

## **Briefing Note to FACS**

<b>Directorate:</b>	<b>Children's Services: Education and Skills</b>
<b>Subject:</b>	<b>School Transport Review</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>3<sup>rd</sup> February 2022</b>

### **Purpose of Briefing Note**

To inform the Executive and Families and Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny committee of the forthcoming review of the school transport arrangements at Northumberland County Council.

To ask the Executive officers to review the tasks identified to undertake the review.

### **Background**

School transport within the Council has had a number of challenges throughout the pandemic to consider above the usual transport routines. The budget for SEN transport has been significantly underestimated and the Families and Children's OSC have requested a review of the governance of school transport.

The terms of reference are set out below and the initial tasks identified. Within the terms of reference, a capture of initial aspects of exploration have been considered, it is anticipated that there may be further aspects emerging (opportunities) and these will be explored ongoing and form part of the review.

A time phased approach is proposed with a review update to the Acting Deputy Chief Executive at each phase end. A summary report will be provided to Executives and FACS with summary recommendations proposed to be received at the June 2022\* FACS committee.

## **Terms of Reference**

### **1. Introduction**

1.1 The Passenger Transport team are currently based in the Planning and Local Services Directorate – the schools transport service is within the passenger transport team.

1.2 The Passenger Transport team covers:

- Mainstream School transport
- School transport for SEND children (with eligibility determined by SEND team)
- Post 16 school transport
- Public Transport Supported Bus Services and other aspects of Public Transport
- Transport for Adult Social Care (with eligibility determined by ASC team)
- Transport for Children's Social Care (with eligibility determined by CSC team)

1.3 There have been a number of discussions and queries raised about where the service would best fit and whether this would best fit within Children's Services.

### **2. Budget**

2.1 The current School Transport budget is: £9,230,550. The SEN school transport budget is £7,123,530 and is held by the SEN team with transport co-ordinated and planned by PTT.

- Mainstream school transport (budget held by Passenger Transport Team)
- Post 16 transport (budget held by Passenger Transport Team)

(The Passenger Transport team also manages budgets for ASC transport, CSC transport and Public Transport Supported Bus Services)

### **3. Tasks**

**Phase 1-** by Feb 27<sup>th</sup> 2022

3.1 Review of current school transport policies to determine if scope and application is reflective of regulation and guidance.

3.2 As part of the review, identify whether there are constraints that need a policy direction.

3.3 Review SEND transport policy and determine if scope and application is reflective of regulation and guidance.

3.4 Identify whether there are constraints that need a policy direction or a systems approach and make recommendations

**Phase 2** – by February 27<sup>th</sup> 2022

3.5 Review of safeguarding processes and checks.

3.6 Review of appeals process and compliance with regulation.

### **Phase 3-** by March 10<sup>th</sup> 2022

3.7 Consider transport needs of ASC/ CSC and whether efficiency/ greater VFM can be achieved

### **Phase 4-** by April 10<sup>th</sup> 2022

3.8 Review of resources which support all areas of school transport, looking at:

- Staffing
- Determination of Eligibility for Transport and transport needs
- Commissioning process / contract management and practice
- Budget planning/setting and forecasting models

### **Phase 5-** by May 16<sup>th</sup> 2022

3.9 Consider where service best fits and link with other directorates and services. Within this consideration provide any systems recommendations as well as modelling and practice to support the service including exploration of transport models and identify any single points of success/ failure.

Proposals to be considered with Acting Exec Director for Planning and Local Services and Lead members in both Children's Services and Local Services portfolio updates by Executive members – CMC to agree.

## **4. Resource Allocation**

4.1 Lead: Audrey Kingham working with David Laux and Mark Cusack plus Neil Dorward to support the policy analysis, flow chart production and review reporting, Specialist staffing and teams will be included for aspects of the review such as safeguarding and HR.

Final report to Acting Deputy Chief Executive May 20<sup>th</sup> 2022.

## **Recommendations**

Executive officers and The Families and Children's Overview and Scrutiny review the tasks as set out and confirm they are the correct tasks to complete the review

Consider whether any additional tasks should be added to the current terms of reference

## **Key Issues**

- The review will examine throughout the approaches as to whether the operations is sufficiently child and family centred and meet needs
- The review will examine budget planning and co-produced work such as SEN transport. SEN Transport budget has been overspent for at least two budget years, the review will examine planning and forecasting systems and models for SEN transport.

- Policy and Direction will be considered alongside implementation and communication of all systems and processes including safeguarding, contracting, forecasting and planning.
- The review will examine whether there are opportunities to consider transport models, best value of the budget available, development of integrated school and wider service transport arrangements including digital supporting infrastructures.
- The review will consider whether the transport service is futureproofed and whether there is a plan to address 'meeting needs closer to home' for children including the transport service and aspects of environmental considerations in the transport infrastructure.
- Is the service located in the 'best fit' for an integrated service to meet the needs of children and families?

\* subject to a full and timely contribution and schedule and engagement from all resources to support the completion of the review.

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