

## **Home to School Transport Inquiry - Executive Commentary**

I would like to thank the Chair and all the members of the Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This has been a very thorough review of the key areas in the Home to School transport service that we have had to come to grips with and invested a great deal of time to improve over the past year.

There have been delays in presenting this report to Full Council, as the Council, Birmingham and the world responded to the challenges of COVID-19. Many of the issues raised have been identified and were already in progress as part of our SEND improvement and transformation journey, which has been developed at pace over the past year.

In responding to COVID-19 our priority was supporting our most vulnerable citizens and our schools have done a phenomenal job in ensuring they remained open for those children with SEND who were able to attend school safely. And for those who were not able to attend school that they were supported appropriately remotely at home.

The Transport Policy Statement for 0-25-year olds has been actively progressed and monitored and appears to be working well, although this has been difficult to gauge during lockdown with fewer children attending school since March this year. However, during this time we have been able to focus on improving online access to transport policy and applications.

In the report communication was highlighted as an issue and this is at the heart of our transformation approach, as through improved communications we are rebuilding the confidence of all our stakeholders, our children, young people and their families. Our summer communications plan, alongside our service improvement plan, has been implemented and is being progressed. COVID-19 has changed our approach around this key issue especially as staff work from home, and this has been reflected in the way we plan our work. Dedicated telephone numbers and email addresses have been provided; this has significantly improved communications with families and has been welcomed. On-line applications for transport can now be made and a corporate review is under way on future communications approaches, especially for those providing frontline services. The service has had regular communications with parents during the COVID-19 period via letters and newsletters. A communications plan for the whole of the SEND service has now been completed. This is being achieved through the local offer and online applications which significantly streamlines the process and delivers early decisions on placements and transport.

The Parent Carer Forum is working very closely with the service area and meets regularly with the Assistant Director and myself as Cabinet Member to ensure there are effective and robust working arrangements and communication channels in place to ensure parents' and carers' voices are heard and embedded in service improvement. The Parent Carer Forum is part of the Home to School Stakeholder Group and has a representative on the SEND improvement board. There have been areas where the PCF have been instrumental in supporting the service area and in the Autumn term we will be undertaking joint parent surveys to capture areas that need to be further improved.

Safety and issues regarding guides and driver training were raised in the report. Over recent months additional guide capacity has been provided to improve service delivery in this area, and some of our transport operators themselves are now able to supply guides when a guide goes off sick at short notice. The additional guides are subject to the full DBS process. The service is being restructured and new training officer posts will provide future training for the guides, which will commence in the Autumn Term 2020. The transport operators provide the necessary training for their drivers as part of the contract arrangements.

In order to improve performance in this area at pace, interim additional senior management support has been put in place to deliver the service improvement program around safety, safeguarding, IT and contract management.

Another key issue raised in this report was in connection with the number of children being out of school because of a lack of or unsuitable transport. This included children attending our Pupil Referral Units who have SEND. At this current time all applications have been processed and all new applications will consider each individual pupil's circumstances.

Our new IT system will enable the service to work much closer with schools and their incident logs regarding children out of school due to transport issues. The data and record keeping will enable the service to also respond to identified issues and to resolve any transport issues promptly.

KPI's have been developed for the service which are linked to the improvement plan. The KPI's are reported through a weekly dashboard. For example, KPI 4 requires complaints to be processed and responded to within 10 working days. This is extended to 30 working days for more complex cases. A copy of the dashboard is appended to this report.

In terms of assessments, our performance has been strengthened and performance is now measured on a weekly basis. Assessments are now carried out in liaison with schools and the Occupational Therapy service is used for those pupils with very complex needs. The new process has reduced stage 1 appeals from 18 in February to nil since July and stage 2 appeals from 11 to 1 over the same period.

All the transport contracts (excluding National Express Assisted Transport Services) were renewed in January/February 2020, so that new terms and conditions could be implemented, which included performance criteria. The operators submit monthly performance information, which enables the service to continuously monitor performance. In addition, we have tripled the number of vehicle inspections from 3 to 9 a month during 2020/21 to check the condition of vehicles. A new compliance team will work in the field monitoring the services as they are operated and at schools.

We have also purchased new software which will significantly improve the delivery of the service and when fully rolled out will enable schools and parents to monitor the exact location of vehicles via an app.

Safeguarding is crucial and the most fundamental issue for all local authorities and one which has been at the heart of our improvement journey. The new contracts introduced in February this year ensured that there is a robust process in place to check the suitability of all drivers and guides via the DBS checking process. We will be enhancing this process further during the Autumn Term when we will be signing up to the online update service. The new process ensures that no driver who has a positive DBS is employed on our routes until the reasons for the positive DBS have been considered by the Council and permission given to drive. Through our improved procurement processes, training is a key element as well as ensuring that there is a specific process in place to deal with any subcontracting, including a declaration by the operator that a subcontractor meets all our terms and conditions. We are working closely with the vehicle licensing authorities, Traffic Commissioner and VOSA to continue to improve safety and safeguarding.

We have put in place a robust performance monitoring system linked to seven key performance indicators these are reported on weekly and through the monthly management information returns from the operators.

The application process is generic and any extra necessary circumstances that need to be considered can be provided on the form. Where an emergency home to school transport application is made as a result of a change in circumstances, these applications can be fast tracked to ensure that we protect our most vulnerable children during difficult times, as happened on numerous occasions during lockdown.

The issue on clarification on the meaning of the term 'exceptional circumstances' within the form has been raised a number of times. We have been advised by our legal officers that it is unhelpful to provide a definitive list because it depends on the specific facts of each individual case and the nature and extent of the circumstances for the individual child and family concerned. This would cover situations such as family circumstances, emergency housing, and change in health conditions which necessitates the provision of transport to ensure school attendance and where all other options have been considered.

The service has a robust improvement programme in place as was reported to the Committee in July. The work to improve the service continues, and this together with a new service structure and IT system will see the service improve over the forthcoming months.

I am absolutely committed to our aspiration for Birmingham to be a child friendly city; a city that keeps our children safe and provides them with the opportunities to fulfil and realise their potential.

Councillor Kate Booth  
Cabinet Member Children's Wellbeing

**Summary Report for Board**

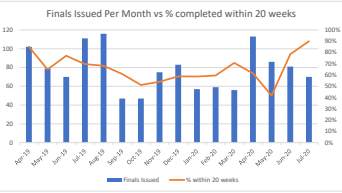
		Finals Issued											
		Jan-19	Feb-19	Mar-19	Apr-19	May-19	Jun-19	Jul-19	Aug-19	Sep-19	Oct-19	Nov-19	Dec-19
Finals Issued					102	79	70	111	116	47	47	75	83
% within 20 weeks					85%	65%	77%	70%	68%	61%	51%	54%	59%
Month		Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20
Finals Issued		57	59	56	113	86	81	70					
% within 20 weeks		59%	60%	71%	62%	42%	79%	90%					

		EHCP Quality Assurance											
		Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20
Quality Assurance of new EHCPs					41%	65%	80%	74%					
					17%	18%	0%	6%					
					42%	37%	20%	20%					

Narrative: There is an upward trend in the quality and relevance of the content for plans produced. The Quality Assurance Framework now assists the team while writing plans, which is having a significant impact. Health colleagues have introduced QA of plans prior to issue since July before issue.

		EHCP Reviews - 2020/21											
		Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21
Reviews expected													
Reviews received													
Reviews completed													
Year 6 Reviews expected													
Year 6 Reviews received													
Year 6 Reviews completed													
Year 11 Reviews expected													
Year 11 Reviews received													
Year 11 Reviews completed													

Narrative: Since March 2020, the paperwork for 5,793 EHCPs has now been completed at the stage of being with the plans at the stage of having been or being issued. Work has taken place to implement new processes to ensure the timeliness for undertaking an EHCP review is embedded going forward. Link professionals have been allocated to all EHCP plans and targeted work is taking place to ensure all children transitioning or undertaking a year 9 review are prioritised for an autumn review meeting.



		Medications											
		Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20
Monthly Summary													
Medications Pending			22	24	1	12	14	8					
Medications resolved before meeting					1	0	0	8					
Costs for Medications			£11,544.00	£9,371.00	£0.00	£5,760.00	£9,548.00	£0.00					

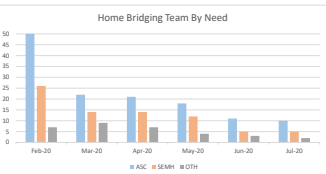
Narrative: As the implementation of the link professional has been established across the service there has been a significant reduction in the number of medications taking place. In July all 8 requests were resolved without the need for a formal medication with parents. The approach has proved highly productive removing the need for parents to engage in a lengthy processes. The continued work of the parent link officer has further strengthened the early help support for families.

		Parent Link Service Call Log											
		Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20
Monthly Summary													
New Referrals			24	44	32	66	76	93	182				
Outgoing Referrals			1	2	4	8	28	30	50				
Closed Cases			23	42	28	58	48	63	132				
Call Logs			0	28	103	68	41	132	200				
Total													

Narrative: Parent Link Officers work alongside all agencies to seek a resolution, improving the outcomes for the child/young person. The team consists of one team coordinator, and 4 Parent Link Officers. The themes for the referrals received are primarily linked to requests for an EHCP assessment, school placements, communication breakdown and advice and guidance.

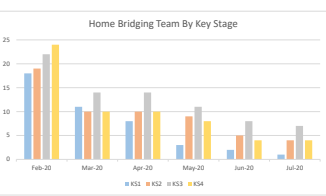
		Children home tutored (by number)											
		Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20
Monthly Summary													
ASC			50	22	21	18	11	10					
SEMH			26	14	14	12	5	5					
OTH			7	9	7	4	3	2					
Total			83	45	42	34	19	17					

Narrative: Children in receipt of home tuition has reduced from 83 to 17 since February this year. The Home Bridging Team have continued to work with professionals and families to help secure appropriate provision for the next academic year.



		Children home tutored (by key stage)											
		Jan-20	Feb-20	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20	Dec-20
Monthly Summary													
KS1			18	11	8	5	4						
KS2			19	10	10	9	5	4					
KS3			22	14	14	11	8	7					
KS4			24	10	10	8	4	4					
Total			83	45	42	31	19	17					

Narrative: From September, the Home Bridging Team will be working in locality areas to support families and schools. Additional resource is being provided to assist specifically in the return to school post Covid-19. The team will be working closely with schools as it develops early intervention approaches with schools and more bespoke provision for students linked to their local community and school.



		Home To School Transport Appeals											
		<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><b>Stage 1 appeals</b></p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><b>Stage 2 appeals</b></p> </div> </div>											
Narrative		<p>Stage 1 appeals have reduced from 18 in Feb 20 to 0 in July 20. There are currently no ongoing Stage 1 appeals</p> <p>Stage 2 appeals have reduced from 11 in Feb 20 to 1 in July 20. All ongoing Appeals are being prioritised for completion</p>											

		Yellow Letter complaints											
		<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around;"> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><b>Yellow Letter Complaints</b></p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;"> <p><b>iCasework Complaints</b></p> </div> </div>											
Narrative		<p>We have received 16 Yellow Letter and 11 iCASE Complaints in the last 6 months.</p> <p>We currently have no on-going Yellow Letter complaints</p> <p>We currently have no iCASE complaints ongoing.</p>											