

## **Children and Families Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	20 March 2023
<b>Report Title:</b>	Update on the transformation of travel support for children and young people
<b>Report of:</b>	Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services
<b>Report Reference No:</b>	CF/73/22-23
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All wards

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. In November 2022, the children and families committee considered a report setting out the findings and recommendations from an independent review of travel support for children and young people. The committee agreed a number of recommendations to progress the transformation of travel support over the next three years.
- 1.2. The November report recommended that the committee receive interim reports around specific actions that require committee approval and to receive an initial update report within six months. This report sets out the progress to date and seeks approval for forthcoming planned activity to implement the transformation of travel support.

### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1. The current arrangements for providing travel support for children and young people are unsustainable. The company, Edge Public Solutions (Edge), was appointed to conduct an independent review of Cheshire East's arrangements in 2022. The Edge review report made a number of recommendations to reduce the budget pressures and improve the customer experience in relation to sustainable travel support for children and young people over the next three years.

- 2.2.** Cheshire East's medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) 2023/24 to 2026/27 includes growth of £5.4m over the next four years (+£4m in 2023/24, £0 in 2024/25, +£600k in 2025/26 and +£800k in 2026/27). This growth proposal reflects the increase in special education needs and disabilities (SEND) demand and increasing costs of fuel and contracts. It also factors in savings identified in the external review, the SEND review work and ensures travel support is provided in line with policy and statute.
- 2.3.** The independent review recommendations were presented to the children and families committee in November 2022, along with an outline implementation plan, financial improvement plan and equality impact assessment.
- 2.4.** This report provides:
- An update on progress to date on implementation of the transformation programme.
  - Information on the requirement to publish the post-16 home-to-school transport policy statement for 2023-24.
  - Details on planned transformation activity over the next six months, including:
    - Consultation on the review of payments in relation to personal travel budgets for 2023/24.
    - Consultation on the review of all school transport policies in line with the Edge review recommendations [agreed by the committee in November 2022], including a review of charges for the post-16, spare seat and Poynton High School scheme for 2023/24.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1.** The children and families committee is recommended to:
- a. Note the progress to date on implementation of the transformation programme, including the imminent appointment of specialist professional capacity, funded from the school transport budget.
  - b. Consider and approve the proposed arrangements in relation to:
    - the post-16 home-to-school transport policy statement for 2023-24.
    - the revised payments in relation to cash grants/personal budgets for the 2023-24 academic year.
    - the proposed changes to the existing school transport policies in line with the Edge review recommendations, including the review of transport charges (the post-16, spare seat and Poynton High School scheme).

- c. Approve the proposals to go out to consultation and the results of the consultation will be brought back to committee.
- d. Delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children and Families, in consultation with the Executive Director of Place, to make decisions in relation to progressing the milestone and activity at Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 respectively, with any specific actions requiring a decision by committee to be subject of a further report.

#### **4. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 4.1. Implementing the transformation plans within the timeline proposed will require the external consultants and officers to work at pace if we are to achieve the ambitious savings proposed, meet statutory deadlines and ensure that the experiences of children and their parent/carers are positive.
- 4.2. Parents/carers who currently transport their own children to school have been impacted by the cost of living crisis, including increases in the cost of fuel. Making a change to the current payment, as soon as possible, would ensure that these payments are fairer, more in line with other local authority areas and would support these parents to continue to transport their children in line with our new policy.
- 4.3. Consulting as soon as possible on the charge for spare seats, Poynton High School scheme and the post-16 parental contribution will give parents sufficient notice of any proposed changes so that they can plan their arrangements accordingly. Finalising the Poynton High School Grant Agreement for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years will ensure that arrangements that were in place with Transport Service Solutions (TSS) are formalised within the council whilst the wider policy review takes place.
- 4.4. Publication of the post-16 home to school travel assistance policy by the 31 May 2023 will ensure that the council is compliant with the latest statutory legislation and guidance.

#### **5. Other Options Considered**

- 5.1. The committee could maintain the existing payment arrangements for personal travel budgets. However, this would not increase uptake and could result in some existing arrangements being handed back to the council to put in place more costly transport such as taxis.
- 5.2. The committee could go ahead with changes to the spare seat, Poynton High School and post-16 parental contribution charges in the 2023/24 financial year. However, this would not be achieved before publication of the post-16 policy at the end of May 2023.
- 5.3. If the council does not carry out all the recommendations within the timescales provided by the review, then the ambitious savings may not be

achieved, and the council would not be able to sustain the existing school transport arrangements due to budget pressures.

## **6. Background**

- 6.1.** In November 2022, the children and families committee considered a report setting out the findings and recommendations from an independent review by Edge Public Solutions in relation to travel support for children and young people. The committee noted the underlying principles and cultural change set out in the review and delegated decision making to the Executive Director of Children and Families, in consultation with the Executive Director of Place, to make a number of decisions in relation to progressing the transformation of travel support for children and young people. The report also committed to providing an interim update report within six months.

### **Progress to date on implementation of the transformation programme**

- 6.2.** The focus of activity since the November committee has included:
- Mitigating against an increase in spend in 2022/23, including the promotion of cash grants/personal budgets, increased management oversight on all new budget commitments and the regular review of all temporary arrangements.
  - Ensuring we have the most accurate budget projections and savings plan for 2023/24 to include in the council's medium term financial strategy.
  - Communication with key stakeholders on the proposed changes.
  - Procurement of the specialist professional services required to implement the transformation, commissioned through the council's independent broker, Bloom.
- 6.3.** The cost of appointing specialist professional services for the next two years will now come from the school transport budget for 2023/24 and 2024/25 as the transformation fund is no longer available due to budget savings.

### **Post-16 home-to-school transport policy statement for 2023-24**

- 6.4.** Transport provision for students in England between the ages of 16 and 19 is arranged by each individual local authority. These arrangements must be published in an annual transport policy statement by 31 May each year. Early publication (March) enables for more effective home-to-school/college route planning to happen before the end of the current academic year.

- 6.5.** The Department for Education’s (DfE) statutory guidance Home to School travel and transport guidance – statutory guidance for local authorities (July 2014) sets out what local authorities must consider when making their transport policy statements for children and young people of compulsory school age – these statements must include provisions for students with special educational needs and disabilities.
- 6.6.** The sixth form age duty applies to young people of sixth form age and young people with education, health and care plans up to age 25 where they are continuing on a course started before their 19th birthday. The DfE has issued statutory guidance Post-16 transport and travel support to education and training (January 2019). The overall intention of the sixth form age transport duty is to ensure that:
- learners of sixth form age can access the education and training of their choice; and
  - if support for access is requested, this will be assessed and provided where necessary.
- 6.7.** Local authorities do not have a duty to provide free transport - they may provide discounted schemes. In Cheshire East post-16 travel assistance is only provided to children and young people with an education health and care plan (EHCP).
- 6.8.** It is not proposed to make any immediate policy changes to the statement for 2023-24 as this will be reviewed alongside all school transport policies over the coming months (see paragraphs 6.31 – 6.34). Although the charges for post-16 transport are not published within the policy (they are listed separately on the council’s website), these will need to be agreed by the committee following the consultation and should be considered as part of the policy.
- 6.9.** Early publication of the policy means that parents/carers can apply for post-16 travel as soon as possible once the policy has been published and we can notify parents/carers if they need to apply or not. Early publication also provides sufficient time to assess eligibility, advise parents/carers, and route-plan and tender contracts in May/June. Parent/carers will then be notified of travel arrangements before the school summer holiday and ‘meet and greet’ meetings can be arranged. There is a significant proportion of young people with SEND who are eligible for travel assistance with autism that benefit from knowing about travel assistance changes in advance of the summer break.

### **Planned transformation activity**

- 6.10.** A summary of the milestones to transform travel support for children and young people is set out at Appendix 1. Appendix 2 provides further detail of

the activity within each milestone. Those activities that are due to complete in the next six months are highlighted.

- 6.11. Any significant decisions, including changes to the school transport policies, will be reported to a future committee meeting. Other activity will be progressed under the delegated authority to officers requested above.

### **Consultation on the review of charging policies of the post 16, spare seat and Poynton High School scheme for 2023/24**

- 6.12. Milestone 2 includes the review of travel policies to re-set the expectations of travel, to provide clarity and ensure robust application of entitlement. This includes the recommendation from the review to harmonise charging for the post-16 transport, spare seat and Poynton High School scheme, bringing them into line with other authorities and reflecting inflation. It also includes agreeing the Poynton High School scheme and underlying Grant Funding Agreement for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years following the transfer of services-from TSS to the council. As set out in the Recommendations above, this decision will be delegated to the Executive Director of Children and Families, in consultation with the Executive Director of Place. The longer-term commitment to the Poynton High School scheme will be included as part of the review of the council's school transport policy as set out in paragraphs 6.31 to 6.34 below.

- 6.13. The charging rates are not currently included in the text of the school transport policies but are published separately on Cheshire East Council's website.

- 6.14. There are currently three different charges for parent/carers in Cheshire East:

- **Post-16 charges** - There is an annual parental contribution of £450 levied for eligible 16-19 year olds. This has been in place since its introduction in September 2018. A parental contribution cannot be levied for adult learners in receipt of home-to-school/college transport. The provision of free or subsidised travel assistance will not normally be provided for mainstream students.
- **Spare/paid for seat** - The cost of a "paid for/spare seat" is currently £460. This rate has been in place since September 2018, to coincide with the introduction of the parental contribution. The cost of a "paid for/spare seat" was previously £930 and was reduced to encourage further take up. Of the 35 young people in this scheme, 30 attend mainstream high schools, 2 attend a special school and 3 are at local primary schools.
- **Poynton High School scheme** – The council continues to operate a bespoke scheme in conjunction with Poynton High School. TSS previously provided the high school with a school transport service for

children who are not eligible for free school transport at a cost of £700 per year. When TSS ended in March 2022, its services transferred to the council, who have continued with the same transport providers and comparable arrangements. Eligible and ineligible pupils are transported to the school on the same vehicles.

**6.15.** Demand for post-16 transport assistance has steadily increased over recent years, in line with the increase of the number of children and young people with an EHCP. This increased pressure is expected to continue to increase. The cost of providing transport is significantly above income generated from charges. The post-16 budget for 2023/24 is approximately £1.44 million and the highest cost contract is approximately £62k per year.

**6.16.** A summary of the charges and projected income for 2022/23 is presented below.

Category	Students as at December 2022	Annual charge per pupil	Projected income for 2022/23	Estimated income if £900 per place
Post-16 (16-18 year olds)	129	£450	£58,050	£116,100
Post-16 (exceptions)*	10	£0	£0	£0
Spare seat	35	£460	£16,100	£31,500
Poynton High School scheme	95	£700	£66,500**	£85,500
Adults (19-25 year olds)	42	£0	£0	£0
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>311</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>£140,650</b>	<b>£233,100</b>

\* Exceptions are – students placed with Cheshire East foster carers, parents in receipt of a mileage rate/personal travel budget and students attending educational establishments that cannot access the 16-19 bursary and the family are in financial hardship.

\*\* School makes a payment to Cheshire East in addition to parental charges.

**6.17.** The provision of spare seats and post-16 transport is discretionary, so there is a significant variance in provision across local authorities. Most local areas do not offer a spare seat option. Latest data from neighbouring local authorities, compared to Cheshire East is set out below.

	Cost of Post-16 Parental Contribution 2022/23		Cost of Spare Seat 2022/23	
	Standard	Reduction for Low-Income Families	Standard	Reduction for Low-Income Families
<b>Cheshire East</b>	£450	N/A*	£460	N/A*

<b>Cheshire West &amp; Chester</b>	£0 (discretionary)	N/A	£880	£440
<b>Staffordshire</b>	£688	£543	N/A**	N/A**
<b>Stoke</b>	£1,000	£500	N/A	N/A
<b>Stockport</b>	£510	£255	N/A	N/A
<b>Warrington</b>	£460	N/A	N/A	N/A
<b>Shropshire</b>	£918	£294	N/A	N/A
<b>Liverpool</b>	£0 - discretionary	N/A	N/A	N/A

\* We would refer parents to the 16-19 Bursary Fund via their educational setting to apply for financial assistance

\*\* Permanently discontinued the "Vacant Seat Scheme" December 2021

- 6.18.** It is difficult to compare against local bus prices in Cheshire East as these tend to operate on a more commercial basis. D&G advertise student travel for a year for £450 or £3 per day for a return trip in Crewe or £2.50 per day in the Knutsford area. This is not comparable for post-16 as the majority of provision is through smaller vehicles (taxis).
- 6.19.** The Edge review recommended increasing seat charges to £900 per annum, in line with Cheshire West and Chester. This increase would generate additional annual income of around £92,450 in 2022/23 figures if the charge were applied to all students. This may be reduced if the contribution from Poynton High School is used to offset their parental charges.
- 6.20.** The average cost for post-16 charges from the five areas listed above who charge for a place is £715. This equates to £3.76 per day for a full-time place. Cheshire East's charge of £450 equates to £2.36 per day for a full-time place.
- 6.21.** The only other local authority providing spare seats in the above table is Cheshire West, who charge £880 per place, or £4.63 per day for a full-time place. Cheshire East's charge of £460 equates to approximately £2.42 per day for a full-time school place.
- 6.22.** In the consultation we will seek feedback on the option for a reduction in the spare seat charge for low income families. For post-16 young families who are struggling to pay, the 16-19 Bursary Fund, available via their educational setting, will be available to support them. The current appeals process will also provide a route for any families who feel that they should not pay at all or the full amount for transport.

## Consultation on the review of payments in relation to personal travel budgets for 2023/24

- 6.23.** Evidence has shown that paying a mileage rate is considerably less expensive than providing home-to-school transport. However, parent/carers have provided feedback that the current mileage rate of 25p per mile is not sufficient to meet the costs of transporting eligible children and young people to and from school. This is due to the increase in the costs associated with running a vehicle, including increased fuel costs over recent years.
- 6.24.** The acceptance of a mileage rate is a voluntary arrangement and can be refused by parent/carers. In these cases, the local authority must provide transport for eligible children/young people to attend school college.
- 6.25.** Neighbouring local authorities are currently paying higher rates to Cheshire East, as set out below:

Local authority	Mileage rate for 2022/23
Cheshire East	25 per mile
Cheshire West & Chester	45p per mile up to 10,000 miles per academic year 25p per mile for all miles over 10,000 per academic year
Staffordshire	Pay travelling expenses at pre-agreed rate
Shropshire	40p per mile, but only for nursery or post-16 students
Liverpool	£3 per day, plus 45p per mile for up to two journeys a day within Liverpool
Warrington	45p per mile

- 6.26.** Increasing the uptake of personal travel budgets is key to the proposed transformation programme. These have been actively promoted over recent months as set out below:

	September 2022	January 2023
Number of personal travel budgets	74	107
Number of children (includes siblings)	80	113

- 6.27.** To ensure the existing payments are maintained and to increase further uptake of personal travel budgets, we are proposing to consult on an improved payment rate for 2023/24. The estimated cost of increasing the existing 107 contracts to 45p per mile would be £124k (average cost at 25p per mile £1,445 per annum). The average cost of a mileage allowance paid at 45p per mile would be approximately £2,600 per annum. The compares

favourably to the average cost of transporting a child/young person with SEND which is approximately £7,753 per annum.

- 6.28.** The consultation will consider whether it is appropriate to include a lower mileage rate once a threshold mileage is reached, eg, in Cheshire West and Chester, their mileage rate reduces from 45p per mile to 25p for every mile over 10,000 miles per academic year. It will also look to align with HM Revenue and Customs advice around rates and allowances for travel.
- 6.29.** Whilst the initial proposal is to look to improve the mileage rate, we will also work with parent/carers to improve the process and accessibility of personal travel budgets over the coming months as part of the new policy development.
- 6.30.** Subject to consultation responses, it is proposed to implement the new mileage rate as soon as is practicable, ideally before the end of the summer term.

### **Consultation on the review of all school transport policies in line with the Edge review recommendations [agreed by the committee in November 2022]**

- 6.31.** Following the Edge review, the committee approved the proposal to streamline and revise the school transport policy and process. It is proposed to work with key stakeholders to develop and consult on new travel support policies. This includes ensuring that the policy wording resets expectations of travel, independence at the core, provides clarity, and ensures robust application of entitlement.
- 6.32.** The current statutory guidance on home to school travel for children of compulsory school age has been in place since 2014. The DfE has recently consulted on revisions to this guidance and we expect this to be published in the near future. We will ensure that Cheshire East's revised policies are in line with the new guidance.
- 6.33.** Cheshire East's current policies are listed below:
- **Compulsory School Age Travel Policy**
  - **Post-16 Education Travel Policy**
  - **Education Travel Behaviour Code**
  - **Education Travel Payment Policy**
  - **Education Travel - Appeals and Complaints Policy**
- 6.34.** The consultation on the above existing policies will take place over the next few months. The outcome of the consultation will be presented to a future committee to make decisions on these policies.

## **7. Consultation and Engagement**

- 7.1. TOGETHER is our shared definition of coproduction in Cheshire East and the transformation of travel support will be carried out together with our key stakeholders, including parent/carers, young people, our staff and providers. Other stakeholders including transport operators, schools and settings will also be part of the transformation.
- 7.2. An initial consultation will be carried out around the payments made in relation to travel support. This will be followed by a more detailed consultation working closely with our key stakeholders on the school transport policies, including charges for transport, over the coming months,
- 7.3. DfE's home to school travel and transport statutory guidance states the following at Part 4 headed Policy Changes:

*'52. Local authorities should consult widely on any proposed changes to their local policies on school travel arrangements with all interested parties. Consultations should last for at least 28 working days during term time. This period should be extended to take account of any school holidays that may occur during the period of consultation.*

*53. Good practice suggests that the introduction of any such changes should be phased-in so that children who start under one set of transport arrangements continue to benefit from them until they either conclude their education at that school or choose to move to another school. Parents make school choices based on, amongst other things, the home to school transport arrangements for a particular school, and any changes might impact adversely on individual family budgets.'*

- 7.4. The following consultation timeline is proposed:

20 March 2023	Agreement from the children and families committee to consult
22 March – 17 May 2023	Consultation period (28 working days) during term time.
By April 2023	Publish post-16 statement for 2023/24
5 June 2023	Children and Families Committee to consider and agree response to consultation on mileage rates
Before the end of the summer term (if possible)	New mileage rate to be applied to new and existing personal travel budgets
By end of June 2023	Agreed charges for mileage rates published on the council's website
By September 2023	New mileage rate to apply
Date to be confirmed	Children and families committee to consider and agree changes to the school transport policies, including charges.

- 7.5. The purpose of the consultation will be to:
- Seek consultees' views regarding the proposed changes and charges.
  - Enable views of stakeholders to be considered and to influence the proposal; and

- Ensure that those views are reported to and considered by the children and families committee who will make the decision about whether the proposals should be approved.

## **8. Implications**

### **8.1. Legal**

- 8.1.1. The local authority is required by the Education Act 1996 as amended by the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to make suitable travel arrangements for eligible children to attend school. This includes the duty to promote sustainable modes of travel for children and young people of compulsory school age. The government has also issued statutory guidance called Home-to-school travel and transport guidance 2014.
- 8.1.2. This means that a local authority is under a duty to have regard to it when performing their duties in relation to home to school travel and transport and sustainable travel.
- 8.1.3. The local authority's transport duties apply in respect of arrangements for young people aged 16-18 years and those continuing learners up to 19 years. Under Section 509(AA) Education Act 1996 the local authority has a duty to set its own transport policy, details of transport arrangements and financial assistance in respect of reasonable travelling expenses that the local authority considers it necessary to ensure access to education or training for learners of sixth form age. The local authority must publish the statement before the 31 May and publishing by that date would demonstrate adherence with the law.
- 8.1.4. Section 509 (AB) (1) Education Act 1996 requires local authorities to set out how their transport statement facilitates the attendance of young people with SEND.
- 8.1.5. Local authorities should publish their transport policies on their "local offer" as required under s30 of the Children and Families Act 2014.
- 8.1.6. The local authority has a legal duty to ensure that any decision it makes is transparent and has been made applying the Wednesbury principles and has a rationale for the decision made. When carrying out a consultation certain guiding principles ('The Gunning principles') must be followed:
- Consultation must take place when the proposal is still at a formative stage
  - Sufficient reasons must be put forward for the proposal to allow for intelligent consideration and response
  - Adequate time must be given for consideration and response
  - The product of consultation must be conscientiously taken into account

- 8.1.7. Failure to follow the principles could leave the local authority open to a judicial review challenge.
- 8.1.8. Since the closure of TSS, the Poynton High School scheme has been operated by the council and has provided transport continuity to both the school and its children. From a contractual point of view, work has been undertaken to update the scheme to a grant funding arrangement to better fit with the council's duties and powers. A draft Grant Funding Agreement has been agreed with the school but, as the scheme currently sits outside the council's current transport policies, Committee approval (or delegation) is required to continue with the scheme. As set out above, there is some risk of legal challenge if operating outside of established policies but, pursuant to the Constitution, this is just one factor for the decision maker to consider alongside other relevant considerations such as service continuity and the availability of alternative options.

## **8.2. Finance**

- 8.2.1. The transport budget is under significant financial pressure as highlighted in 8.2.2 – 8.2.7.
- 8.2.2. The budgetary pressures around school transport are increasing due to increasing numbers of pupils with an education, health and care plan (EHCP) requiring transport, the increased costs of contracts due to a reduced number of suppliers and the impact of fuel inflation.
- 8.2.3. The financial improvement plan proposed by the Edge report estimates £2.1m annual savings at the end of the three-year transformation plan. The achievability of these savings will have to be carefully considered to establish whether they are deliverable in the current climate of increased demand, national inflationary increases and deflated market conditions. Either way, the result is expected to be a net increase in transport costs.
- 8.2.4. The Edge report is based on a consultant's forecast during the review period (March – July 2022) which members should consider against the latest financial position to be reported at the second finance review. The current indicative position is a £3.8m forecast overspend for 2022/23.
- 8.2.5. The 2023/24 MTFS includes growth of £4m relating to an increase in transport provision. The 2023/24 budget assumption is that £0.5m of Edge savings will be achieved and a further £0.5m of SEND process challenge savings. It should be highlighted that SEND transport provision is anticipated to increase in future years, in line with EHCP referrals, which will significantly increase cost pressures.

8.2.6. A further increase of up to £440k of specialist consultancy costs will need to be funded from the transport budget in 2023/24 with the withdrawal of the transformation funding.

8.2.7. The recent announcement that Arriva Bus services will no longer be operating in Cheshire East may impact on the school transport budget in 2023/24 and on wider access to schools. Officers from Cheshire East Council continue to engage with Arriva and other commercial operators, through our local bus partnership arrangements. We will ensure that travel support is in place for all children eligible for free home to school transport.

### **8.3. Policy**

8.3.1. This paper proposes a consultation on changes to the council's school transport policies in line with recommendations from the Edge review. Proposed changes will be presented back to the children and families committee for decision.

### **8.4. Equality**

8.4.1. A significant number of existing travel arrangements are put in place for children with SEND and are accessible to meet their needs.

8.4.2. We will ensure that any changes to policies, services and practice do not discriminate against any particular groups and, where possible, we will promote equality of opportunity.

8.4.3. An initial equality impact assessment (EIA) was presented to the committee in November 2022. This has been updated to ensure that the activity proposed over the next few months is included. This assessment will be updated again following the outcome of the consultation.

### **8.5. Human Resources**

8.5.1. Additional capacity is being secured through Bloom to deliver the transformation of travel support.

8.5.2. The transformation includes establishing a new integrated travel support team. This will need support from HR and will include consultation with staff, unions etc, where appropriate.

### **8.6. Risk Management**

8.6.1. There is a risk that, due to some delays in procuring the additional capacity to drive the transformation programme, the pace of change needed to make the proposed savings for 2023/24 will not be achieved. There is already a delay in initiating the consultation exercise, however the recommended proportional approach to consultation means that some of the benefits can be achieved in 2023/24 if approved by

committee. Senior managers within the council will regularly monitor and scrutinise this risk through performance and budget update reports.

- 8.6.2. There is a risk that demand for transport will continue to increase, in particular from children with education, health and care plans. This reduction in demand is being addressed and reported separately through the DSG management plan.
- 8.6.3. There is a risk that stakeholders will not engage positively with the consultation. We will work with key stakeholders ahead of the consultation to shape this.
- 8.6.4. There is a risk that the proposed increase in spare seat charges will have a significant impact on low income families. The consultation will include an option for a reduction in charge for these families. For post-16 young families who are struggling to pay, the 16-19 Bursary Fund, available via their educational setting, will be available to support them.
- 8.6.5. A risk management framework is being established as part of the new governance arrangements to oversee transformation of travel support.

## **8.7. Rural Communities**

- 8.7.1. Children and young people across all areas of Cheshire East access travel support. However, as the statutory provision of free home-to-school transport is based on distance-to-school, residents in rural areas of the borough are more likely to be affected by any changes.
- 8.7.2. As those children living in rural communities often rely on home to school transport provision to access their learning, any proposals to improve the delivery and customer experience for these services supports our rural communities.
- 8.7.3. Any options as a result of the review will take into consideration the current geography and accessibility of transport in Cheshire East.

## **8.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children**

- 8.8.1. Wherever possible, the transformation of travel support will aim to improve the experiences and/or mitigate against any negative impact for children and young people. Children, young people and their parents are key stakeholders in the transformation.

## **8.9. Public Health**

- 8.9.1. The provision of walking and cycling routes to school and promoting active travel, including safer walking routes to school is in line with our Public Health priorities. Wherever possible, we will support children,

young people and their families to engage in physical activity to help them to live well and for longer.

## 8.10. Climate Change

8.10.1. Wherever possible the transformation of travel support we will aim to benefit climate change through maximising shared transport arrangements, ie, larger vehicles, shared taxis etc. Initiatives such as independent travel training, cycle to school and available walking routes all make a positive contribution to the council's carbon reduction ambition. However, this is not always possible, in particular where children with SEND need to travel to more specialist provision, sometimes outside of Cheshire East.

<b>Access to Information</b>	
Contact Officer:	Gill Betton, Head of Service for Children's Development and Partnerships <a href="mailto:Gill.betton@cheshireeast.gov.uk">Gill.betton@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a> 07764 166262
Appendices:	Appendix 1 – Summary of Transformation Milestones Appendix 2 - Milestone Activity
Background Papers:	Children's Travel Support Review Papers, Children and Families Committee, November 2022 <a href="#">Children's travel support review committee paper</a> <a href="#">Appendix 1 – Independent review report</a> <a href="#">Appendix 2 – Financial improvement plan</a> <a href="#">Appendix 3 – Equality impact assessment</a>

### Summary of Transformation Milestones

(Those to be completed in the next 6 months highlighted)

Milestone	Description	Completion Trigger	Start Date	End Date
Milestone 1	Revised implementation plan, savings and performance monitoring and communication plan	Completion of agreed detailed implementation plan and timescales, baseline savings plan, tracker and budget and performance Monitoring arrangements signed off	Feb 2023	Feb 2023
Milestone 2	New transport policies and governance	New policy, including charging policy, approved and launched. Governance in place. New Grant Agreement in place for the Poynton High School scheme for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years.	Feb 2023	May 2023
Milestone 3	Integrated travel support team	Structure for new integrated travel support team approved	Feb 2023	Sept 2023
Milestone 4	Assessment policy and procedure	Assessment policy and procedure in place.	Jul 2023	Oct 2023
Milestone 5	Re-assessment policy and procedure	Re-assessment policy and procedure in place. Re-assessment of all passengers as a one-off exercise complete.	Aug 2023	Dec 2023
Milestone 6	Personal budgets	Personal budgets policy and procedure in place. Reassessment of all passengers complete.	Mar 2023	Dec 2023
Milestone 7	Independent travel training	Model of training delivery agreed and implemented	Oct 2023	Apr 2024
Milestone 8	Available walking routes	Proposals accepted. Agreed schemes implemented	Apr 2023	Oct 2024
Milestone 9	Market engagement	Initial market engagement complete	Feb 2023	Apr 2023

Milestone 10	Licencing	Licencing improvement plan agreed	Nov 2023	Apr 2024
Milestone 11	Tenders	Re-tender via DPS framework completed	Feb 2023	Mar 2024
Milestone 12	Contracts	Review and redraft of contract documentation for DPS re-tender in place	Feb 2023	Apr 2023
Milestone 13	Reprocurement	Reprocurement complete	Feb 2023	May 2023
Milestone 14	Re-routing changes	Re-routing complete	May 2023	Apr 2024
Milestone 15	System changes	System changes complete	Feb 2023	Sep 2023
Milestone 16	Handover/exit plan	Handover document/exit plan agreed with managers	To be agreed	To be agreed

### Milestone Activity

#### Milestone 1

##### Implementation plan

- **Produce a detailed change plan** to implement the agreed recommendations from the independent review and cultural change needed, including governance, action leads, timescale and impact expected.
- Put in place arrangements to project manage and **monitor and evaluate progress** against the implementation plan.

##### Financial improvement plan

- **Review and revise the financial improvement plan** to provide a baseline for the start of the transformation.
- Ensure **robust tracker and budget management arrangements** are in place to monitor spend, savings and costs avoided.

##### Management information

- **Produce and implement clear performance management reporting** on costs and delivery performance to allow more accurate forecasting and management.

##### Communications and engagement

- Implement plans that are **aligned with our TOGETHER definition of coproduction**, by ensuring the transformation is carried out together with our key stakeholders, including parent/carers, young people, our staff and education and travel providers.
- **Provide regular communications and engagement** to schools, parents and users of transformation and culture shift, re-setting expectations and importance of the changes required.

#### Milestone 2

##### Policy review

- **Lead the review of travel** policies to re-set the expectations of travel, to provide clarity and ensure robust application of entitlement.
- Ensure review includes **promotion of alternative travel solutions** such as personal budgets and travel training and clarifies the appeal process.
- **Harmonise the charging policies** of the post 16, spare seat and Poynton High School scheme charges, bringing it into line with other authorities and reflecting inflation.
- Agree the **Poynton High School Grant Agreement** for the 2022/23 and 2023/24 academic years.
- Ensure **protocol is in place for annual routine inflation**.
- Lead on the **development of the consultation and outturn report** to seek the necessary approvals.

## Policy launch

- **Launch the new policy and all assessment and delivery processes** into 'travel solutions' and away from transport and implication of a 'door to door' transport offer being the norm.

## Milestone 3

### Integrated travel support team

- i. **Produce proposals** to an agreed approach to integrate all aspects of travel delivery into a dedicated and integrated travel team that ensures corporate wide support and overall accountability for total expenditure.
- ii. **Support implementation** of the agreed approach
- iii. Lead on development of a **joined-up strategy** and direction for travel with internal and external stakeholders.

## Milestones 4 and 5

### Assessment and reassessment of need

- **Develop assessment and re-assessment forms and processes.**
- Ensure assessment and re-assessment **provides relevant supporting evidence required** for entitlement to be determined and highlight opportunities to offer alternative travel offers such as personal travel budgets and travel training.
- Support relevant contacts **to integrate travel needs into the assessment and reassessment process for education, health and care plans (EHCPs).**
- Ensure that **application forms are completed for SEND by parents** with full evidence of circumstances requested and checked.
- **Coordinate the re-assessment of all passengers as a one-off exercise**, prioritising those under statutory distance and agree protocols for implementation of changes with services and members.
- Ensure transport is **discussed as part of the annual EHCP review** to reflect changing needs that may impact transport requirements.
- Ensure a process is in place on a routine basis to ensure **record of review and outcome is kept.**
- **Prioritise changes** for those under statutory distance and lacking distance data, and expensive single person journeys.

### Social care budget controls

- Oversee the **introduction of controls** on social care, **gatekeeping** of requests, **notice period** to allow effective procurement of supply and reporting use against available budget and reason codes.

## Milestone 6

### Personal travel budgets

- **Develop a flexible offer of personal travel budgets** for all appropriate passengers.
- Lead on the **re-assessment of all passengers** for personal travel budgets in line with prioritising expensive single passenger routes.

- Coordinate the development of a **new process and procedures** to automate payments and eradicate process of waiting for attendance data before approval.

### **Milestone 7**

#### **Independent travel training**

- Develop model of training delivery** based on commissioning service from a partner and using in-house resources to lead on promotion and identification of candidates.
- Coordinate the implementation** of independent travel training.
- Ensure travel training is promoted** and uptake monitored and evaluated.

### **Milestone 8**

#### **Available walking routes (AWR)**

- **Identify and review previous decisions** on current routes that are not deemed as AWRs for home to school transport purposes.
- Where routes are now deemed to be AWR and supported by managers to progress, **prepare and coordinate consultation**.
- **Identify small capital schemes** to improve safe walking routes on potential high-volume routes.
- **Prepare paper** setting out consultation outcome and capital proposals to committee.
- **Support the implementation** of routes agreed by committee as AWR.
- Develop a protocol and strategy for approval to implement safe walking routes, in line with the new policy.

### **Milestone 9**

#### **Market engagement**

- Lead a **comprehensive supply market engagement exercise** to better understand the market, highlighting any good practice/issues with managers.
- Encourage **new suppliers to access the DPS** and bid for work.

### **Milestone 10**

#### **Licensing**

- Work with the Licensing Team to **identify and implement improvements** to the licensing process to make entry for new applicants more appealing.

### **Milestones 11, 12 and 13**

#### **Tender and contract arrangements**

- Put into place a system of **reverse auctioning** for all contracts to increase competition and conduct re-procurement exercise over three tranches commencing September 2023.
- Develop use of **tactical batching of tenders**
- **Provide coaching and support to suppliers** to use electronic and reverse auctioning. Focus on communications to schools and users.
- **Synchronise contract end dates**.
- **Update contracts** with re-balanced notice periods, more specific to smaller vehicles etc.

- Ensure the **DPS window** for new applicants is always open.

### **Milestone 14 and 15**

#### **Re-routing and system development**

- Lead on the **integration of systems** and extension of the use of Mobisoft to assessment to streamline the process from application to delivery.
- **Carry out changes in a modular process** beginning with improving Mobisoft data integrity, ownership, and user training on the system.
- **Oversee re-route using software for each school**, prioritising schools with more than 5 vehicle routes, ensure re-routing over 3 tranches before development of new route tenders for re-procurement using reverse auctioning
- Bring together **data on route mileage** and test value on a cost per mile basis during tender process and during lifetime of contract.
- Oversee the **data cleanse exercise** on Mobisoft, if required.

### **Milestone 16**

#### **Handover and exit plan**

- Develop **handover documents** and associated **operations manual**.
- Phased **handover of all operations and delivery responsibility**.
- **Formal sign off of programme**.
- Formal **project review and assessment of savings** delivered; **identification of any additional opportunities**.