SEND Transport Policy.

Home to school transport for children and young people with special educational needs and or disabilities is by far the most complex and high-cost element of commissioned transport.

The community of children and young people who use this service also have the most complex needs and challenges of all of the service user groups.

Despite these significant facts, there is insufficient representation within current policy for the transportation of children and young people with special educational needs.

It is therefore recommended that home to school transport policy includes much greater focus upon the needs and diversity of children and young people with special educational needs. This development should be led by Children's Services, supported by the passenger transport team. The proposal for a proportionate personal budget should also be made equally available to users of SEND transport. Policy sections related specifically to SEND transport users, as recommended for other user groups, should be reviewed and updated annually including service user consultation and a 'You said – we did' briefing for service users raising engagement of residents in service developments. It is important that given the differing satisfaction levels of different user groups that consultation is

specific to individual user groups to allow the needs of each to be clearly represented, not diluted by the bigger picture.

Enhancements to SEND representation within Transport policy as proposed above should also be supplemented with policy developments for post 16 SEND transport, specifically with a focus on eligibility which previously missed essential considerations such as the mode of assessment of academic progress for those post 16 students with SEND which are in some instances very different than for mainstream, this oversight risking unnecessary exclusion from transport and hence access to education. Inclusion of parameters for timely submission of transport referrals should also be agreed and included which has been an ongoing challenge in the area of SEND transport.

Policy developments should also set out clearly how the SEND team holding budget but transport team arranging the commissioning should work in practice with the objective of the SEND team having increased focus upon the operational and financial impacts of their application and eligibility work. Enhanced focus in this area also has potential to enhance passenger transport team understanding of the challenges of the SEND Team in return which is in concordance with the overall objective of closer working practices.

 The enhancements to SEND representation within Transport policy as proposed should set out an approach to introduce consistent and sufficient independent travel training provision with greater contribution from both schools and NCC. This function was previously delivered by Children's Services but was ceased, the passenger transport team, SEN team and external consultants all having shown support for its reintroduction. 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, yet this provision is lacking in Northumberland. Many local authorities have an established team of independent travel training staff, 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. Independent travel trainers would sit well within Children's Services directorate under the Preparation for Adulthood lead; this function would also align very well with the NCC SEND Strategy and national Preparation for Adulthood outcomes. It is proposed that two independent travel trainer roles are introduced initially, each taking a caseload of 12-15 young people at any one time. The role would also include working with schools and providers to increase the provision of independent travel training within education settings, widening the reach and further raising participation in independent travel training over time. Given the average annual transport cost for a young person with SEND it is anticipated that the cost of creating an independent travel training role would be more than

compensated by the savings in transport costs delivered by moving young people from commissioned transport to independent modes of transport.

Children's Services should lead policy developments supported by the passenger transport team. As part of annual policy review annual service user consultation surveys should be carried out, replicating those conducted during the transport review. Consultation yielded valuable insights into the satisfaction of service users upon specific elements of transport provision (Appendix 07), this was especially the case for the SEND transport user community and can be used to inform policy update. Transport review consultation results should be used as an initial benchmark and the outcome of the annual process should include a 'You said – we did' briefing for service users raising engagement of residents in service developments.

In response to aspirations of some schools it is recommended that consideration of devolving transport to budgets to special schools and alternative provision is considered based upon confidence to deliver.

Children's Social Care Transport Policy.

Transport for Children's Social Care differs from school transport being less consistent and more ad-hoc in many cases with service users having different needs and challenges to regular school transport users. It is recognised that the passenger transport team have made much progress in recent years with gaining visibility and control over the way transport is commissioned by Children's Social Care where previously commissioning was less controlled. Despite the different needs and service developments with this user group there is currently no standalone policy for Children's Social Care transport.

It is therefore recommended that a standalone transport policy for children's social care is developed, led by Children's Services and supported by the passenger transport team. This policy, as recommended for other policy, should be reviewed, and updated annually.

Policy should set out how the more reactive children's social care transport arrangements should be managed and should provide direction on how boundaries between children's social care and SEND team responsibilities are managed given the regular involvement of both teams. Policy should also set out clear boundaries between SEND Transport responsibilities and budget and CSC responsibilities and budget where there have been unclear boundaries to date. Inclusion of parameters for timely submission of transport referrals should also be agreed and included which has been an ongoing challenge in the arrangement of children's social care transport. It is also

recommended that an ongoing working group between Children's Social Care senior and operational officers and the Passenger Transport team be arranged, modelled upon that seen with Adult Social Care, and should have terms of reference in place to ensure that the new policy is implemented effectively in practice and to allow operational issues to be identified, widely understood and collaboratively resolved as well as informing annual policy update.

When developing policy, the expertise of CSC and SEND teams should be used to account for the transient placement arrangements that some care experienced children require without causing disadvantage, this to include how cross county boundaries are managed.

The approach to meeting the needs of more profound physical and mental disability should be set out in this policy with clear indication of the range of reasonable adjustments to transport which can be expected.

Adults Social Care Transport Policy.

Similar to children's social care, a separate adult social care transport policy should be developed, led by adult social care officers and supported by the passenger transport team – work toward this already having commenced.

Similar to work completed for children's social care, it is recognised that the passenger transport team have made much progress in recent years with gaining visibility and control over the way transport is commissioned by adult social care where previously commissioning was less controlled. It is also acknowledged that the current working group arrangement between adult social care and the passenger transport team is working well, and a similar approach can be applied to children's social care transport management.

Both adult social care officers and passenger transport team officers are in agreement that the developments made in conducting route reviews are impactful and are driving efficiencies in the area of adult social care transport.

Sustainability within Policy.

The section related to resources covers measures being introduced to allow measurement, benchmarking, monitoring, and reduction of carbon impacts associated with commissioned transport.

It is recommended that across all refreshed and newly introduced policy that the approach to sustainability within transport commissioning and delivery is set out consistently and with respect to the measures which are practically available as a result of work being conducted with the sustainability team.

3.1 Policy – Key Recommendations:

1. Children's Services to lead all policy development for mainstream and post 16 education, SEN and children's social care - supported by the passenger transport team.

2. Annual service user consultation of specific stakeholder groups including parents, carers and education providers including an annual '*You Said – We Did'* briefing.

3. Annual policy refresh with respect to guidance emerging over the period and service user consultation outcomes.

4. Greater representation within home to school transport policy for children and young people with special educational needs, these policy developments led by Children's Services, supported by the passenger transport team.

5. Inclusion in policy of an Independent Travel Training function within Children's Services including recruiting to two independent travel training roles.

6. Standalone transport policy for children's social care is developed, led by Children's Services and supported by the passenger transport team.

7. Creation of a Children's Social Care transport working group modelled on that developed for Adult Social Care.

8. A separate Adult Social Care transport policy should be developed, led by Adult Social Care officers, and supported by the passenger transport team.

9. Personal budget award *proportionate* to the cost of commissioned transport arrangements, rather than by mileage rate, in some circumstances.

10. Move away from the term '*Home to School Transport'* to reduce pockets of expectation that transport will collect from the door of the home address and deliver to the school entrance.

11. Post 16 transport policy must include strategies to support and reduce NEET and those at risk of NEET, these policy developments led by Children's Services, supported by the passenger transport team.

12. Post 16 transport policy must include clearer representation for children and young people with special educational needs, these policy developments led by Children's Services, supported by the passenger transport team.

13. Embed transport sustainability strategy consistently within all policy or develop standalone transport sustainability policy.

14. Pilot a devolved transport budget with mainstream schools, special schools, and alternative provision where individual settings will deliver internally or externally commissioned transport in line with own operational requirements and within the devolved budget.

3.2. Terms of Reference Review Phase 02 – Safeguarding & Appeals.

Safeguarding processes and checks.

During review, semi structured interviews with compliance officers were conducted and independent safeguarding spot checks made upon vehicles by the school safeguarding team.

Currently the passenger transport team have developed and are delivering a programme of safeguarding training for drivers and passenger transport assistants as well as undertaking vehicle spot checks to establish how effectively safeguarding is implemented in practice. Drivers are subject to DBS checks via the passenger transport team or through standard NCC taxi licensing processes.

DBS checks provide assurance that employees of transport operators are suitable to work with children and young people. There is still work to do via the ongoing programme of training to provide assurance that all drivers are sufficiently knowledgeable of their role with regard to safeguarding. The robustness of safeguarding within spot checks and coverage of spot checks have capacity to be improved to provide greater assurance around safeguarding however the passenger transport team have now commenced this work.

Currently, monitoring spot checks made by compliance officers are mainly reactive to issues and complaints, this is owing to compliance officer resource (2 officers only) and the challenge that the geography of the county presents.

To enhance the coverage of safeguarding checks upon vehicles it is recommended that the school safeguarding team contribute to these checks whilst at school sites, providing enhance coverage of safeguarding checks whilst already in attendance at school locations.

To enhance the robustness of safeguarding checks within the monitoring spot check process it is recommended that compliance officers work with school safeguarding officers to further develop the inclusion of safeguarding within the spot check framework. A primary objective of this being to put in place metrics to measure the impact that driver safeguarding training is having upon driver

understanding of safeguarding and the actions to take in specific safeguarding scenarios which was reported as inconsistent by the school safeguarding officer during independent spot checks. The passenger transport team have already commenced work to achieve this objective.

It is recommended that drivers and passenger transport assistants are mandated to use the DBS Update Service, rather than the standard 3-year expiry DBS process. This will reduce the administrative burden of monitoring the 3-year expiry as well as reducing the risk of gaps in DBS coverage or gaps in transport provision owing to staff clearances. The passenger transport team are consulting with operators on this development to understand any implications before enforcing.

Digitisation of transport management systems could bring the potential which some platforms offer to implement drivers completing basic vehicle pre-use checks and a declaration of having done so to provide a further layer of assurance on day-to-day vehicle safety.

Digitisation of transport management systems could also bring potential for real time vehicle mapping and parental access which can indicate more rapidly and to all parties when a child is late, a child is not present at collection, a vehicle is late, and the location of a child at any time within the journey – this visibility is not currently available. This technology is available through comprehensive TMS systems as well as more basic app-based systems which operate exclusively from mobile phones giving potential for a range of options that can be explored during feasibility study and also potential for shorter and longer terms options to enhance journey visibility. The feasibility study will need to carefully consider GDPR management and cost benefit of systems given the need to implement technology across the wide range of operators.

Digitising transport management systems also provides enhanced opportunity for streamlining compliance monitoring of driver credentials and vehicle status with TMS packages offering compliance functions within their end-to-end functionality.

As a channel for children and young people to raise concerns confidentially a real-time confidential channel for children & young people to report concerns should be considered. Proprietary mobile applications are available and are used in education settings to allow disclosure of concerns directly to the place of learning or service provider when children may be unable to do so face-to-face, may not be confident enough to approach an adult, or may want to speak-up but are at home, in public, on school transport or cannot access the right member of staff. This may be an option to specify within some transport management systems too.

A separate briefing on Safeguarding can be found in appendix 05.

Appeals process and compliance with regulation.

As part of review of the appeals procedure comparison was made between DfE home to school travel and transport statutory guidance and NCC home to school transport policy terms outlining the appeals process, NCC policy is deemed fit for purpose and compliant however a range of housekeeping, clarity and format recommendations have been proposed, these can be found in appendix 04.

It is recommended that the appeals procedure will be updated annually as part of the broader home to school transport policy updates accounting for lessons learnt over the period specifically around any issues emerging from appeal activity.

3.2 Safeguarding & Appeals – Key Recommendations:

1. Compliance officers to work with school safeguarding officers to further develop the inclusion of safeguarding within the existing spot check framework.
2. School safeguarding team contribute to compliance spot checks whilst at school sites.
3. As part of feasibility study into more advanced transport management systems consider potential for real time vehicle mapping and parental/stakeholder access to pupil journey information in real-time.
4. Mandate subscription to DBS Update Service for drivers and escorts, rather than the standard 3-year expiry DBS process.
5. Adopt a proprietary real-time confidential channel for children & young people to report concerns directly to the place of learning or service provider.

3.3. Terms of Reference Review Phase 03 – Adult & Children's Social Care Transport.

During review of efficiency and value for money delivered by adult and children's social care semi structured interviews were conducted with the respective teams in ASC and CSC as well as covering this topic within interviews with transport officers and in review of documentation, systems and processes.

The volume of ASC and CSC transport provision is small in comparison to home to school transport however Children's Social Care is significantly more ad-hoc and less structured with regular individual journeys rather than multiple vehicle occupancy making efficiencies difficult to realise.

Children's Social Care officers explain scenarios where individual journeys are made with opportunity missed to combine passengers whilst the passenger transport team report too many instances of referral information being supplied too late and incomplete, this supports the need for closer working and better communication to reduce such challenges, potentially modelled on the working group approach already taken between adult social care officers and the passenger transport team.

Social care providers, patients and families can also be challenging to communicate with around temporary amendments and cancellations which can be informal, not timely, and leading to inefficiencies. Informal changes and cancellations are difficult to track which results in transport logs and invoicing not always aligning, adding to the administrative burden of the transport team managing these transport contracts and potential for loss of value for money.

The work that the passenger transport team have already undertaken in recent years in gaining visibility and control over the way social care transport is commissioned will be continued considering further efficiencies. However, the proposed feasibility study should consider how proprietary transport management systems with the ability to analyse route demand data have potential to accelerate developments into more efficient route planning and route combining and potential for vehicle tracking functions to allow comparison of actual journey made against invoice to help informal changes and cancellations to be captured.

During interview with EHCP officers and children's social care officers blurred boundaries became apparent when a child is known to both children's social care and SEND team and has transport needs with respect to both. As set out in the policy section above, establishing specific children's social care transport policy and SEND transport policy, led by Children's Services, supported by the passenger transport team, should set clear boundaries around responsibility and budget for children known to both children's social care and SEND team to remove ambiguity in this regard and more certainty in budget management.

3.3 Adult & Children's Social Care Transport – Key Recommendations:

1. Define clear boundaries around responsibility and budget for children known to both children's social care and SEND teams during development of specific CSC policy and SEND Transport policy.

2. Commence a formal Children's Social Care transport working group modelled upon that in place for Adult Social Care transport.

3. As part of feasibility study into longer term plans for more advanced transport management systems focus upon solutions which realise efficiencies and visibility within ad-hoc and fluctuating transport arrangements seen within CSC.

4. Continue to develop understanding of transport usage and opportunities for further efficiencies in the short term.

3.4. Terms of Reference Review Phase 04 – Resources.

Staffing.

The passenger transport team comprises fourteen staff in total:

- 1x Band 10 - Passenger Transport Manager
- 1x Band 8 - Transport Contracts and Compliance Manager
- 1x Band 6 – Senior Transport Network Officer
- 2x Band 6 - Monitoring, Compliance & Enforcement Officers
- 6x Band 5 – Transport Network Officer
- 2x Band 4 – Senior Support Assistant
- 1x Band 3 – Admin Assistant

The revenue expenditure of the transport service being circa £18m per annum therefore represents delivery of £1.3m per team member. This indicates high levels of efficiency in this service area in comparison to averages across all local authority activity in England and with other local authority transport teams. In this regard it is concluded that in staffing terms the transport team is lean, and this would go some way to explain the pressures that the team face at peak times in the application cycle which result in long working hours and measures taken such as preventing annual leave for team members through August into September.

Whilst not recommending increasing staff levels to reduce the pressures faced at peak times, as part of the exploration of current transport management systems and shorter-term developments it should be one of the primary aims to reduce the burden of those tasks which contribute to pressures felt by the team within the application period via the uptake of enhanced systems and automation of some administrative process.

It is also recommended that in the area of safeguarding and school admissions that resource from Children's Services is well placed to contribute to reducing pressures, making systems more efficient by combining processes and to enhancing the reach of some functions.

Whilst not directly related to the Passenger Transport Team, the proposal to introduce consistent and sufficient independent travel training provision with greater contribution from both schools and NCC would initially require the appointment of one or more Independent Travel Trainer roles within NCC. These would sit within the Preparation for Adulthood function of Children's services.

Eligibility assessment/award and demand.

During review of eligibility assessment and award resource, information was gathered from semi structured interviews with transport network officers, transport manager, supporting documentation and by directly accessing the application admin systems, access being arranged by the transport team. Semi structured interviews were also conducted with teams from children's social care, adult social care, and SEND team.

Applications for home to school transport are made via application administration systems which are specific to transport type (i.e SEND pre/post 16, mainstream, Post 16) allowing the application system to comply with the respective policy and user group needs. These systems have been subject to ongoing developments which have moved them to an online process from the previous paper form and email-based process making the application process less demanding for transport network officers during the initial contact of parent/carer applicants. The application admin system produces automated email communication during the application phase which also reduces administrative burden upon transport network officers.

Despite the positive move to streamline the initial application phase by moving to online systems, the fact that eligibility is then assessed by transport network officers still provides a bottleneck in the annual transport cycle, applications for pre 16 and post 16 transport predominantly being received in the period May to August. This puts pressure upon the team during this time in the year resulting in longer working hours and restrictions upon the taking of annual leave in this period as all attention is focused upon eligibility assessment and route planning.

Post 16 vocational transport, whilst small in volume, is complex to assess for eligibility; this being particularly complex with vocational education where course type is complex, timetables can be inconsistent day-to-day and subject to change, meaning route planning can be challenging and

results in efficiencies owing to the scattergun of post 16 attendance needs by comparison to very consistent school attendance needs. It should be noted that for this reason many local authorities charge users for post 16 travel with adjustment applied on grounds of low income or for those with SEND.

It is recommended that children's services, where greater levels of post 16 vocational education experience can be accessed, contribute more formally to supporting transport network officers with eligibility assessment in this area, contributing to relieving pressures during the peak application period.

Pre 16 mainstream transport is straightforward by comparison however the challenge in this area is the volume of applications being received in the peak period, circa 1600 in 2021-22 academic year, and at the same time as post 16 applications.

During exploration of the impact of digitised transport management systems focus should be applied to identifying systems which have potential to fully automate the majority of straightforward applications which it is expected could reduce eligibility assessment burden by a significant margin allowing transport network officers to focus upon a more user centric approach to more complex cases of redirections, SEND transport provision, post 16 applications and EOTAS transport provision in turn raising user satisfaction ratings in more complex client groups. User consultation indicates lower satisfaction levels with the application process, particularly including challenges in self-assessing eligibility before applying, further developing the process also brings opportunity to increase satisfaction levels in this area.

Differing in process from mainstream transport, SEND transport entitlement is assessed and awarded by EHCP officers, transport network officers subsequently deciding the mode of transport and then commissioning. In respect of this EHCP officers are best placed to make this assessment based upon individual needs and the most complex eligibility decisions are prevented from adding to the workload of transport network officers, the process therefore being appropriate for putting these arrangements in place.

It is recommended to include in policy related to SEND transport the roles that schools, special schools, Northumberland Inclusive Education Service and transport network officers should play in contributing to awarding and planning transport. This will more formally set out how NCC officers and Schools' knowledge of individuals, their peers and their settled cohorts is utilised to contribute to increasing instances of multiple occupancy journey planning, building on and supporting with the work of the passenger transport team in this area.

Like the model for SEND transport, for both children's and adults social care transport social care officers assess need for transport then refer outcomes to transport network officers for commissioning ensuring the complex eligibility assessment demands are carried out prior to referral to transport officers which is appropriate for this user group.

During exploration of the impact of end-to-end transport management systems it should be considered how enhanced systems can identify route efficiencies particularly within the more complex and ad-hoc picture of children's social care transport commissioning.

While efficiency is managed by route review and economy by retendering, there are less opportunities to manage demand. Mainstream is generally predictable however SEND transport has experienced escalating demand pressure, 10% contingency being built in yet 18% demand growth experienced in 2021/22. Whilst diagnosis of SEND may be difficult to predict there is opportunity to mitigate this to some extent via creating a more deeply integrated working relationship between Northumberland Inclusive Education Service, transport officers and schools where Northumberland Inclusive Education Service should develop modes of providing transport officers with greater levels of intelligence and early warning of upcoming demand as far as is practicable within this complex landscape.

Commissioning & contract management

During review of commissioning and contract management resource a series of structured interviews were conducted with the passenger transport manager, transport contracts and compliance manager and other associated transport officers as well as studying processes, procedures and documentation related to commissioning and management.

First contact with transport providers is initiated via procurement when providers apply to become an approved supplier on the transport dynamic purchasing system. Becoming an approved supplier utilises a self-certification approach via questionnaire, typically around 200 suppliers on DPS at any time, each selecting which transport lot they intend to secure work within, i.e. SEND, mainstream, etc. The approach commencing via procurement and involving an initial light touch self-certification is an effective model to reduce demand upon transport officers.

When an approved supplier proceeds to secure a contract for transport following competitive tender further detailed compliance checks are undertaken and updated termly when commissioned. This approach ensures a wide range of transport providers are accessible but maintains efficiency for

compliance officers by only requiring more detailed compliance checks upon contract award and then periodic update.

The transport team have authority to perform core purchasing activities outside of procurement, an effective flexibility allowing the agility necessary to deliver the high volume of comparatively small transactions. A zero-tolerance policy on invoice accuracy is in place which sets high standards for providers financial management, keeping tight control over a very large volume of transactions.

The approach to management of contracted providers is positive and looks to support contractors to improve performance when issues arise rather than terminate contracts as well as rewarding of good performance with an operating credit system. The deployment of resource to support providers contributes to continuity of provision and offsets resource that would otherwise be necessary to manage service continuity issues and to manage supplier turnover – this way of working growing in importance owing to current pressures upon the operator network owing to escalating cost and driver shortage.

Efficiency is managed via route reviews aligned with contract end dates for the different geographical areas and types of transport; these are carried out periodically however greater digitisation would allow instances of creep in efficiencies to be automatically identified and rectified more rapidly which on aggregation would provide a cost advantage.

Economy is driven by competitive retendering of contracts however acknowledging that a balanced approach is needed given transport providers require sustainability in contracts to remain interested in providing home to school transport without which risk to continuity of service is introduced, the team balance this aspect effectively.

Management of invoices and receipts is resource hungry and as part of the feasibility study into an end-to-end transport management system the potential to reduce the administrative burden should be explored whilst being able to maintain the zero-tolerance policy. This integration would also provide the benefit of route and contract changes and associated finances being instantly reflected in real-time reporting at the press of a button.

A well-developed set of key performance indicators has been put in place for ongoing monitoring of the performance of the business unit.

Budget forecasting

During review of resource contributing to budget forecasting a series of structured interviews were conducted with the passenger transport manager, transport contracts and compliance manager, a range of stakeholder service areas and a range of supporting documentation reviewed.

The budget forecast cycle is a challenge and poses risks owing to budgets being set prior to the financial year commencing in April but with stable application and demand data for that year not being fully visible until the following October, the picture is stable October until March. Whilst this misalignment of financial year and application cycle is unlikely to change, the challenge should be acknowledged and the importance of maximising the input of data and resource from children's services to support forecasting should be recognised.

Different transport user groups bring different challenges to budget forecasting.

Adult and children's social care are relatively small in scale and despite the ad-hoc nature of children's social care do not significantly vary year to year so can be forecast sufficiently accurately.

Post 16 transport is unpredictable and complex however it is also a small part of transport provision so in overall budget terms can be forecast sufficiently accurately year to year.

Mainstream home to school transport benefits from children being in the system for several years bringing year to year demand side forecasting stability and the ability to use the school admissions process to inform budgets of new entrants to the transport system. Within mainstream transport an area of challenge is redirection of pupils away from their local school which then makes them eligible for transport to schools further afield and thus likely to be individual or low occupancy on the route, this scenario accounting for £340,000 cost in 2021-22. It is proposed in the policy section that the approach to pupil redirection is considered at policy level and that children's services contribute to developing this policy. It is also recommended that closer working between school admissions and transport teams is introduced, increasing the responsibility placed upon the admissions team to inform transport planning, allowing the maximum benefit of admissions data to be realised in transport planning and taking advantage of opportunity to alleviate pressures on the transport team by utilising resource within the interrelated business function. This would also support the development of an integrated 'one stop shop' for admissions and transport.

SEND transport has experienced escalating demand pressure. 10% contingency being built into budget forecast, yet 18% actual growth experienced in 2021/22 and hence delivering a significant budget overspend. Compounding the demand is the complexity of SEND transport geography where circa 40% of users are individual travellers covering long distances to specialist providers. It is

recommended that this specific area is subject to focus on how personal budget *proportionate* to the cost of commissioned transport, rather than by mileage rate alone, can be used to engage more parents in providing transport, reducing commissioned transport cost, and reducing resource demands of complex commissioning.

Whilst diagnosis of SEND and resulting transport demand may be difficult to accurately forecast there is opportunity to mitigate this to a degree by developing greater connection between Northumberland Inclusive Education Service (benefiting from its specialist provision relationships) with transport planning officers. In this area it is recommended that Northumberland Inclusive Education Service should develop modes of providing transport officers with greater levels of intelligence and early warning of upcoming demand, working toward shared efficiency objectives while maintaining user satisfaction.

In addition to demand side impacts, budgets are also impacted by supply side issues affecting the transport market, key issues recently being the unprecedented increase in the cost of fuel, widespread driver shortages and the reduction in numbers of transport operators across the transport industry, which has been exacerbated by the downturn in the transport sector during the pandemic and the associated movement of drivers away from the industry.

Systems & processes

During review of systems and process resource structured interviews were conducted with the passenger transport manager, transport contracts and compliance manager, operational transport officers, a range of stakeholder service areas and a range of supporting documentation reviewed. External semi structured interviews were also conducted with five comparable local authorities and an independent transport consultancy.

Greater digital integration of the functions of transport management is a common theme throughout the aspects considered during review, the detail of where this is considered an advantage can be found within many of the recommendation areas.

More broadly, EMS case management system is used within Education, Swift is used within Adult Social Care and ICS is used within Children's Social Care. The Passenger Transport Team use the transport module within EMS and Oracle E Business for payments. These platforms are not yet sufficiently joined up with supporting systems within Transport which can require manual intervention to complete administrative functions which could be more automated. This is

particularly relevant to financial management where the case management systems can be seen to indicate differing quantities of transport contract to that seen in financial management/invoicing systems needing resolving manually. Some work is underway by Performance and Systems Support team to link LIFT directly with ICS to deliver precise and integrated financial management however LIFT is unable to link with EMS so is not a solution for all areas which use NCC managed transport. It should also be noted that Children's Services are currently reviewing whether EMS or alternative systems will be used as the education management system going forward and this should be factored into wider planning of transport system developments.

A variety of end-to-end transport management systems are available which are tailored to the functions of local authority transport teams, these have potential to provide a step change in the development of the transport service, the move to such systems being prominent in section 5 of this report and operational recommendations within Appendix 06.

Currently a range of different management information systems are used across different transport areas and functions, the join-up of these being underdeveloped resulting in some processes still requiring labour intensive manual input and the benefits of end-to-end systems not yet being realised, the potential for a transport management system to link seamlessly with existing systems is however essential and must be a primary requirement when exploring systems.

Greater system integration via more current transport management systems has potential to provide particular advantage to SEND transport including more centralised records of individual needs where EHCP coordinators, parent/carers, schools, drivers & PTA's have potential for greater access to current information appropriate to their role or relationship with the children and young people using transport. Driver/PTA credentials and training status has potential for greater visibility to appropriate officers as well as EHCP coordinators and schools' potential to access information on the nature of peers sharing transport in consideration of multi-vehicle occupancy planning. The impact of greater visibility and appropriate levels of access to all stakeholders is suggested will offer officers and professionals involved in planning and delivering aspects of transport and education the opportunity to raise satisfaction levels of users while making administrative arrangements more efficient.

roader adoption of transport management systems brings potential for greater analysis of combining routes and appropriate combining of individuals in the reactive and short to medium term transport arrangements within children's social care. Equally, children's social care transport can change short notice owing to care related needs; more advanced transport systems have potential to support the

passenger transport team in identifying journeys which have been cancelled or rearranged including streamlining accounting for the financial impact of such changes.

Adult social care officers comment however that temporary amendments and pauses in adult social care transport are not always sufficiently visible, for example when a family call a transport operator directly to cancel a journey. In this area there is potential for any transport management system adopted in the medium to longer term to contribute to assisting with visibility in this area however acknowledging that such occurrences are a minority.

The proposed approach is that an independent feasibility study is commissioned to establish the detailed needs of NCC passenger transport team and the most appropriate system identified so that cost benefit analysis can be carried out. This measured approach should consider how best to support implementation of system change whilst maintaining continuity of service and ensure that the most appropriate system is identified to fit NCC policy, systems, and processes, rather than risking the selection of a system then changing business processes to fit.

It is acknowledged that whilst approaching this service development via a detailed and independent market-wide feasibility study will deliver the most fit for purpose and value for money solution, that this will result in this development being a medium to long term implementation timeframe and that other continuous improvement measures should not be ruled out to enhance service delivery in the short term. It should also be considered during feasibility study how developments in transport management systems fit into and complement wider education management system plans and the wider strategic change programme of Northumberland County Council.

Sustainability monitoring

he carbon impact associated with home to school transport has historically been unknown with resources, systems and processes not yet in place to allow benchmarking and improvement of carbon impacts – the passenger transport team have recently commenced work with the sustainability team on this agenda. The passenger transport team will continue this work to identify and adopt ways in which carbon impact monitoring can be established, resulting in carbon impact benchmarking allowing carbon impact reduction measures to be enacted via diversifying transport modes and developing commissioning practice, the impacts of those measures monitored against benchmark. Whilst this work has been commenced locally increasing the profile and support for this initiative has potential to accelerate the impacts. During feasibility study into transport management systems and the vehicle tracking technology which forms part of more advanced transport

management systems, carbon impact monitoring should also be considered as a desirable feature as this development has potential to be delivered as part of wider digitisation measures.

3.4 Resources – Key Recommendations:

1. NCC Senior Leadership Team and committee evaluate the range of options put forward for transport models (Section 3.5) and where the transport services best sit within Northumberland County Council, providing feedback on the options.

2. Maintain current staffing levels within the passenger transport team, reviewing the model periodically to allow the model to evolve with developments of the service.

3. Commence Children's Social Care transport working group modelled upon that in place for Adult Social Care.

4. Conduct an independent market-wide feasibility study appraising which end-to-end transport management system would be most fit for purpose and will deliver greatest value for money.

5. School safeguarding team contribute to safeguarding spot checks whilst at school sites, providing enhanced coverage.

6. School Admissions and Passenger Transport Team combining application and transport processes where appropriate to raise efficiencies.

7. Introduce consistent and sufficient independent travel training provision within Children's Services, using this resource to develop Independent Travel Training provision within school settings.

8. Develop a formal channel via which Education & Skills can contribute to eligibility assessment of the more complex cases of post 16 vocational education programmes.

9. Develop a formal channel via which Northumberland Inclusive Education Service can contribute to eligibility assessment of the more complex cases of post 16 SEND education programmes.

10. Passenger transport team to work with the sustainability team to identify and adopt a resource with which carbon impact monitoring and reduction can be established.

3.5. Terms of Reference Review Phase 05 – Service Integration, Business Models & Systems

Transport models, links with other service areas, where service best fits

During review and exploration of models and links to other service areas semi structured interviews were undertaken with five comparable local authorities and an independent transport consultancy.

Typically, two main transport models are commonly adopted by LA's with a range of examples of how these models are delivered in practice.

Firstly, an Integrated Transport Unit model delivered within Local Services (or equivalent service area) is commonly adopted where the transport function remains independent to all other functions, acts as a standalone business unit, and has formal contracts in place with all internal and external stakeholders/clients, in some instances delivering some transport functions itself with its own fleet of vehicles rather than commissioning. It is independently responsible for all its own budgetary and quality performance. Feedback suggests this model is typically able to deliver greatest financial performance but may be less focused upon some of the qualitative elements of performance and user satisfaction where these considerations are not sufficiently prioritised.

It should be noted that lack of focus on qualitative elements is less apparent in the current NCC ITU arrangements, where the team have implemented a number of qualitative enhancements to the service including SEND information booklet for parents; disability/autism awareness training for contract personnel and more digitised transport application processes. There is however no formal mechanism currently in place to establish user satisfaction levels, to benchmark these, and then work to positively shift the satisfaction levels of all user groups. The implementation of these mechanisms is required to allow true qualitative distance travelled to be measured year-on-year, to inform focused and evidence-based quality improvement initiatives and to establish a range of qualitative key performance indicators.

Secondly, the alternative to the ITU model is separating the education transport functions from the wider passenger transport functions to create two separate teams and embedding of the education transport unit within Children's Services, with the other transport functions remaining within a Place or Environmental service such as Local Services. In relation to the home to school transport element sitting within children's services, whilst this model can focus on financial performance as a priority there is typically a strong qualitative element to this model and greater focus upon the end user

than with an ITU approach given the Children's Service's influence. It is to be noted that balance is essential with this model to prevent focus upon service quality from causing escalation of costs.

Northumberland County Councils current passenger transport arrangement is biased more toward the ITU model although not as significantly independent and contract driven as some other ITU's.

Of the five local authorities consulted with, a variety of interpretations of the models are in place, some authorities having adopted both at various times, and from discussions during review each model has been seen to work effectively within local authorities when the right network of individuals and teams are in place working to shared objectives to drive the function successfully.

In Wiltshire, the model is more toward the ITU however a small number of staff are employed jointly between Children's Service and the ITU to improve the operation of SEN Transport.

In Devon, the model is a well-established ITU which offers services for public transport, Children's Services, Adult Care and also for NHS for whom it handles eligibility assessment and bookings for non-emergency transport. The ITU is continuing to evolve with most recent intentions being a move away from their current transactional application process as the intended outcome, including an adoption of more advanced transport management systems, this forming part of a wider strategic change programme.

In Norfolk, an ITU model is in place which has been moved around various departments within their Community & Environment Directorate, a key aim of the current operating model being to make the service more procedural, rather than user centric.

In Surrey, a move to relocate home to school transport into children's services was made in 2020 however staffing problems have plagued this move, the impacts of which are still ongoing, leaving Surrey CC with the advice that a move to children's services has benefits however the transition must be managed carefully to maintain continuity.

In Lincolnshire, a three-year transport transformation programme is underway to introduce a 'business centric' model prioritising cutting cost.

It is apparent that transport functions across this range of local authorities tend towards the integrated ITU model but there is some degree of flux as these continue to evolve. In a limited number of cases some ITUs have split some of the education transport function from other passenger transport duties. It is also apparent that to be successful the function must have clear priorities and an operational structure that is clear in order to deliver the priorities, whichever model is in place.

It should be noted that in general Northumberland's Passenger Team performs well in comparison to issues present in some other authorities.

Within Northumberland County Council circa 95% of transport delivery is specific to mainstream school transport, SEND transport, post 16 education transport, EOTAS and children's social care – this meaning that the vast majority of transport delivery is inextricably linked to contributing to the objectives and priorities of Children's Services suggesting greater contribution from and closer working with Children's Services would be advantageous. It should also be acknowledged however that a proportion of commissioned transport managed by the passenger transport team is not directly related to Children's Services so should be carefully considered. Supported bus services for example which the passenger transport team design, timetable and commission based on specific local needs are managed by the same team members so would be difficult to extract from the team without building duplication or fragmentation. It is also important to acknowledge the supported bus service developments commencing which will increase the volume of this mode of transport via Department for Transport Bus Recovery Grant and local authority Bus Service Improvement Plans. These potentially transformational programmes increasing the volume of bus coverage and the potential for buses to contribute to efficient home to school transport within a bigger picture of public transport beyond the remit of Children's Services.

In some areas, for example SEND transport, budgetary responsibility lies within Children's Services whilst operational responsibility lies within Local Services, in this instance it can be argued that having both budget and operational responsibilities more closely connected would be an advantage however improvements could also be made by closer joint working.

Children's services, particularly School Organisation and Resources, Northumberland Inclusive Education Service and Children's Social Care have potential as set out in previous sections to contribute more in terms of supporting resource but also providing greater pupil place planning data and intelligence to steer policy direction and efficiencies of planning and delivering transport if the passenger transport team were more closely connected with these business functions. School Organisation and Resources in particular having an Education Business manager and team to support financial processes and developments, School Admissions team to support operational planning and applications processes to relieve pressures upon the passenger transport team which are evident at peak times. This would also bring Children's Services priorities to the forefront of transport delivery.

Whilst there is not one singular seismic impact expected the aggregation of the range of gains delivered by reduced boundaries and greater systems working toward more formal shared objectives with children's services suggests that adopting a model where the passenger transport

team has closer joint working with children's services with responsibilities more clearly set out, and where appropriate shared, would be a logical development.

Given the above and the significant expenditure on Children's Services transport it is natural to consider whether any of the passenger transport team function should be formally managed by Children's Services. However, when considering how this closer working could be achieved and whether this should be through closer joint working or formally separating the Passenger Transport Unit to form a separate education transport unit, careful consideration is needed of the potential benefits and disbenefits. Consideration must also be given to whether it would be appropriate to move the whole passenger transport team to Children's Services. This would mean the Public Transport function and other non-education transport functions of the team also being managed by Children's Services, NCC ITU are not aware of any other Local authority where this is the case. The inherent risks associated with the unproven nature of the model of relocating the complete passenger transport team to Children's Services should not be underestimated.

A consideration of advantages and disadvantages of a range of models to reduce boundaries and enhance systems working is set out below in tables 01 to 04:

Table 01:

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 would mean that there would be two operational level teams, one based in Children's Services and responsible for organising all school/education transport and children's social care transport and another based in Local Services and responsible for public transport, adult care transport, DRT, dial a rides, community transport.	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Potential for the home to school transport element to be used to directly contribute to achieving Children's Services priorities via maximum integration with children's services teams allowing greatest focus upon priorities.	Team is currently a completely integrated passenger transport unit that carries out public transport, home to school transport, adult and children's services social care transport duties – this integration and understanding of overall transport provision in Northumberland and it's benefit to the wider community may be lost.
Responsibility for the budget and for the home to school transport team making decisions about eligibility for school travel support could potentially be brought into closer alignment. [But in practice, it remains difficult for the eligibility team (particularly SEN eligibility) to take transport costs into account as a key factor in decision making.]	Potential for administrative duplication by splitting one team into two with similar functions. For example, will procurement be done separately for the two elements? What about contract management? How will service inspectors be split across the two units? May require additional staff reflecting the fact that individual PTU staff currently work on an integrated basis, resulting in increased salary costs. Lack of integration

	and oversight would increase the risk of opportunities for service improvements and efficiencies being missed – for example, incorporating supported bus services into education transport routes.
Senior departmental management responsible for long-term planning of school capacity, use of out of county placements, location of schools and units could be made responsible for the budget so that the impact on transport could, in principle, be taken into account when those decisions are made. However in practice, it is often the case that transport costs have little influence over wider decisions.	Reorganising the location of responsibilities does not necessarily tackle any of the many cost drivers that impact on the school transport budget. These include both demand-side issues (e.g. eligibility and fare paying passengers) and supply-side issues (e.g. managing the commercial market). These impact both public transport and home to school transport.
There can be clearer alignment between policy responsibility and budget responsibility for the home to school transport elements.	Loss of professional expertise in passenger transport matters (e.g. legislation) for aspect of service transferred to Children's Services with no underlying interest in wider transport issues and no career path for staff involved in transport. Likely to increase recruitment and retention issues for transport staff with knock-on impacts for service resilience.
If home to school transport is wholly within Children's Services remit, may stimulate initiatives for home to school transport to deliver on Children's Services priorities such as provision of Independent Travel Training . May make it easier to get buy in from Children's Services to develop and implement Invest to Save initiatives such as this	Risks ignoring the overlap between mainstream school transport and local bus service provision which is significant. Many schoolchildren travel to school on 'commercial' and supported local bus services. Some 'commercial' bus services are only viable because of the income from scholars. Decisions on whether to buy scholar seats on a commercial local bus service or to commission a public bus service that includes a school journey or to commission a closed door school bus service not available to the public need to be made from a corporate perspective to get the best value for the county's residents as a whole. Separating off statutory school transport requirements runs the risk of resulting in greater cost to maintain the local bus network or the loss of some of that network, whilst not achieving any corresponding savings in school transport. In particular the PTU currently considers the needs of non-entitled children travelling to school when making decisions about local

	bus provision. It is not obvious that a team within Children's Services would have a remit to make provision for the wider travelling public (i.e. non-entitled scholars) when deciding what services to commission.
Streamlines communication chains for home to school transport element e.g. possibly makes it easier to persuade schools to play their part in arrangements that reduce transport costs if they are relating to a transport team in Children's Services rather than one in Local Services?	Loss of the potential to package education transport and non-education transport together in single contracts if they are being commissioned separately. This is likely to cost more, but as importantly this can also be critical to sustaining small operators. This applies to both mainstream and SEN transport provision. Also risks doubling the amount of commissioning activity (and cost) at a time when there are major supply-side issues, driver shortages etc.
Could harness additional energy and management effort within Children's Services (though this isn't exclusive to this model)	Risk of misalignment between quality and safety standards if two teams are commissioning similar services. E.g. safety and passenger care standards across school transport, social care transport and public transport/community transport commissioned by the Council. This contains potential for legal challenge.
Where the administration of school transport identifies gaps in the existing policies it could be easier / quicker to implement the processes around changing policies.	Disruption and administrative costs associated with splitting the PTU into two units and moving some staff (physically?).
	Risk of requiring two separate IT systems - one with a focus on school transport and one with a focus on local bus transport, but covering similar material e.g. operator details and records.
	Will it be more difficult for a Unit focused just on school transport to be able to contribute adequately to the Council's decarbonisation agenda (move to zero-emission transport)? Potential risk of a two-speed model.

	Abandons the best practice model of Integrated Transport Units as championed by the Audit Commission.
	Splitting the PTU up in this way could be seen as admission that facilitating collaborative joint working across departments has been unsuccessful e.g. effective joint budget management.
	There will be loss of logistical efficiencies in transport delivery where separate planning occurs.
	Risk that this is perceived by NCC staff and externally as a downgrading of the County's public passenger transport function
	Given the complexity of transport and the supplier market for all facets of transport (buses, coaches, taxis, community transport, etc) in Northumberland it is key that transport decisions are made taking into account the best outcomes for transport overall. The ability to fully understand this and to make decisions accordingly would be significantly reduced if transport decisions were being taken by two separate teams
	Looking forward, Government policy including Bus Service Improvement Plans will place even further emphasis on local bus service development.

Table 02:

Option 2: Closer Joint Working Model (between Passenger Transport Team & Children's Services) - this would mean the PTU remaining as it is in Local Services and as currently constituted but with an improved relationship with Children's Services (aided by an SLA). A part of this may involve the adoption of integrated IT systems where appropriate that enhances joint working across the two teams resulting in productivity gains and improved levels of customer service.	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Passenger Transport Teams current good level of performance would be further enhanced by improved joint working with Children's Services. Could allow more integration with Children's Services teams, allowing some resource to supplement the work of the Passenger Transport Team at peak periods. School Organisation and Resources, Northumberland Inclusive Education Service and Children's Social Care have potential as set out in previous sections to contribute more in terms of supporting resource but also providing greater pupil place planning data and intelligence to steer policy direction and efficiencies of planning and delivering transport through enhanced joint working between the passenger transport team and these business functions.	Will need to be actively followed through with Executive Director/Service Director support to ensure that initiatives and improvements are successfully achieved, to avoid risk that the difference between this and an 'As Is' model will not be perceived, and therefore there will be limited or no impact on current relationships and arrangements.
Continues as an integrated unit with full knowledge and understanding of all aspects of transport provision across the County to ensure decision making takes account of best outcomes for overall transport provision in the County (e.g. in impacts of utilisation of public transport for fulfilling home to school transport statutory provision, and provision of public transport services where possible to assist non-eligible pupils to access education).	Will require clear agreement on who will take the lead on improvement activities such as the feasibility study into enhanced Transport Management Systems and how this will be resourced
Continuity of service provision in Passenger Transport Team, alongside enhanced input from Children's Services.	Will require clear governance and management arrangements to deliver the improvement action plan that details allocation of responsibilities, resources and timeframes.
Maximises benefits of a Council integrated passenger transport team but with enhanced working with Children's Services teams for the home to school transport and children's social care elements of service	
Retains expertise without need to split roles between two teams, maximising efficiency of staffing structures for transport and avoids issues around lack of career path/recruitment and retention of transport staff	
Continuity of senior management input from Local Services managers utilising their knowledge and	

expertise on transport issues, but supplemented by enhanced input from Children's Services	
Allows continued focus on the overlap between mainstream school transport and local bus service provision which is significant. Many schoolchildren travel to school on 'commercial' and supported local bus services. Some 'commercial' bus services are only viable because of the income from scholars. Decisions on whether to buy scholar seats on a commercial local bus service or to commission a public bus service that includes a school journey or to commission a closed-door school bus service not available to the public need to be made from a corporate perspective to get the best value for the county residents as a whole. Separating off statutory school transport requirements runs the risk of resulting in greater cost to maintain the local bus network or the loss of some of that network, whilst not achieving any corresponding savings in school transport. In particular the PTU currently considers the needs of non-entitled children travelling to school when making decisions about local bus provision. It is not obvious that a team considering home to school transport within Children's Services would have a remit to make provision for the wider travelling public (i.e. non-entitled scholars) when deciding what services to commission.	
The further emphasis on local bus service development looking forward including Bus Service Improvement Plans will continue to be dealt with by an integrated passenger transport team with senior management knowledgeable on public transport to support this aspect. BSIP consists of £8.1M grant funding of local bus services over the next 2.5 years and has the potential to have a transformative impact on the travel patterns of young people (including students) and other members of the travelling public.	
Can achieve the improvements for home to school transport and social care transport that have been identified through the review without the disbenefits inherent in the other options	
Maintains the benefits of service integration e.g. thinking corporately when designing mainstream school bus services which may also serve the general public (including non-entitled scholars).	

Takes the opportunity to create a clearer client-agent relationship between the PTU and its corporate clients (Children's Services, Local Services, Adult Social Services) underpinned by SLAs showing the service standards that the PTU will deliver.	
Would allow development of improved services / functions through specific and short-term shared (i.e. joint) Task & Finish groups e.g. to introduce Independent Travel Training or to agree the specification for an IT system and plan for its implementation.	
Takes advantage of the opportunity to redefine information flows and reporting arrangements around the acquisition of an integrated transport management software system	
Avoids disruption costs	
Clearer focus on 'outcomes' improvement.	

Table 03:

Option 3: Children's Services Transport Model – this would mean the PTU as it is currently constituted moving in its entirety into Children's Services Directorate	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Could allow more integration with Children's Services teams, allowing some resource to supplement the work of the Passenger Transport Team at peak periods. School Organisation and Resources, Northumberland Inclusive Education Service and Children's Social Care have potential as set out in previous sections to contribute more in terms of supporting resource but also providing greater pupil place planning data and intelligence to steer policy direction and efficiencies of planning and delivering transport through enhanced joint working between the passenger transport team and these business functions.	There are no examples of this model in operation in any other local authority as far as can be ascertained. We are not aware of any Integrated Passenger Transport Unit in any Local Authority previously or currently covering all aspects of transport (incl Public Transport) that sits fully within Children's Services. This would therefore be an unproven model of service.
As an integrated passenger transport team, could maintain the benefits of service integration e.g. thinking corporately when designing mainstream school bus services which may also serve the general public (including non-entitled scholars).	Does not take account of 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).
Might improve the contribution of Children's Services and schools to sustainable transport initiatives around education – walking buses, ITT, cycling initiatives, etc.	Unclear how senior managers in Children's Services would provide the support to the team on overall transport legislation, operations and development (such as public

	transport, community transport, transport operator regulations etc)
Shortens important communication channels around school transport aspects	Looking forward, Government policy including Bus Service Improvement Plans will place even further emphasis on local bus service development needing further senior management focus on these elements and it is unclear without significant additional learning and development and allocation of resource for these aspects how senior managers in Children's Services would have the knowledge / expertise / time to provide this support to the team
	The senior managers within the PTU do not believe this is the correct approach given their wider role in transport provision other than simply home to school transport. Implementing a structural change in this way is therefore likely to be de-motivational for a team that performs well
	This 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.
	In view of the on-going consideration of overall structure of the Council it could be viewed as being premature to consider moving an individual team that has linkages with both Place and Children's Services and that any changes to structural alignments between service areas should be considered more holistically as part of this wider council wide exercise.
	The improvements for home to school transport and social care transport that have been identified through the review can be achieved without the disbenefits inherent with moving the Passenger Transport Team into Children's Services
	Potentially breaks or diminishes the link between passenger transport policy (within the Council's wider movement strategy) and passenger transport commissioning and management.

	Could potentially result in reduced input / activity levels around supporting public and community transport.
	Would possibly make cross-boundary co-operation (Nexus, Durham, etc.) more difficult, including working within joint authority structures.

Table 04:

Option 4: Local Services Transport Unit Model – this would mean that ITU stays where it is as currently constituted, no change	
Advantages	**Disadvantages**
Team would continue to perform at it's current good level of performance	None of the identified opportunities for further joint working between Children's Services and the Passenger Transport Team are maximised. Nothing will change as regards outcomes. This approach contains no plan for service improvement / improved cost containment.
Continues as an integrated unit with full knowledge and understanding of all aspects of transport provision across the County to ensure decision making takes account of best outcomes for overall transport provision in the County	Doesn't alter the relationships and communication channels between the various stakeholders, if these need improvement
Continuity of service provision and senior management support that is currently provided by Technical Services Management	A 'no change' response will be perceived as accepting that there is no need for action / nothing that can be done to improve arrangements, or that analysis has failed to identify potential improvement paths. This will demoralise stakeholders and will have the effect of making it difficult to energise for any actual change initiatives that may be needed.
No disruption for staff – avoids unnecessary associated costs of change	No incentive to invest in a new IT system and make it the focus for improved processes and joint working
Evidence from other authorities does not suggest that moving away from an ITU model delivers any long-term benefits. Indeed there are examples where the situation (e.g. budget overspend) has got worse because management efforts have focused on the wrong issue (location of the PTU) instead of tackling the underlying cost and quality drivers.	

In conclusion to the advantages and disadvantages evaluation, option 1 is acknowledged to present advantages with regard to the priorities of Children's Services but also risk of fragmentation, duplication and missed opportunity to take advantage of the benefits that a whole system overview brings and could be perceived as contrary to other strategic change initiatives in delivery within NCC. Option 2 provides potential for the passenger transport team to make a greater contribution toward Children's Services priorities, for Children's Services to support the passenger transport team, offers reduced risk to business function continuity overall but risks the perception of an 'As is' scenario which will be limiting to the impact of this option. Option 3 is considered high risk in terms of being a largely untested model, particularly around the continuity of transport for purposes other than education. Option 4 (the do-nothing option) is recommended to be discounted owing to the acknowledgement of all stakeholders of the opportunity to enhance outcomes by adopting a different operating model going forward.

It should be noted that whilst the Home to School Transport review has focused specifically upon the operations of the Passenger Transport Team, that there is further public transport management activity within Northumberland County Councils Regeneration directorate under the Strategic Transport function. It is proposed that this is kept in mind during the developments set out and considered as Home to School Transport review workstreams begin to connect with the wider structure changes.

Single points of failure

The Leanness of the passenger transport team is set out within the resource section as are the pressures upon the team, particularly around peak times of the academic cycle.

Whilst systems and processes utilised to commission and deliver transport have been subject to continuous improvement there remains potential for further investment to provide more advanced systems which are joined up end-to-end, some areas currently rely too heavily on manual intervention, knowledge, and expertise to provide continuity of service.

The passenger transport team is a prime example of a business function with team members which are highly knowledgeable and experienced in maintaining the day-to-day delivery of the business function using their significant knowledge of the systems and processes that they have worked to establish.

Whilst the team should be commended for the effort to which they go and the scale of what they deliver within a lean structure and with tools they have available; this introduces the risk of single points of failure.

The greatest risk in this regard it is suggested is with respect to the Passenger Transport Manager, Transport Contracts and Compliance Manager and Senior Transport Network Officer without the deep operational knowledge and significant effort over and above the expectation it would be difficult to guarantee continuity of service without experiencing operational challenges that remaining staff would find difficult to overcome.

It is suggested that the move to more digitised transport management systems which runs as a thread throughout this report has potential to reduce single point of failure risk by introducing a more systematic approach with reduced need for manual intervention and application of knowledge specific to the current ways of working and pinch-points of the transport system.

It is also suggested that more integrated working between the passenger transport team and Children's Services would also provide opportunity for greater dissemination of knowledge and provision of wrap-around support. The school admissions and transport applications processes and the finance functions within transport and school organisation & resources being two key areas where most benefits could be realised.

3.5 Service Integration, Business Models & Systems – Key Recommendations:

1. Consider transport model options as set out in tables 01 to 04 as part of the wider structure considerations within Northumberland County Council.

2. Feasibility study into end-to-end transport management systems should prioritise exploring potential to reduce single point of failure risk.

3. Consider how Home to School Transport review workstreams connect with the wider structural review, including consideration of Strategic Transport activity delivered within the Regeneration directorate.

4. Quantitative 'Value for Money' Savings & Investments Developed in Collaboration with PeopleToo.

The recommendations which will have a direct financial impact are outlined below. It should be noted that there remain a significant number of recommendations in the report which will have a direct impact on the operational performance of the service and which will improve the user experience.

Pick up points: Pick up points (PUPS) are operated by the Home to School Transport team, but it has been suggested they could be better promoted to expand their acceptance by parents and usage by the team. Whilst they are used on some routes, capacity within the team limits their ability to perform this consistently, whilst it is often difficult to obtain agreement from parents to accept the pick up from a point other than the home. Likewise, route mapping (as covered below) is only performed on 25% of routes annually, therefore aligning a review of pick up points, in line with route mapping all routes each year, should generate some benefits. Moving forwards, it will be important that the team use the additional capacity released from implementing other recommendations, and through the required investment in the team to ensure this forms part of the standard routing process, whilst also engaging with parents to shift expectations. Pick-up points involve the team identifying a suitable location (e.g. mainstream bus stop) which is an easier location to pick up a child from. This may be a more efficient place to stop than going to someone's home, and/or more easily accessible. Key to their use are that certain parameters are set, including maximum distances to travel to a pick-up-point, and when children/young people would be exempt – i.e. use of a wheelchair. PUPs represent best practice and would be highly recommended to be expanded to generate further efficiencies in terms of route times, but deliver benefits to children/young people in terms of reducing on-board times. As PUPs are currently used, and this relates to an expansion, there would be no requirement to consult on a change to policy.

Personal Budgets: When compared to best practice, it is noted that the current uptake of personal budgets is low, at only 2.53%. It is noted that the mileage rate which is offered has recently (in the last few months) been increased from £0.29 to £0.45 a mile. In the short term this will have increased Personal Budget payments by c50%, but should hopefully facilitate an increase in uptake. A good target for the Service should be a minimum of 15%, but many high-performing authorities will reach 20%. However, an increase in the mileage rate may only increase uptake so much, and it will be critical that the offer of a Personal Budget is more integral to the application process and identification of an appropriate transport solution. Therefore an alteration to process would also be

proposed. Additionally, an increase above the £0.45 rate could be considered in the medium term as financial benefits of PB over Mini/bus/Taxi would remain significant. A cap could also be considered up to xx miles or £5000 for example which would still be below the average cost of SEN Transport which NCC pays per child (£6363). It will be important that a process is implemented to track through the avoided cost of placing more children on personal budgets, especially where an increase to the mileage rate is implemented.

Enhanced Budgets: In addition to an increase in the uptake of personal budgets which are calculated via a mileage rate, 'enhanced budgets' should also be pursued. Enhanced budgets are not currently used by the Council, but can be an alternative to personal budgets and may be paid at an enhanced rate. An enhanced budget may be offered where the alternative may otherwise be a 'high-cost' private hire route, or where it would be cheaper for the parent/carer to arrange the transport themselves direct. Again a cap could be introduced, but realistically each should be appraised on case by case basis. As with personal budgets, it will be important that a process is implemented to track through the avoided cost of placing more children on enhanced budgets.

Route Mapping: Whilst route mapping is undertaken annually, it is understood that this is primarily performed on 25% of routes (1 of the 4 areas which the Service is divided in to) as part of a wider commissioning exercise. Likewise, it is understood that, whilst the team do utilise route mapping software, this does not integrate as well as it could with other operational processes. As a priority, the Service should look to procure a Transport Management System (TMS) which would enhance this process, and ensure that route mapping would be expanded to all routes on an annual basis. It would be considered highly likely that this would result in the rationalisation of routes which would reduce the overall costs of delivery.

Applications: It is understood a high volume of applications are received per annum by the team, many of which clearly do not meet the associated eligibility criteria. This is placing a significant resource requirement on the team which could otherwise be avoided. Additionally, a revised process for applications more generally would be recommended, which would integrate more fluently with a Transport system, in addition to the system used by the wider Children's Directorate. It has been identified that the introduction of a 'self-assessment' tool, in addition to the process redesign, should assist in limiting a significant % of these high-volume non-complex applications and the overall resource requirement in the team.

Resource: Whilst there are a number of initiatives (see main report) which could be undertaken to reduce demand in the Transport team as referenced by the application above, benchmarking would suggest that the team is under-resourced. Currently, there are c12 staff in the team involved in day-

to-day operations, a ratio of c125 pupils per head. A better ratio would be c1:100. Further work would be recommended to understand where additional resource would support the team, but this would create additional capacity to undertake route mapping etc. and activities which would add value but which are not currently undertaken.

Independent Travel: The Council do not currently either deliver direct, or commission external, independent travel training which was removed during a previous re-structure. Whilst it is understood that some travel training is delivered direct by Schools, it does not appear that there is a consistent arrangement or specification in place for this training. It is considered highly likely that ITT would deliver significant savings for the Council given the relative costs of training a child versus ongoing support, whilst also improving outcomes for the Child in terms of improved independence. A specification should be developed in terms of how the Service would be delivered, in addition to a process for how suitable children would be put forward for training. Training is typically targeted from Year 9 onwards by authorities, but some will start as early as Year 7, whilst other Children may only become suitable in Year 11, or post 16.

Table 06:

The above initiatives have been quantified in the table below:

	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	2026/27
Pick up Points	£55,000	£110,000	£110,000	£110,000
Personal Budgets	£118,500	£177,750	£237,000	£237,000
Enhanced Budgets	£70,000	£147,000	£147,000	£147,000
Route Mapping	£92,500	£185,000	£185,000	£185,000
Non-Cashable				
Applications	Non cashable			
Investment				
Investment in Back Office team	-£150,000	-£150,000	-£150,000	-£150,000
Investment in Technology	-£55,000	-£55,000	-£55,000	-£55,000
Independent Travel Training				
Investment in ITT team	-£50,000	-£100,000	-£100,000	-£100,000
Independent Travel	£0	£44,632	£189,613	£469,869
Total	**£81,000**	**£359,382**	**£563,613**	**£843,869**

It should be noted that the savings detailed above are based on the 'as is' picture in terms of current demand/costs. More complex modelling could be undertaken to account for future demand, and inflationary increases, which would increase the potential benefits.

Calculations:

- **Pick up points:** Will be Council dependent, but likely 3-9% savings on route prices with higher savings possible if pick-up-points are not used at all, and lower if they are used, but at a reduced level. Of the Overall spend of £9.55m, only £3.7m is a minibus route. Suggest 3% of total spend, equivalent of £110k given pick up points are used. Assume 50% saving in Year 1, increase to full in Year 2.

- **Personal Budgets:** Uptake of PTBs is c2.5%. This equates to 38. Average cost of PTBs is £4,019 so cost of PTBs, £152k. If uptake was increased to 15% (225), this would increase spend to £905k. A net saving of £439k (6363 x 187 = £1191k. 2244 x 187 = 752). However, if increased overall mileage to £0.55 to support increase, this would reduce savings to £237k. (Calcs for this shown on spreadsheet). Assume 50% saving in Year 1, before increasing in 25% increments.

- **Enhanced Budgets:** NCC have a significant volume of high-cost taxi routes. All taxi routes over £10k (268) are delivered at an average of £21k, whereas taxi routes over £20k (145) are delivered at an average of £31k per route. The Council should look to approach all families on routes over £20k with an enhanced budget, and could set a maximum of £10k. If 5% of families currently receiving transport took up this off (7), this could save the Council c£147k. Assume 50% saving year 1, increase to full in year 2.

- **Route Mapping:** If no route mapping software currently used then 20-30% savings possible. Total minibus spend is c£3.7m. However, the Service do undertake route mapping and do use software, albeit on only 25% of routes per annum. Consequently, a conservative figure could be 5%. This would equate to £185k. Assume 50% saving in Year 1, increasing to full amount in Year 2.

- **Staffing:** Currently they are a ratio of c125 pupils per head (1502 / 12). A better ratio would be c1:100. This would mean an increase in c3 staff, or £150k. Full year effect in Year 1. However, could consider delay, as many other recommendations will free up capacity, and then assess. In addition to core x3 core staff, a further x2 staff (part time) have been included to deliver the Independent Travel training detailed below (£50k in Year 1, rising to £100k in Year 2 and 3).

- **Technology:** Work completed recently with benchmark Council (1600 pupils, £10m annual spend), who have recently been quoted a price for a similar system to the one proposed by Northumberland of £55k per annum for a 3-year contract. This includes both supplier/parent portals, vehicle tracking, real time alerts, route mapping, and implementation costs. Note – the above does not include NCC costs of implementation. Assume £55k per annum, starting in Year 1.

- **Independent Travel:** In-house, should cost c£3.5K per child to train. Current costs of £6363k per child. For purposes of modelling, assume 2 providers in year 1, increase to 4 in year 2. Typically, would target Year 9 onwards, so for purposes of modelling have assumed 2 full years of financial benefit.

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5. Annex 01: Methodology

i. To understand the current systems and processes for NCC commissioned transport a series of semi structured interviews were conducted with internal stakeholders.

Interview theme - Financial Governance.

Interviewees:

- Principal Accountant – Children's Services
- Senior Accountant – Children's Services
- Principal Accountant – Local Services
- Senior Accountant – Local Services

Interview theme - Operational Finance.

Interviewees:

- Transport Contracts & Compliance Manager – Passenger Transport Team.

Interview theme - Operations Management.

Interviewees:

- Passenger Transport Manager - Passenger Transport Team.

Interview theme - Monitoring & Compliance.

Interviewees:

- Passenger Transport Manager - Passenger Transport Team.
- Monitoring, Compliance and Enforcement Officer - Passenger Transport Team.

Interview theme - SEND Transport Applications.

Interviewees:

- Team Manager SEND - Children's Services.
- EHCP Co-ordinator - Children's Services.

Interview theme - Children's Social Care Transport.

Interviewees:

- Team Manager 01 – Children's Social Care.
- Team Manager 02 – Children's Social Care.
- Team Manager 01 – Children's Safeguarding.
- Team Manager 02 – Children's Safeguarding.

Interview theme - Adult Social Care Transport.

Interviewees:

- Senior Manager – Adult Social Care
- General Manager – Adult Social Care
- Service Development Manager - Safeguarding & Strategic Commissioning

Interview theme - Operations Delivery.

Interviewees:

- Transport Network Officer 01 - Passenger Transport Team.
- Transport Network Officer 02 - Passenger Transport Team.
- Administrative Assistant - Passenger Transport Team.
- Passenger Transport Manager - Passenger Transport Team.

Interview theme - Strategic Integration.

Interviewees:

- Head of School Organisation & Resources – Children's Services.

Interview theme - Management Information Systems and I.T.

Interviewees:

- Senior Manager - Performance and Systems Support - Children's Services.
- Systems Support & Development Manager - Children's Services.

ii.   To establish a broad perspective on local authority home to school transport infrastructures across the United Kingdom semi structured interviews were conducted with an external consultancy and a range of other local authorities.

Interview theme - Home-to-school Transport Consultancy Sector Experience Across UK.

Interviewees:

- TAS Partnership ltd.

Interview theme - Home-to-school Transport models, systems and challenges.

Interviewees (5 separate sessions):

- Devon County Council.

- Lincolnshire County Council.

- Norfolk Council.

- Wiltshire Council.

- Surrey County Council.

iii.   To understand the needs, feelings, experiences and to help shape service user consultations parent and carer representative bodies were consulted.

Interview theme - SEND Transport Users.

Interviewees:

- Northumberland Parent Carer Forum contributors.
- Parent of a young person with SEND who has previously engaged with NCC on transport related topics.

iv.   To understand the experience of service users and applicants for transport services a range of public consultations were created on the Citizen Space platform and distributed directly to identified user groups via Microsoft Power Automate.

Service user consultation surveys:

- SEND home to school transport users***** (**76** responses).

- Mainstream home to school transport users***** (**256** responses).

- Post 16 home to school transport users***** (**58** responses).

- Applicants****** for SEND home to school transport (**5** responses).

- Applicants****** for Mainstream home to school transport (**52** responses).

* Users who applied for and were awarded transport, having experienced both aspects, this should be considered when interpreting satisfaction scores.

** Applicants who were not awarded transport but who experienced the application process, this should be considered when interpreting satisfaction scores.

v.   To evaluate the robustness of safeguarding during home to school transport in addition to that undertaken as part of the main review activity an NCC safeguarding professional was

engaged to perform unannounced checks upon vehicles at school sites and general policy and safeguarding review.

Theme – policy, vehicle and driver readiness, driver safeguarding knowledge, following of processes.

Facilitator:

• Team Manager - Schools' Safeguarding.

vi.   To understand the systems and processes of Northumberland County Council transport delivery a range of operational information was reviewed including:

- NCC transport policies and supporting documents.
- Central government policy and guidance for transport.
- Access to admin/application system and key differences for different audiences: Pre 16, Post 16, SEN Pre-16, SEN Post 16.
- Transport appeals procedure.
- Organisation chart
- Details of Lot 1 to Lot 6, scope of each.
- Details of the DPS application, questionnaire, self-certification system, etc.
- Examples of local bus service commissioning process.
- Examples of the operator compliance process issued prior to agreeing contract.
- Examples of assurance audit monitoring, compliance and spot check info.
- Link to operators' web pages.
- Examples of safeguarding/DBS info help by transport compliance officers.
- Example of spot check schedule of activity.
- Examples of pro-active spot checks.
- Examples of reactive spot checks.
- Examples of depot compliance checks.
- Back record of historic complaints.
- Example social services referral form.
- Example EHCP learner referral.
- Examples of communications from mainstream application system.
- Examples of monthly budget reports.
- Examples of quarterly performance reports with KPI's.

Appendices

6. Appendices

Appendix 01: Terms of Reference.

Terms of Ref -
January 2022.pdf

Appendix 02: Home to school policy review briefing.

Home to school
policy review briefing

Appendix 03: Post 16 Home to school policy review briefing.

Post 16 Transport
review briefing paper

Appendix 04: Appeals process review briefing

Appeals briefing
paper - Rev 01.pdf

Appendix 05: Safeguarding review briefing

Safeguarding
briefing paper - Rev 0

Appendix 06: Operational Recommendations

Operational
Recommendations - F

Appendix 07: Resident service user feedback summary reports.

Key Points - Home to   Key Points - Home to   Key Points - Post 16   Key Points - Home to   Key Points - Home to
School Transport in N   School Transport for   Education Transport -   School Transport App   School Transport App

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