

# **Travel Assist**

**14 November 2018**

# Our Legal Duty

- Section 508B of The Education Act 1996 – local authorities to make such travel arrangements as they consider necessary to facilitate attendance at school for eligible children. The provision for eligible children being:
  - Statutory walking distance (for all children):
    - If the nearest school is beyond 2 miles (if below the age of 8) or beyond 3 miles (if aged between 8 and 16)
  - SEN, a disability or mobility problems:
    - Make transport arrangements for all school aged children who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school because of their mobility problems or because of associated health and safety issues related to their SEN or disability. Eligibility for such children should be assessed on an individual basis to identify their particular transport requirements.
  - Extended rights eligibility:
    - Provide free transport where pupils are entitled to free school meals if their parents are in receipt of maximum Working Tax Credit

# Travel Assist Service

## ■ Travel Assist Team

- Office hours 07:00 – 17:30 (2 shifts)
- 21.81 FTE
  - 3 Supervisors
  - 15 Coordinators (G3) – 11.31 FTE
  - 6 Customer Advisors incl. 2 x apprentices (G2) – 5.5 FTE
  - 2 x vacancies back filled with agency (1 x G2, 1 x G3)
- Busiest period of the year July - October
- Restricted leave during summer break

# Travel Assist Service Cont.

- Provide travel assistance for 5,870 pupils daily
  - 4,250 pupils on transport per day
  - 1,600 with a bus pass
- 600 routes per day on average
  - 80% of vehicles are minibuses
  - 478 pupils travel in a wheelchair
  - shortest journey for a pupil - 0.2 miles
  - longest journey for a pupil - 44 miles
  - largest number of vehicles going to one school is 47 minibuses
- 80 personalised transport budgets (PTB)
- Bus passes issued to pupils:
  - 16/17 – 1,500 pupils
  - 17/18 – 1,620 pupils
  - 18/19 – first quarter 50% increase in temp accommodation passes
- Largest provision of school transport in the country

# Travel Assist Finance

- Travel Assist budget - £18.4M
- £3.5M budget pressure
- Previous financial years:

			Budget	Actual	Variance
Financial year			£	£	£
17/18	Travel Assist	Net Expenditure	17,446,650	20,537,880	3,091,230
16/17	Travel Assist	Net Expenditure	13,543,745	18,249,493	4,705,748
15/16	Travel Assist	Net Expenditure	15,710,900	16,792,354	1,081,454

# Travel Assist Finance Cont.

- £14.2M contractor spend
- £6.2M guide spend
- Other
  - bus passes - £359k
  - personalised transport budget - £317k
  - other local authorities (OLA) - £390k
  - Administration - £783k
  - Income (Post 16 and OLA) - £383k
- Average cost of transport for each pupil (per academic year) is £4,800

# Travel Assist Service – Guides

- 600 + guides provided every day
  - 471 permanent
  - Over 100 relief guides employed by BCC
  - agency guides
    - need fluctuates based on sickness absence, authorised leave etc.
    - on average cover 6/7 routes per day (on Monday can be up to 16 routes)
  - Travel Assist notified at 07:00 – 2 x team to cover within 1.5 hour period
- Not all pupils require a guide – they may be on a guided route as other pupils on that vehicle require a guide
- Unguided routes
- Routes with 2+ guides
- 1:1 guides (individual routes or shared routes)

# Service Improvements

- Implementation of a routing IT solution
- Implementation of Independent Travel Training Service
- Move to paperless office
- Online bus pass application  
[www.birmingham.gov.uk/travelassistbuspassform](http://www.birmingham.gov.uk/travelassistbuspassform)
- Training for office staff – upskilling (autism awareness and effective communication)
- Implementation of complaints database and revised complaints process
- Working with schools to implement their own fleet/driver/guide
- Service redesign



# Application Process

- Statutory Duty
- Transport Referral Form completed by parent/carer
- Form sent to school to confirm school place and provide supporting evidence if required
  - 882 new transport referrals received June to August)
  - not including YR6/YR7 transfer
  - new process for YR6/YR7 introduced last year to review pupils with school – reduced pressure/paperwork on parents/school/Travel Assist
- Application assessed by panel of officers
- Decision based on individual pupil and holistic need
- Response sent to parent and school within 15 working days
- School/contractor advise parent/carer of route/time etc.
- Bus passes sent to school/home

# Application Process Cont.

- Travel assistance provided:
  - Bus pass
  - Home to school transport guided/unguided
  - PTB (personalised transport budget)
  - Public transport guide (and bus pass)
    - 1:1 transport
- Stage 1 Appeal
  - average 20/30 per month
  - reviewed and assessed by Supervisors
- Stage 2 Appeal
  - receive average 4/5 per month
  - 2 years ago average 60+ per month (in crisis)

# Routing

- Routes constantly reviewed throughout the academic year
- All schools reviewed during June/Aug when pupils change (leavers/new starters)
- Largest school has 47 routes
- Routes optimised, re-scheduled based on location of pupils – this may result in change of route/guide
- Whole school provision (12 schools)
  - routed by contractor
  - reviewed by Travel Assist 18/19 – optimised further
- Collaboration with schools
  - 3 schools provide own transport (totalling 15 routes)

# Routing

- Previously no IT solution to review/optmise routes
- Wall maps used – out of date, could not provide data reports
- New IT solution reviewed 18 months ago but requirements not met, interim solution sourced – Q Routes
  - Allows optimisation of routes
  - Shows route timings
  - Reduces dead mileage
  - Improved guide allocation
- Currently sourcing full IT solution
  - parent/carer/school portal (similar to Uber)
  - improved communication for all stakeholders
  - Quicker bus pass assessments (initial request response automatic)
  - secure GDPR
  - management of guides hours – reduced Travel Assist workload
  - contractor/driver compliance improved
  - Improved data analysis

# The National Picture

- Increase in demand for SEN provision across all LA's
- Strain on budgets
- Statutory duties to be met
- Benchmarking completed against other LA's including recent West Midlands wide survey– BCC was shown as cost effective and value for money
- Attend ATCO best practice - West Midlands Education Travel Support Group
- Meeting with Core Cities to review best practice

# School engagement

- SEN Headteachers Forum
- School meetings
  - Annual (moving to bi-annual)
  - As and when required throughout the year
- Guide provision
  - Schools often supply relief guides where possible
  - Schools provide training free of charge for guides based at their school
- Complaints database (in addition to corporate icasework)
  - School IT provided an online complaints database
  - Rolled out as pilot – increase to all schools by December
- School own transport provision
  - Supported schools to provide their own driver/vehicle/guide
  - 3 x schools – 15 routes
- Pick up points
  - 2 schools changed to pick up points
  - Reduced carbon emissions, improved health

# Service Challenges and Solutions

- Guides
  - Rolling recruitment – low uptake
  - Ageing workforce – retiring
  - Working with schools to provide guides
- Over reliance on minibuses
- Contractors
  - old contract – increasing costs
  - low availability of accessible vehicles on the market
- New Home To School Contract
  - Market engagement
  - additional work for team on lead in and at implementation (peak time)
- Clean Air Zone
  - Majority of routes based inside the zone or travel through it
  - Potential increased costs due to Euro 6 minibus requirement (new vehicles)
  - Potential reduced hackney carriage vehicles

# Service Challenges and Solutions cont.

- Data
  - require new IT solution for improved management and reporting of data
  - Working towards new IT solution but there will be a cost
- Communication
  - Small team working over two shifts
  - Currently reviewing and implementing a new telephone system (as per BCC call centre)
  - Potential to have support at peak times from the call centre in future
- Budget
  - Essential to maintain a quality service whilst managing budget pressures
- Complaints/comments
  - Increased complaints at peak time
  - Parent/carers complaints high at beginning of new academic year due to changes to routes/guides
  - New IT solution will improve response to parent/carer information request – reduce complaints
  - Implemented school complaints online system to improve service
  - Working with PSS to manage day-to-day complaints
  - Transferred to corporate icasework complaints database



# Independent Travel Training (ITT)

- We are working with children, young people and their families to promote and deliver ITT
- Working with Adult Services – currently 2 x travel trainers
- Links with Health – reduces obesity, lower carbon emissions
- Working with external source to improve/grow the service. They will gather baseline data including:
  - Identifying potential C&YP in correct age range
  - Meet SENAR officers/schools to discuss individual C&YP identified
  - Promote full or partial ITT (home to school or to pick up point)

**Questions?**