

Appendix 3

School Travel Assistance Policy 2011 (DRAFT) – Summary of Consultation feedback

This report brings together the comments and concerns raised at the consultation meetings with parents and carers about the draft Southwark School Travel Assistance Policy.

This report records the questions asked by the parents and carers attending the six meetings. The meetings were held in;

- Salmon Youth Club, 14 March, 5-7pm, young peoples consultation
- Tooley Street Council Offices, 16 March, 5-7pm, parent/carers
- Tooley Street Council Offices, 21 March, 5-7pm, parent/carers
- Cator Street Centre, 25 March, 10-12am, parent/carers
- Cator Street Centre, 13 May, 10-12am, parents/carers
- Tooley Street Council Offices, 17 May 5:30- 7:30pm, parent/carers

The consultation meetings were attended by 42 parent/carers and the young person's consultation had 6 young people attend and was facilitated by the young persons advocate from Cambridge House. There is a separate report from this consultation.

The following local Authority officers attended the meetings: Head of Pupil Access (consultation lead), Business Co-ordinator and Projects Officer and Home to School Transport Services Manager.

The consultation has been advertised in various ways,

- letters were sent out to all of the families who currently receive transport
- Letters were sent to parents who currently receive transport via the escort on the child's transport.
- invites and policy were sent to Sunshine House to consultants and Therapists
- letters were sent to schools and schools were asked to publicise the consultation and to send out copies of invite to interested parties within the school setting
- Copy of policy and invite to community groups, Contact a Family, Parent Carers Council and Cambridge House
- Published on the Southwark website

During the consultation on 25 March several parents voiced concerns that they had not received a copy of the invite. Due to this the Local Authority extended the consultation period to 20 May and held two extra parent/carer meetings on 13 and 17 May. The consultation was also held open for responses on the Southwark website.

Parent partnership advisers attended all the parent meetings and took extensive notes of all the questions and responses from the parents and local authority offices. Parent partnership is an impartial service that is provided by the Local Authority, as a support to parents who have a child with special educational needs as set out in the Education Act 1996. This report is written by Southwark Parent Partnership and summarises all the comments and concerns discussed by those who attended the meetings.

The Consultation Meetings

The consultation meetings were mostly well attended by parents, fifteen parents came to both meetings at Cator Street on 25 March and on 13 May. Both of these meetings were on Friday mornings. The evening meetings were less well attended with between three and six parents attending each session. The meetings were weekdays only, no weekend meetings but the evening sessions were arranged to ensure that working parents had an opportunity to attend. Parents were also able to contribute to the consultation via an email link from Southwark's website. Parents reported at the meeting on 25 March that they had not all been informed that there was a consultation about the new travel assistance policy and to give more opportunity for a wider response from parents, so the consultation was extended for two months until 20 May 2011. At the final meeting on 17 May there was an observation from a parent that still some parents did not know about the consultation. The Local Authority Officers explained that the information had been sent out via the child's transport, posted to home addresses of children receiving transport, Southwark schools, Sunshine House, Southwark voluntary groups and charities and published on Southwark website. It was agreed that it had been publicised widely but that when informing the community about the outcome of the consultation the information should be in Southwark Life as that goes to every property in Southwark.

The Head of Pupil Access outlined the reasons why the Local Authority had rewritten the policy on home to school transport. She explained that a complete review of the transport service was underway which included the policy, process used to allocate transport, operational systems as well as the contracted services used to deliver transport (vehicles). The LA wanted to produce a policy that was clear for parents and carers and also, had a more flexible approach to providing transport solutions for children eligible to receive the service. The current policy has limited options for support, in most cases a bus or cab is provided. The Local Authority recognises that some young people may benefit from or be able to receive different forms of travel assistance help and support to enable them to get to and from school each day for example, independent travel training has been proposed as additional travel solutions for young people where it is appropriate. The new policy sets out to be clearer as to who is eligible for assistance and that all young people would be assessed as to what sort of assistance they need and that the assessments would take place annually to look at if there has been a change in need of the young person. Currently the assessment is through a paper application form; the proposed new assessment would be much more comprehensive and take into account advice from other professionals that work with the young person. The Head of Pupil Access explained that the assessment had not yet been formulated and that the Local Authority is keen for parents to contribute to its development. Parents who were interested in being part of the parent group to form the assessment process have given the Local Authority their contact details.

It was explained to parents that the proposed changes are to make the policy deliver a more flexible service that meets the needs of all the young people in Southwark and also, help the local authority to make best use of its resources.

Questions from parents were often repeated at each meeting and they are summarised in eight main priorities that will be discussed below alongside officers response/actions. Outside of these priorities there was concern that the Local Authority would deny transport assistance to parents who were in receipt of higher rate mobility allowance for their child. It was explained that this point had been reworded in the draft policy to say that the Local Authority would take into account if

the child was in receipt of higher rate mobility. This would mean that the Local Authority would ask parents if they would like to transport their own child to school and if they agreed the parents would be paid a millage allowance. The Local Authority confirmed that this would only be an option in agreement with parents and carers and that no one currently would be denied assistance because they were in receipt of any other benefit.

Conclusion:

Parents have had general concerns that the policy changes were due to changes in funding and that it is a cost saving exercise. The Local Authority stated that the main aim of the draft policy is not solely to save costs; some of the changes may be a more expensive option in the short term to achieve longer term benefits (e.g. investing in providing one to one independent travel training to children/young people). However, the local authority needs to ensure the best use of council resources in delivering travel support as well as ensuring that services are flexible and appropriate to meet the needs of children and young people. Parents want to be part of developing the assessment process and asked the Local Authority to establish a parent user group. The consultation sessions raised lots of issues around individual children, highlighting the fact the young people who are in receipt of travel assistance need to be assessed as individuals and the service they receive should be tailored for the individual child.

8 main discussion priorities from consultation meetings:

Discussion point	Consultation response	LA response/action
1. After school transport	Parents asked questions about transport provision to young people to and from after school clubs. Some parents thought that this should be provided and some parents thought that it was appropriate for the parent to collect the child themselves. The Local Authority discussed the difficulties and expense of having transport to make several journeys to and from the same school. Agreed that further discussions with schools and other areas of the authority would take place to follow up on this point and see where any support for parents in these situations could be achieved.	This will be raised with schools as part of the post consultation process.
2. School placement and transport not to be linked	Parents voiced concerns and confusion about school placements and the link to getting assistance with travel. Some parents were convinced that the LA took into account transport costs as the main criteria for refusing a school if a parent requested an out of borough school as the most appropriate school for their child. Glenn acknowledged this point and informed parents that this would be discussed further with colleagues in the SEN team and legal services for clarification before finalising.	Legal and SEN comments have been sought and the policy amended to clarify the position which is also summarised in point 33 of the school travel assistance policy report.
3. Set up a parents' user group to ensure transparency & involvement.	Parents felt that they were not part of the process and the LA felt that they did not have the views of parents and young people that use the service. A solution to these issues was discussed whereby a parent user group will be established to inform the LA of parents' views and opinions and to help develop the implementation of the policy.	A significant number of parents and carers that attended the consultation meetings put their names forward to be involved in development of the transport assessment tool/process. Parent Partnership will arrange a first meeting before the end of term.
4. Look at pick up points and risk assessments	Parents were concerned that pick up points may be far from their homes and that they would have to stand outside and wait for transport to arrive. Parents were also concerned that there should be a risk assessment of each pick up point for each child. The LA explained that the use of pick up points was to ensure the effective use of time, for example, if the transport was picking up several children from one estate rather than go to each individual property everyone would be picked up in one place.	Any proposed pick up point will be near to the family home e.g. at the entrance to a block of flats if appropriate and each proposed point fully risk assessed before any implementation. Pick up points will not be used for all rounds and only when suitable.

5. Need the council to pledge to work with parents.	Some parents felt that the LA often asked them for their opinions and then did not listen. Parents have asked the LA to pledge to working in partnership with parents.	A school travel assistance working group of parents will be established to provide views and have involvement in the implementation of the policy (see 3 above).
6. Parent partnership to do a booklet that explains the process	Parents have asked that a booklet is produced in simple language that outlines the legal rights and responsibilities that parents have if they have a child with special educational needs. Parents felt that they were unclear about the services that the local authority is required by law to provide.	In progress, to be completed during the Autumn term 2011.
7. Get parents back together to discuss after changes to the policy	Parents want to have the same opportunity as in the consultation to hear and discuss the final policy document	Consultation responses have been circulated a copy of the final policy which will be sent to all consultees and a meeting held to feedback in September 2011.
8. Train parents to deliver Independent Travel Training (ITT)	Many parents at the consultation meetings were interested in independent travel training. Some parents would like to receive the training so they can deliver it themselves to either their own child or to be able to train other young people. Several parents at the meetings explained that their child was desperate to receive some support to become an independent traveller.	Phase 1 of the independent travel training programme is underway the first group of children are receiving travel training from fully trained staff. Consideration will be given to extending the ITT programme to parents in future.

Notes from meetings taken by Southwark Parent Partnership.