Cheshire East Council
Travel Support for Children & Young People
Review findings and recommendations

Transport arrangements for children and young people have significantly changed over recent years.

A rise in those eligible for travel, in particular children with special educational needs (SEND), along with increasing challenges of identifying effective transport supply have impacted on both the cost of travel and the experiences of our children and young people who use these services.

The recent re-organisation of delivery with a return of the service from TSS, to a CEC managed service presents both an opportunity for improvement and a challenge to ensure effective organisation.

This review explored options to reduce the pressure on the travel support budget and improve the effectiveness and customer experience in relation to providing sustainable travel support.

The review gathered information and feedback to help understand the current position, identify options for change and make recommendations.

Richard Hall

July 2022

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0   OVERVIEW & CONTEXT

Overview

1.1   In March 2022, Cheshire East Council provided daily travel support for 3,557 children and young people with 2,609 attending mainstream schools and settings, 925 attending specialist provision and 23 in other settings. This vital service enables children and young people to attend a learning environment that meets their needs as close as possible to where they live.

1.2   The service has represented a challenge to manage effectively and forecast costs with certainty. Budgets are split across the Children and Families and Place directorates and the service is currently forecasting an overall funding requirement of £17.98million for 2022/23. However, the agreed budget, including additional medium-term financial strategy (MTFS) funding to mitigate some of the pressures, has been agreed as £15.29million, presenting the service with an in-year budget challenge of £2.69million.

1.3   The council has conducted some outline analysis to understand the reasons for the budget risks and challenges, which are largely explained by increases in the demand for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) transport and increasing contractor prices. In March 2022 the service was transporting 925 SEND passengers which was 83 more than in September 2021 and 32% more than pre pandemic levels in March 2020 when only 697 passengers were being transported.

1.4   According to a children and families departmental management team (DMT) report in January 2022, there has been a 32% increase in the average cost per SEND pupil from £6,028 per passenger per annum in March 2020 (pre-pandemic) to £7,928 as at October 2021.

1.5   Projections indicate that SEND pupils requiring transport will increase by 156 pupils each year. This is based on the council's designated schools grant (DSG) management plan assumption of 520 net new children with an education health and care plan (EHCP) each year and with 30% of these needing transport.

1.6   There is a view from some council officers that the service offer and the granting of entitlement for transport is 'generous' and that decisions are made which are risk averse and in the context of high parental expectation. The way that eligibility decisions are applied in practice are out of line with some

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other local authorities who have moved to a very clear offer of statutory minimum levels of service.

1.7   The council's transport arrangements were commissioned by Transport Service Solutions (TSS), an arms-length company of Cheshire East Council, up until April 2022 from when a new model was deployed which resulted in the strategic, planning, commissioning and procurement of services being delivered directly by the council and transferred the existing functions from TSS between the council's Children and Families Directorate and Place Directorate.

1.8   This return from TSS has presented the challenge of ensuring that accountability for key tasks sits in the right places and that resources applied are appropriate for the tasks. This has further coincided with the challenges of COVID-19 and its impact on the availability of supply; it is reported in an internal audit that there has been a 23.6% decline in licenced vehicles and a 21.7% decrease in licenced drivers in the borough over the last 3 years.

1.9   Whilst a key rationale for the return of the service from TSS was greater clarity of accountability and a better integrated approach, there are still evident concerns about how the organisation is set up to deliver travel effectively, in a coordinated fashion, and with clear accountability.

Scope & approach

1.10   This report is the culmination of a 3 months review of key areas including an examination of how Cheshire East Council (CEC) delivers its statutory travel support requirements to children and young people. Essentially this means an examination of travel provided to mainstream and SEND children travelling to school and provided travel support for social care reasons such as for contact visits, respite etc.

1.11   The review includes an examination of the organisation, roles and responsibilities, processes, supply market value, procurement practices, routing, systems used, performance culture and customer expectation and management. This necessitated a detailed review of end-to-end process from the identification of the initial travel need, policy, offer, delivery and overall strategy for the service.

1.12   The key to identifying opportunities for change has been the collection of financial data, route data, prices from suppliers as well as other empirical evidence through examining processes and interviewing key stakeholders involved in delivering the travel process.

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1.13   A range of interviews, group feedback sessions and surveys have been conducted with schools, current and potential suppliers, parents, and users across a wide range of settings.

1.14   The geography of the area is largely rural and the council has a limited public transport network. Therefore, efforts have been made to develop a benchmark comparison with local authorities which are broadly comparable and using data that we have been able to verify. Comparison is a good starting point to indicate lines of enquiry and potential opportunities but cannot replace in depth analysis of the bespoke factors

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2.0   EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overall findings

2.1   As of March 2022, the council provided daily home to school transport to 2,609 mainstream passengers to reach 51 different schools and establishments and 925 SEN passengers to 130 schools and establishments. This is delivered through 527 routes with suppliers drawn from an approved list on a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) framework which has 150 suppliers.

2.2   The total annual forecasted net cost of the service for 2022/23, which includes transport elements such as public bus and concessionary fares, is £17.98m. This is set against an agreed budget for 2022/23 of £15.29m. The table below outlines the headline requirement, budget agreed and the consequent budget pressures.

Place	Agreed 22/23 budget	22/23 forecasted requirement	In year pressure/ net of extra funds to mitigate
Public bus	1,968,649		
Concessionary Fares	2,294,758		
Transport/Commissioning/ Management	1,439,720		
Sub Total	5,179,280	5,703,127	523,847

Children and Families	Agreed 22/23 budget	22/23 forecasted requirement	In year pressure/ net of extra funds to mitigate
Mainstream	2,777,460		
SEN	4,945,908		
LAC	405,418		
Post 16	1,175,772		
Admin	425,508		
Management/Flexi-link	376,295		
Sub Total	10,106,361	12,277,779	2,171,418
Total	**15,285,641**	**17,980,906**	**2,695,265**

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2.3   The gross pressures on the budget include £3,348,252 of SEND passenger growth pressure and a necessity to reflect the Confederation of Passenger Transport inflationary factor of 3.7% on home to school contracts which amounts to £358,000 and 10% inflation applied to Local Bus which is £295,000. These pressures are partially mitigated by MTFS funding which leaves an overall net pressure of £2,695,265.

2.4   The final reality of an inflationary offer had not yet been confirmed by June 2022 but the options being considered indicated that a further pressure of around £300,000 is likely to be the result.

2.5   The forecasted costs for 2022/23 are based on sound assumptions, albeit a budget has not been set to accommodate all forecasted costs, and therefore efficiencies will need to be identified and delivered in year.

2.6   Overall SEND costs and the cost per SEND passenger are increasing rapidly. The total annual current contracted cost for SEND passengers is £8,463,000 for 925 passengers, extrapolated from current spend which has been carefully considered along with in-year growth to identify the pressures to the budget above. Current performance equates to a cost per SEN passenger on contracted transport per annum of £9,149, again from the current costs extrapolated, which is significantly higher than most other similar authorities and represents a considerable increase in recent years and has continued to rise since January 2022.

2.7   If comparisons are made to other local authority passenger transport operations, then CEC is challenged because of rural geography and a lack of public transport availability. This results in a larger than normal proportion of mainstream passengers being transported by more costly dedicated contracted supply rather than public bus routes. In recent years the number of licensed drivers has decreased at a greater rate than the average elsewhere. These factors present market supply and resultant procurement value challenges. However, we were able to compare with similar authorities and identify successfully implemented opportunities.

2.8   A clear strategy for travel is now imperative to ensure the delivery of a sustainable operation and it is essential that a plan to mitigate demand and supply pressures and improve service is developed.

2.9   The service must be cautious of continuing to perpetuate high user expectation if it aspires to reduce costs in line with available budgets and mitigate the costs of increasing demand. If the service does not commit to re-setting the culture of high expectation and to delivering an offer which is more closely aligned with minimum statutory obligations then it must be cognisant of the cost of this and of rising demand and the fact that the current approach is not best supporting the life-long needs of passengers in terms of independence.

2.10   **By embarking on a fundamental service transformation over the next 3 years then there is an opportunity to deliver significant savings against forecasted expenditure of at least £2.15million per annum and make improvements to quality of service and future proof the service to mitigate as much as possible the cost of future demand.**

2.11   Further cost avoidance is likely through improvements to the SEND transport assessment processes that will reduce potential future passenger demand. However, this cost avoidance is challenging to predict accurately.

2.12   The benefits of delivering the opportunities identified are set out in detail in a 3-year financial improvement plan in section 9. These should be considered in the context of the requirement for significant resources to deliver a transformation over 3 years and a sensible range of expected savings that are deliverable should be established.

2.13   Success will be dependent on fully implementing a range of initiatives across four critical themes,

  I.   Better controlling and significantly developing the supply market. This includes introducing more competitive procurement processes and managing a complex engagement of potential new supply, re-engaging with current supply, and re-procuring all contracts. This will significantly benefit from a fundamental re-routing overhaul.

  II.   Tightening controls and decision making against clear eligibility criteria together with the re-setting of parental expectations. This will include moving to a service offering travel solutions such as personal budgets, travel training and the promotion of life-long independence. It will also require robust periodic re-assessment of passenger needs.

  III. Improving integration of the roles and functions involved in the delivery of travel which will lead to a clear cross council strategy and tactical decision making. Creating clear accountability for strategy, policy, assessment, and cost of delivery will be key and can be supported by a reorganisation into an integrated team, better end-to-end data flow, communications, and improved use of the systems currently available.

  IV.   Introducing a passenger charter outlining what parents and passengers can expect from the Integrated Travel Team in terms of how service is delivered, service levels and how changes to travel arrangements will be delivered to help reduce anxiety and improve communication.

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2.14   Detailing the above themes, this report will show how the formation of an
        Integrated Travel Team (ITT) will be a building block to success. The service
        must make better use of technological advances and exploit the functionality
        and resultant benefits of a seamless database and IT system.

2.15   Implementation of the review findings will present a significant challenge and
        require political support as well as the need to raise the profile of travel
        strategically across CEC to allow senior support for the changes required.

2.16   The provision of overall leadership and significant resources to implement a
        complex range of sustainable service improvement initiatives over the next 3
        years will be critical. Care must be taken to ensure changes consider the
        impact on children. In this respect, careful communications and risk
        assessment will be critical. With significant change to arrangements and the
        acute impact this will have on children, then it is proposed that the full
        package of transformation be carefully communicated. This will include
        spelling out changes, commitments, and rationale with timelines to set
        expectation.

2.17   Following agreement to this reports' recommendations then detailed timelines
        and resource planning should be conducted along with identification of
        options to secure transformation resources with the skills and expertise
        required before commencement in January 2023.

Summary observations & recommendations

Service organisation

2.18   Travel management is not currently integrated, with small teams straddling
        the Children and Families and Place directorates. This has contributed to a
        lack of clear accountability for key aspects of travel such as total expenditure,
        ownership of a clear joined-up strategy, and an agreed direction for the future
        development of the service.

2.19   Assessment, entitlement decision making and policy ownership are detached
        from daily transport management and further detached from Contracts and
        Performance. Improved integration is recommended with the current
        Children's Transport, Transport Operations and the Contracts & Performance
        team coming together into one team. This is best achieved by a re-
        organisation to integrate the transport delivery functions into an Integrated
        Travel Team.

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2.20   Analysis has determined that the current level of resource is slightly below the level required for an operation of this size and complexity and it is recommended that at least 2 further full time equivalent (FTE) staff are added. Resources should be re-aligned to reflect the additional focus areas required such as developing personal transport budgets (PTBs), travel training and forming one dedicated Head of Service level role for the new ITT.

2.21   Integration will be supported by better using data and systems. Efforts must be made to improve data quality and integrity contained in the system, Mobisoft Transport Centre (MTC) so that its full functionality is utilised. This includes its ability to forecast expenditure, produce performance reporting and be used as a fully integrated assessment system, and therefore mitigate clunky communication and manual re-entry of passenger data across the travel process.

Operational effectiveness

2.22   Around £11 million per annum is spent on contracted suppliers, but it is challenging to prove that this expenditure is good value. The average cost per SEN passenger is £9,108 per annum which is more than £3,000 per annum more than the average of the benchmark group of county councils. Whilst cost per passenger comparison with other local authorities provide only headline indications and does not consider potential mitigating reasons for poorer value, there is compelling evidence that contract prices are significantly more expensive per mile than those achieved in other comparable authorities.

2.23   Opportunity to improve contract value is shown to be most stark when contract prices are compared to the local standard tariff private hire market. Short journeys of around 10 miles cost three times as much across average contracted supply than the standard taxi tariff, and four times as much for journeys carried out of 20 miles or more. We normally expect only a 30% premium for contracted routes therefore 300% premium is extraordinary. This is likely to indicate how important council work is to suppliers in the area and an opportunity to achieve better prices.

2.24   Despite the challenges of proving value, by examining practices and processes there is clearly an opportunity make improvements which, from our experience and evidence, will improve value if implemented.

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2.25   The Contracts and Performance team report that there are areas of fragile supply and therefore poor competition for some contracts. Despite rising prices and potential supply issues it has been challenging for the team, due to lack of resources, to deliver a mitigating strategy, to apply significant activity and focus to proactively identifying and engaging new suppliers to support increasing competition. The review identified 200 potential new suppliers of bus and private hire across only the nine main towns that could serve the Cheshire East area with a small number of companies that could serve more than one town, so some overlap.

2.26   Whilst the review concluded that there is an opportunity to better engage the supply market, it also evidenced that the council currently still performs better than the benchmark group with 150 active suppliers on a functioning dynamic purchasing system (DPS). Nevertheless, it is recommended that a concerted and strategic exercise is conducted to identify, ignite, and educate the supply market on the availability of work and the tendering process.

2.27   Better contract value will also be driven by using a more competitive procurement process. There is compelling evidence to indicate that the procurement process is not maximising value.

2.28   After successfully developing a healthier and better engaged number of suppliers on the DPS it is recommended that electronic reverse auctioning is utilised to evaluate bids for contracts. This will provide all bidders with information on the best priced bid and enable them further chances to bid their best possible price. When conducted well this is proven to drive much improved competitive value.

2.29   A critical initiative to enable an increase in competition is to further develop the tactical bundling of contracts where appropriate. Whilst the council does offer the ability for suppliers to offer prices for bundles this could be developed further to force bids for bundles, where appropriate to include unpopular routes. *Some* local authorities have experienced success with one school one provider arrangements. This is complex and does not always drive better value, therefore any further development must be progressed with caution, nevertheless there will certainly be opportunities to bundle some routes into one tender**.**

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2.30   There is evidence that the contracting process could be stifling competition. Whilst there are 35 different contract end dates, these are largely batched into 6 different periods of time, and this may prevent many suppliers bidding for new work when contracts come up as they are working full capacity, therefore reducing the number of bidders and therefore competition. It is recommended that end dates are synchronised into 3 tranches of contract end dates on a geographic basis.

2.31   Whilst an open DPS is in place, suppliers report that it is not possible to access the DPS aside from in periods when a window opens for new applications. This frustrates suppliers who move on to find other work using their valuable capacity and therefore it is recommended to routinely allow new suppliers to apply at any time.

2.32   There has been a 23.6% decrease in licenced vehicles (higher than the 15.9% decrease in England since 2020). There has also been a 21.7% reduction in licenced drivers over the past 3 years in the council area. Efforts must be made to attract new drivers and make the licencing process as appealing as possible. There is evidence that CEC are more stringent than many councils, for example, insisting on a 5weeks college course to become licenced, and it is recommended that this is reviewed.

2.33   Engaging, developing, and understanding the supply market will provide the team with the confidence to take back control of driving competitive value through procurement and contract management and reduce the perceived risk of de-stabilising suppliers through a routing overhaul and other improvement initiatives. Providing extra resources to sensitively manage the changes for children and parents in the initial transformation phase will be a necessity.

2.34   By developing a range of initiatives to improve the supply base and competition there is a conservative opportunity to improve contract prices by an overall average of at least 5% which will deliver £590,000 per annum in better value. This opportunity has been reduced from normal expectations to reflect the current inflationary pressures and dwindling supply.

2.35   To manage the workload peaks associated with transforming this process, it is recommended that full re-procurement is carried out over three tranches coinciding with school term commencement dates, beginning in September 2023 and further tranches in readiness for January 2024 and April 2024 on a

zonal basis. Notice will need to be given to suppliers to enable the re-procurement of contracts and is allowable contractually for reasons including the likelihood that improved value to the council will result from changes.

2.36   An overhaul of routing is carried out annually in some councils to mitigate the fact that new passengers allocated to existing routes quickly erode effectiveness. There is evidence of only partial re-route exercises in recent years and some limited experimentation with the MTC routing functionality. This is because of a combination of factors such as lack of resources to carry out a huge task, a reluctance to change arrangements for children and parents, parental sensitivity, perception of supplier fragility and a lack of support to make wholesale changes where there may be some resistance.

2.37   We ran all the routes to a selection of large SEND schools through similar software to MTC and clearly evidenced an opportunity to make significant reductions to routes required, whilst ensuring that maximum travel times were not increased.

2.38   We extrapolated a very conservative opportunity to reduce the number of routes by 12.5% to schools which have 5 or more routes coming in and excluding large coach and large bus routes. This equates to an opportunity to impact around 300 of current routes by 12.5% which represents a reduction of 37 routes and equates to around £814,000 saving per year. Representing an approximate carbon emission impact of 777 tonnes per year.

2.39   A significant extra benefit of this routing improvement will be the release of at least 37 vehicles into the supply market which will support increased vehicle availability and naturally improve competition.

2.40   The average cost to transport a SEND pupil to out of borough is £11,053 per annum. Since March 2020 there are 189 (92%) more children being transported to out of borough provision. It is recommended that this information be shared with school selection panels so that informed decision making and school planning can be carried out cognisant of transport costs.

2.41   The council appears in reasonable control of arranging single person journeys and is comparable with similar authorities. Nevertheless, single person journeys are expensive costing near to £17,000 per year to run and therefore a focus on their assessment and alternative arrangements, in particular a focus on whether these passengers are suitable for a personal transport budget (PTB).

2.42   Passenger assistants (PAs) deployment represents good control in CEC with only 41% of all SEND routes against a normal expected deployment of around 65%. This indicates good performance.

Policy & assessment

2.43   There is an opportunity to adapt the travel offer made and improve the process of how children are determined eligible. This can be done by introducing a more robust application and assessment process for all passengers, including implementing a clear re-assessment process. Critically this will rely on careful management of high parental expectation of entitlement. The service must recognise the importance of multi-agency early intervention and prevention and transport enabling educational inclusion is an important part of this. Bringing the service back into CEC will facilitate better integration of wider services.

2.44   All communications and guidance, including the thrust of policy wording can better and more clearly set out the offer and set out more clearly what parents and passengers should expect. Currently there is an expectation of expensive door-to-door transport, and an extremely low number of appeals indicates that parents/users are receiving exactly what they want.

2.45   Promoting a range of appropriate travel solutions which support child independence and the development of a travel offer will help move expectation away from 'door-to-door' transport. This cultural shift will be supported by use of consistent language and the effective re-branding of the service away from transport to a service offering travel-solutions.

2.46   Policy should clearly set out when re-assessment takes place, and the need to re-apply at transition and other changes.

2.47   There are opportunities to improve assessment by the application process capturing better information relating to SEND passengers to enable better decisions. All decisions should be made by a team dedicated to making travel eligibility decisions based on essential evidence, rather than it be by one of many case workers.

2.48   Opportunities also include setting realistic timeframes for processing applications to enable better decision making on travel solutions and capturing data and evidence.

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2.49   It is recommended that all passengers are re-assessed for their entitlement to travel and the form of travel offered. Resources must be made available to do this task which will not be a business as usual burden if carried out as part of a routine process but will require additional resources to retrospectively re-assess all passengers as a starting point. This process should make a priority of examining expensive single person journeys and those travelling less than statutory distance who might not require door-to-door transport. This will include robustly considering public bus network options for each passenger currently travelling on dedicated transport.

2.50   As part of the initial process of assessing children's needs and the process of developing an EHCP, there are opportunities to incorporate an assessment of travel needs. This should include an assessment of whether a child could respond to travel training and is able to become more independent. When EHCPs are reviewed then travel needs should be reassessed too and information and evidence made available to support the ITT to make decisions.

2.51   Of the entitled 2,609 mainstream school passengers, 36% live under the statutory distance from school over which free transport is provided. We would normally expect to see only around 15% of children under statutory distance receiving transport for reasons such as the absence of a safe walking route, or low income. This high number is likely, in part, driven by the number of safe walking routes which have now been evidenced but not implemented because of parental and political pressure. It is recommended that a clear strategy and protocol be set out to manage expectation and implementation takes place in the interests of child health and independence.

2.52   Under section 508A of the Education Act 1996 local authorities must promote the use of sustainable travel and transport for all children and young people of compulsory school age who travel to receive education in the local authority's area. Alternative travel solutions must be strategically developed and offered, such as private travel budgets and travel training. Both initiatives appear underdeveloped

2.53   We would normally expect to see more passengers that are entitled to travel benefitting from a PTB and in some local authorities this is as high as 12% of SEN passengers, however in CEC there are only 63 representing only 6% of SEN or 1.7% of all passengers. The main reason for this is that PTBs are not

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promoted and where they are made available there is limited flexibility in how the PTB is calculated and offered reducing its popularity and appeal.

2.54   Promotion of carefully agreed PTBs to attract take-up will contribute to significant financial savings estimated at least £375,000 per year and contribute to the development of independence and in many cases promote the better interaction of parent and school at daily drop and pick-up, and the re-setting of the expectation away from expensive door-to-door transport. However, this will be a long process of change and take up to 3 years to fully deliver.

2.55   Travel training will underpin the shift in the travel offer and there is a real opportunity to develop and promote this offer better.

2.56   Consideration of the availability of public bus routes will be key in the decision process, given that only 150 of 2,609 children are transported by public route. The service will benefit from better interaction to make decisions on adapting public routes to meet demand where changes are palatable.

2.57   There is an option to consider for all passengers where possible to consider better public route availability and use of PTBs.

2.58   Charges or parental contribution for post 16 and all other non-eligible spare seats including one bespoke high school scheme should be set at the same level to ensure equality across all students. There has been no change since 2018 and this were in line with other authorities and was set at similar level as Cheshire West and Chester who charge £880 per annum and this would generate extra income of around £70,000 per annum. Routine inflationary linked rises should occur every year. Increases of this level might need to be implemented in tranches over 3 years.

2.59   In respect of the bespoke high school scheme, this scheme should remain for many valid reasons such as lack of viable travel alternatives, but efforts should be made to establish whether public routes can be adapted or routes can be provided by private operator. The high school should be encouraged to cover the cost of any shortfall between cost and income of the scheme by renegotiation.

2.60   Efforts must be made to improve communication and set expectations of delivery standards. This will be helped by issuing a passenger charter to

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outline what they can expect in terms of communication regarding changes to arrangements which is the item which causes most anxiety and dissatisfaction. The charter should include expected periods of notice before changes are made, details of new drivers and PAs and the introduction of a child passport to be shared with suppliers so that they fully understand their passenger needs.

Delivery of transformation

2.61   The initiatives required to deliver efficiencies, better manage demand, transform expectation, and re-organise services will require significant resources and leadership. A transformation of this type must be carefully planned and will take around 3 years to fully deliver in a sustainable way.

2.62   Transformation will benefit from corporate-wide support but cannot be done without adding resources to enable it to happen. The current resources engaged in travel are at full capacity delivering a demanding day to day operation. Capacity of capable resource with expertise in driving engagement and value across supplier networks, re-routing, managing expectation of users and supporting the re-assessment of passengers, does not appear readily available from across the rest of the council.

2.63   Careful consideration of the options available to provide leadership, deliver resource and expertise will be required. Options include identifying an internal team or partnering a niche provider of travel transformation where outputs can be underwritten at the partners risk.   From our experience there will be significant investments associated with each option, but these will be imperative and will deliver significant financial returns in each year of the transformation.

2.64   It is recommended that the programme of change begins in January 2023, allowing time for approvals and to secure resources for commencement. For changes to the travel offer then a period of consultation and agreement will be necessary before options and direction are finalised and taken for approval. However, there are many aspects of transformation that can begin quickly in 2023. This momentum will be critical to enable maximisation of potential benefits, and implementation at time sensitive points such as the start of the new school terms. A headline implementation plan is provided in section 7.0 and it is recommended that the transformation programme and its benefits be considered as a whole and not broken up into parts. This

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approach should also be taken for any cost benefit analysis required to secure resource to support the overall programme.

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3.0   ORGANISATION – RESOURCES, SYSTEMS & PEFORMANCE

Structure, accountability, and resource levels

Overview

3.1   Transport arrangements were commissioned by Transport Service Solutions (TSS), an arms-length company of Cheshire East Council up until April 2022 from when a new model has been deployed which results in the strategic, planning, commissioning and procurement of services being delivered directly by CEC. This resulted in the transfer of the existing functions from TSS to the council's Children and Families Directorate and Place Directorate and Ansa.

3.2   Audit in 2017 makes clear observations that each element of the service operated independently, that there were clunky communications and that clear transparent reporting was not in place. As a result, it was difficult to understand the value achieved, particularly as the budget split between Place and Children and Families and the influence of TSS in delivery, did not allow for clear accountability for whole expenditure.

3.3   This return of the services from TSS has presented the foundations for an opportunity, but also the challenge of ensuring that accountability for key tasks is clear and that resource levels are appropriate for the tasks. Indeed, we have evidenced in this review that the main findings of the 2017 Audit are still relevant in that the travel function is currently delivered in a fragmented fashion across the council with various teams and roles involved across the process and sitting in both the Children and Families and Place directorate.

3.4   The organisation of travel in headline simple terms can be described as follows

   1. Case workers in the Children and Families Directorate including social care make decisions on travel eligibility for SEND and social care reasons when it is straight forward to do so.

   2. A School Transport team in Children and Families owns the policy and makes decisions on eligibility when more complex.

   3. The school transport operations team in Children and Families receives mainstream transport applications direct from parents and validates their entitlement before arranging transport. The Transport Operations team processes requests for travel, risk assesses high need arrangements, allocates to best available route, commissions new routes from the Contract and Performance Team and liaises daily with parents, schools, and suppliers.

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4. A Contract and Performance team (Place Directorate), manages supplier compliance and procures and contracts new supply arrangements.

5. Social care case workers across Children and Families make decisions and request transport for children for social care reasons, operating in a detached manner from Transport operations, before passing the request through.

6. Ansa provide a small fleet of vehicles and organise their deployment. Whilst this is part of the wider Ansa partnership arrangement and not a typical supplier contract, they no longer deliver any intrinsic role in the management of the travel process.

3.5   This organisational approach is not unusual, and the recent change represents a significant move in the right direction towards integration and better control, but it does still represent a fundamental absence of clear accountability and a level of dis-integration for some key aspects of travel. In this respect, observations include

     I. An absence of a clear joined up strategy for the service. This includes the setting of the offer, and whilst ownership of the policy is clear and is reviewed, it is in isolation of an overall strategy for delivery and the direction of the service and how user expectations are managed.

     II. Accountability for expenditure is not clear and therefore the value achieved by the service is lacking. This is common where separate departments manage demand and manage delivery value. This usually manifests in there being a lack of a clear strategy to mitigate increases in demand for expensive door to door services and to adapt towards other travel options which support independence. Without overall accountability it is commonly not easy to drive improved value of delivery and allow the consideration of the most effective forms of delivery as costs are often clouded by new demand.

     III. Whilst Children and Families have responsibility for determining EHCPs, and as a result determine the number of SEND children that are entitled to transport, it is not clear where type of travel is determined. Decisions are made across various teams and therefore no one team has accountability for overall demand and how travel is then to be provided.

     IV. The specific cost of new demand is not easy to determine from the cost of the existing passenger cohort. This will never be possible without good quality data, so finding an explanation for increasing costs is challenging. Eligibility decisions being made in isolation from delivery for SEND means no part of the service can be truly

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accountable for delivering the most effective solution. This problem is magnified as there is a lack of an overall travel strategy that is supportive of promoting alternative travel support solutions and controlling demand for expensive door-to-door transport for some children.

3.6 In CEC we evidenced many examples of accountability not being clear

    I.   Lack of joined up ownership of a strategy for how travel is be delivered

    II.   Poor data availability, difficulty in forecasting demand and costs.

    III.   Meetings to understand growth have broken down in recent years

    IV.   The recognition of transport growth and escalating costs has not until recently been recognised corporately, maybe because TSS was arms-length and fragmented with little voice

    V.   Social care has a lack of gatekeeping of transport requests and decision makers have no budget visibility and therefore accountability

3.7 Clearly there is an absence of accountability for each aspect of delivering an effective service, the table below summarises CEC's fragmented service, detailing resources. NB resource levels do not include overseeing management roles with other wider responsibilities.

Directorate	Children and Families	Children and Families	Children and Families	Place
Team	Case workers in Children and Families	School Transport	Transport Operations	Contracts and performance
Resources	x13 roles involved in SEND x6 roles involved in SC	x3.8FTE	x9.6 FTE	x5 FTE
Role/ Accountabilities	Decisions on SEN eligibility when straightforward	Policy Decisions on eligibility Appeals	Allocation Risk assessment Customer relations Routing	Procure Compliance

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Unclear Accountabilities and areas for development	Re-assessment of passengers
	Overall expenditure
	Overall strategy
	Development of the supply marketplace
	Ownership of user expectation
	Travel training and alternative transport

3.8　There are two options for re-organising, which operate well in other local authorities, both of which present a platform for greater accountability for the council's travel offer

　　I.　Full Integration - Reorganise all parts of the travel operation and place them together in the same team. This should include a dedicated team taking ownership of travel policy, assessment, eligibility, and delivery in both SEND and social care as well as mainstream. Contracts and performance can form part of the team although it is recognised that there are synergies between this team and wider public bus and transportation network. Elements of resource dedicated to public bus could remain in Place alongside the wider transportation strategy. This would allow for one entity to be accountable for total expenditure.

　　II.　Partial Integration- Overall accountability will be delivered and be dependent on a Travel Board to oversee all travel functions. The board would ensure a clear strategy and accountability and govern the whole operational process and outputs. The board being accountable for policy, strategic delivery, overall expenditure, and budgeting. This could be combined with other hybrid alternatives such as combining transport operations and school transport only.

3.9　The Travel Board approach is usually implemented in local authorities when travel is wholly delivered in a different directorate to the key client, Children and Families. This is not the case in CEC where the travel operations team now sits in this directorate. Therefore, by far the more effective option is full integration and this is recommended. This would benefit from

　　I.　Improved control on eligibility by the integrated travel team (ITT) controlling all decisions on eligibility for all types of transport. Case workers would work with parents to formally apply for transport in each category of travel and not make decisions. This includes social care transport requests.

　　II.　Joined up accountability and ownership of all parts of the service from strategy and direction, assessment to delivery. Therefore, one

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> team would be accountable for overall expenditure, budget, and service standards.

> III.   One team would aid the process through assessment to delivery being much slicker using available technologies.

3.10   However a Board approach may be taken if it is not possible to integrate the Contracts and Performance team into the ITT.

3.11   The location for an ITT makes sense to be wholly in Children and Families which will then be accountable for the end- to-end process and value achieved.

3.12   Part of an integrated recommendation is to bolster the assessment of eligibility with the development of a robust application process feeding into a thorough review against policy of each application which will be best done by a team to consider eligibility based on a parental application form. (Next section) Consideration much also be given to the need to robustly re-assess travel entitlement on a regular basis.

Overall resource levels

3.13   The determination by comparison, of management and officer resource levels required to deliver an effective travel service cannot be a precise science because of the bespoke nature of geography and make up of client groups.

3.14   However, a headline comparison with other local authorities where the number of FTE is known provides a useful gauge. We have found that the most effective determining factor of resource required is the number of contracted routes.

3.15   The table below compares CEC resource allocation for travel management, coordination, and procurement with some other local authority operations. This comparison does not consider assessment.

Councils	Contracted routes	FTE	Contracted route/vehicles per FTE
A	622	18	34
B	711	22	32
C	304	11	27
D	700	21	

			33
E	1304	38	31
CEC	527	15.6	34

3.16 The overall level of resources allocated appears slightly under resourced with comparators to a level of at least 2 FTE. (NB this does not include assessment resource in the Children's Transport team)

3.17 However the analysis above does not provide surety that all key functions are being carried out effectively and resourced to the right level. It is important to examine the alignment and focusing of resources.

Resource alignment and focus

3.18 We compared the CEC operation to a basket of other authorities to determine level of resources applied to key functions or important categories of task in a typical travel operation. Whilst this analysis is not a precise science it does highlight some critical deficiencies which need attention. These findings support anecdotal feedback and review observation that resources in the Transport Operations team are lacking.

	Basket average % of total resource	Current		Recommended	
		%	FTE	%	FTE
Management	10%	5%	0	5%	1
Supply, procurement, and compliance	20%	30%	5	27%	6
Co-ordination/daily management	45%	49%	9.6	42%	9.6
Travel training and PTBs	10%	0%	0	9%	2
Dedicated assessment and re-assessment	15%	20%	3.8	18%	4
Total	**100%**	**100%**	**19.4**	**100%**	**22.6**

3.19 The table above indicates some comparators of CEC against a basket of operations. The CEC service has some key observations

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I.   Appears to have the right level of resources in general coordination and daily management of travel service.

II.   Appears to have a higher proportion of resources, assigned to the contract and performance than expected.

III.   Has no dedicated focus on alternative travel solutions (such as travel training and PTBs) there is more rationale for more focus on this area in later section

IV.   Has a dedicated assessment function which is resourced at a level capable of making all transport eligibility decisions and owning policy supported by better systems and database.

V.   There is at least one role in the Contracts and Performance team which has intrinsic expertise on public bus relationships and transport network. This could be kept separate from the ITU however it should be noted that better integration in how public routes link with home to school need is required.

3.20 The comparison table enables the identification of how resources could be better applied and is referred to in other sections of this report. It is recommended that the services structure and resources are fully evaluated and clearly defined to meet the deficiencies indicated. To fully integrate the service then we expect that a small number of extra resources will need to be identified and a Head of Service created from the resources currently identified across all teams.

Systems and database

3.21 The current process and system is a mixture of using Liquid Logic, email, excel and a Mobi-soft database to capture data and communicate requests. This operates slightly differently dependent on whether passengers are SEN, mainstream, or social care.

Process	SEN	Mainstream	Social Care
Application	Parent verbally or email to case worker	Parent completes application form which goes to Transport Ops team	Case worker emails Transport Ops team
Referral if eligible	If obvious then SEN team complete Liquid Logic transport form and an email to alert	Transport Ops team check using Mobi-soft assessment	Transport Ops check

	Transport Operations Team If it needs clarity then Transport Assessment Panel decide before entering onto Liquid Logic		
Decision communication with parents	Liquid Logic generated letter	Email/letter to parent	n/a
Logging transport arrangements	Transport Ops team manually input of details from LL and the arrangements on Mobi-soft	Transport Ops team enter details on Mobi-soft through data download	Transport Ops team enter details on Mobi-soft
Communicating arrangements with parents and suppliers	Email/ letter	Email/ letter	Email/ letter
Requesting new contract route	Email to Contracts and Performance team	Email to Contracts and Performance team	Email to Contracts and Performance team
Tender process advertisement	CHEST but now email for ease	CHEST but some now by email for ease	CHEST but some now by email for ease

3.22   There are many observations and pitfalls of these processes which are not helped by lack of integration in the systems that are used. The issues include

      I.   Lack of consistency in assessment protocols (subject of the next section)

      II.   SEND re-work and manual entry of data, for example Liquid Logic data needing inputting on Mobi-soft

      III.   Communications are clunky, for example Travel Operations team needing to be alerted by email that a new request has been sent using Liquid Logic

      IV.   Mobi-soft has much functionality which is not used to potential.

3.23   MTC is a good system and has many facilities which are not used or fully deployed including

    I.   Routing capability, including scenario planning on routes, visual representation of routes and passengers on maps, the ability to look at a whole school, multiple schools or individual passengers or vehicles.

    II.   Ability to communicate quickly and effectively – SMS messaging is available to individual parents, or groups of parents on the same route etc. Also, an ability to survey users all by the push of a button.

    III.   Data on vehicle type, capacity available and current fill, passenger seating type etc. (passengers needing extra space) which will assist with route planning and scheduling.

    IV.   Facility to calculate journey times and mileages – especially useful when considering adding passengers. Mileages were not available for this review and are useful to assess route price value.

    V.   Capability to interface with other systems

    VI.   Potential for school, provider, and customer web-based portal to enhance communications.

    VII.   Ability to forecast expenditure accurately which in the case of CEC would mitigate the time spent doing this manually

    VIII.   The ability to produce MI reports of performance across the travel process. Mobi-soft has excellent reporting packages and will allow excel downloads for specific drill down. But it must be ensured that data input is meaningful, and granularity of data is key.

    IX.   The system has an assessment module which could be utilised by those making assessments in SEND to record data and decisions which will integrate with the delivery database mitigating the need for clunky communications and manual re-entry of data

3.24   However, there are some important considerations to ensure that the system works effectively. Several observations have been made in CEC with accompanying recommendations

    I.   Staff training has been poor and conducted remotely during the difficult Covid time. There appears no clear owner of the system from a technical compliance perspective or a data integrity perspective. Users are using the system like the Route-wise system which was in place before. It is recommended that ownership of the system is put in place.

II.   Some of the data in the system is not accurate, there is duplicated data, out of date data, and error messages which are not rectified. Passengers have not always been removed when their transport ceases etc. This results in lost confidence to use the system for forecasting, running reports or routing. It is recommended that a process of stripping obsolete data, checking contract values, rectifying error messages, and removing duplicates takes place. But most importantly that the team using the system begin to input data accurately and properly supported by a system owner who can gatekeep issues or the system will slip back again. This is likely to take several months to conduct.

III.   Only when confidence in the data is re-gained can the system begin to be used to generate meaningful reports, forecast, and used as a full routing system.

IV.   It is recommended that the Mobi-soft assessment model be considered. It is used well elsewhere and would provide an end-to-end solution. The module is available and been purchased as part of the wider product. The module should be used for all categories of passenger and can be developed to

    a.   Integrate with liquid logic so that data can be easily transferred where appropriate

    b.   Integrate with on-line/electronic application forms to prevent re-work and data will automatically populate MTC

    c.   Support decision making with protocols based on data

    d.   Eradicate the need for clunky communication and allow the new ITT to have one end-to-end system therefore supporting the full integration of travel

Performance measurement and management.

3.25   Generation of bespoke performance reporting to manage transport/travel and forecast costs will be key to success and will support individual performance appraisals of all team members.

3.26   The teams do not appear to clearly measure performance other than monthly wide departmental budgeting meetings attended by principal officers. Metrics and indicators are largely produced reactively or as part of analysis of increasing spend. There appears to be a lack of confidence in the metrics produced.

3.27   The table below, whilst not exhaustive, outlines typical measures across each function of an ITT which can be used for setting targets and monthly

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performance appraisals. It is recommended that a small number of routine metrics are produced which are key to measuring performance.

Category	Common measures	Function
Overall team	Cost per passenger. Demand increase, each category of passenger Demand decrease, each category of passenger Length of journey, each category of passenger	Overall
Supplier value	Cost per passenger. Cost per mile. Cost per vehicle type. Cost per supplier (based on passengers) Number of suppliers Variance (uplift) to base contract of each supplier	Procurement function
Day to day	New allocations Single person journeys per total (separated by reason) PA per passenger route Complaints Number passengers allocated to existing routes. New routes procured. Short term quotes Invoice issues	Day to day management function
Alternative travel	Identified for travel training. Travel trained. Cost per travel trained. Saving per travel trained Identified for PB. Moved to PB. Saving per PB	Travel training and PB focus functions

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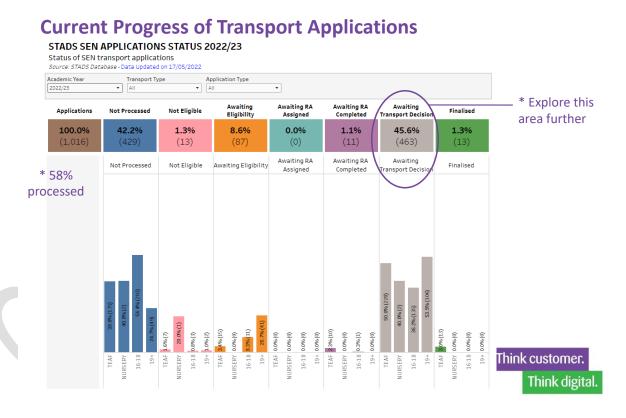| Assessment	Applications received. Applications processed Applications approved for Travel support. Appeals/ successful appeals. Re-assessments completed v planned. Applications suitable for travel training Applications suitable for PBs	Assessment function

3.28   More granularity from the assessment process will be critical. An example from Leicestershire shows the level of data that should be expected to manage the process.

Current Progress of Transport Applications

3.29   The service has not yet developed robust reporting and measures although a template has been evidenced. It is recommended that reports are specified so that monthly and live data can be produced for use in managing performance as soon as possible.

3.30   The provision of reports with agreed targets and direction will provide
        confidence and evidence of value for money being achieved and aid greater
        clarity in understanding the key drivers of costs and therefore the ability to
        forecast more accurately. This will help in a move towards a forward thinking,
        performance culture with Corporately understood strategic aims.

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4.0   POLICY, ASSESSMENT & SHIFTING THE TRAVEL OFFER

Challenges

4.1   Demand for children and young people's travel in CEC has been significantly increasing with SEND passenger numbers growing by 32% since March 2020. Based on the councils dedicated schools grant (DSG) management plan assumptions there is also a predicted increase of 156 new SEND passengers each year, based on the assumption that 30% of the 520 new EHCPs per year which are predicted require transport. Mainstream transport appears consistent in demand.

4.2   Whilst there is headline evidence of a robust policy which is reviewed regularly and an EHCP plan to transport entitled ratio of 30%, which is lower than most other authorities, we were able to evidence some fundamental opportunities to make improvements in the application, assessment, and decision-making process.

4.3   The key observations included

    I.   There is no transport application form required for SEND children. An application form represents good practice as it facilitates consistent evidence gathering to support applications and supports consistent decision making. There appears to be a lack of evidence used in making decisions.

    II.   The options outlined in policy and decision making on type of travel to be offered does not fully consider the opportunities for alternative travel arrangements such as (PTB) personal transport budgets, also known as cash grants.

    III.   There are limited travel training options and resources applied to allow travel training so that other forms of travel can be better utilised such as public buses or walking.

    IV.   There has been little gatekeeping and control/accountability of social care transport which is granted and then requested by case workers. This is improving in some areas.

    V.   There are more mainstream and SEND children who travel less statutory distance than expected versus comparators and further investigation found many of these children to have safe walking routes.

    VI.   There is no routine re-assessment process deployed for all passengers which has contributed to the embedding a culture and expectation that transport entitlement is for the whole school life.

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VII.   Expectation of a door-to-door transport service is high with little focus on child independence and regular re-assessment to determine if needs or capabilities have changed.

VIII.   There is little focus on determining opportunities to use the public bus network to transport SEN passengers. This might require passengers to walk to nearest stops.

IX.   In respect of VIII, there is an opportunity to improve the integration between the passenger transport team and the public bus network team to adapt the routes with minor changes to accommodate passengers currently receiving dedicated services. Most public network routes receive some level of funding support and therefore this will be effective in maximising value from this funding.

X.   User surveys report frustration at last minute arrangements, especially at term commencement and in 2020 28% of those surveyed said transport was confirmed at 'last minute' with 9% saying after the start of term. These results were worse than the survey in 2018.

SEND policy and application process

4.4   The policy is robust and clear and was updated in 2018. There are aspirations to update it again soon. There are further opportunities to use policy to promote a shift of the travel offer away from expensive door-to door transport to a range of travel solutions which will support independence. Under section 508A of the Education Act 1996 local authorities must promote the use of sustainable travel and transport for all children and young people of compulsory school age who travel to receive education in the local authority's area

4.5   A policy review is recommended to include the following changes

I.   Reference to reassessment and reviews in general. The policy should be clear that travel is not granted for life and regular assessment will be conducted.

II.   Emphasis on other travel solutions that will be considered, such as the offer of PTBs where appropriate and travel training as core elements to the travel support which is offered.

III.   That the independence of the child is core to the travel policy and strategy

IV.   A review of post 16 policy in terms of clarifying entitlement and bringing charges into line with comparators and to reflect annual inflation

4.6   The launch of a reviewed policy represents an opportunity to re-launch the service, setting clear expectations and being a pre-cursor for change.

4.7   In respect of the entitlement decision-making process some headline observations were made

      I.   SEND entitlement decisions are made by case workers of which there can be around 13 roles making decisions. Whilst efforts have been made to issue training and guidance our experience is that this approach can result in in-consistency and lack of control of the offer and the type of travel offered. More difficult decisions are made by a dedicated transport team. It is recommended that all SEN decisions are considered by the dedicated team in the newly formed ITT.

      II.   A full on-line application form for SEND is recommended and to be completed by parents. This is the common practice in most other authorities. The application form should gather evidence of low income, child's needs, wheelchair details, asking whether parent would consider a PTB, asking whether child might respond to travel training, detail on child's ability to walk etc. This detail will allow better decisions on the form of travel and aid the making of travel arrangements.

      III.   Once the application form is on-line then the details can integrate into the Mobi-soft assessment system and prevent the need for manual entry of details. Currently this happens twice as a transport request is entered into Liquid Logic and then re-entered into Mobi-soft. Mobi-soft has the assessment function and the council is currently paying for this but it is not in use for SEND.

      IV.   Reassessment of all passengers is not carried out for SEND, there is no evidence of data being set or kept of re-assessment dates or data kept of reassessment result. It is recommended that re-assessments are conducted as a one-off exercise as part of transformation exercise and then processes put in place to manage on-going reassessments to a plan. Re-assessment should be at least annually and transport should be re-applied for at school transition or if any changes occur such as a move of address. One of the impacts of no re-assessment was reflected in the Headteacher feedback that eligibility for transport is not equitable as decision protocols have changed over the years leaving some children receiving transport for much lower needs than would currently be deemed as entitled. Further, transport should be discussed as part of the annual EHCP process. Transport is often a

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> very important element of a child's day and changing needs discussed in an EHCP review can have an impact on transport requirements.

> V.   Late application forms, especially for beginning of term commencement dates, cause bottle necks, it is recommended that clear deadlines are set for applications and that this is managed robustly with users. These recommendations will support a theme of resetting expectation.

> VI.   It is recommended that the assessment process identifies those children who will be capable of responding to travel training, being able to walk, and those passengers where the parent is willing to consider being compensated for transporting their own child or making their own arrangements if it is deemed appropriate.

Mainstream passengers

4.8   The process for mainstream and catchment schools is different to SEND, with an application form which feeds directly into the Transport operations team for validation (against mainly distance) and then route allocation. Some key observations were made

> I.   Only 150 pupils are transported by public bus. This is unusual and we recommend a re-appraisal of the arrangements and availability of public bus for all passengers. The protocol in place for insisting ambulant passengers walk up to 1 mile to reach a pick up point should be properly implemented and utilised in place of dedicated transport.

> II.   There is little interaction between Transport Operations and Public Bus network team to overlay demand and routes available to examine if there is potential for alterations to public routes to be available for young people. This is a resource hungry task but will bear fruit if done robustly as a one-off exercise and then on a periodic basis.

> III.   Consideration of availability of public bus and other options such as PTBs should be made further up the line in school placement decisions so that expectation of parents can begin to be managed. Dedicated transport provision should not be offered at this stage.

Statutory distance and safe walking routes for all passengers

4.9   In simple terms CEC is statutorily obligated to provide transport to those over 2 or 3 miles walking distance (dependent on age) from their nearest school unless there is an absence of a safe walking route which can be taken, accompanied as necessary. The council is further obligated to put in place transport arrangements for SEN passengers that cannot walk to school if under these distances.

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4.10   The table below shows that 36% of mainstream passengers receive transport when under statutory distance and 12% of SEND passengers. In respect of SEND this is in line with what we see in other authorities, nevertheless, whilst many of these passengers may indeed require door-to-door transport there is no obligation to provide it if an appropriate alternative form of travel is available, and this can include walking if the passenger is ambulant and the route is safe.

	Under statutory walking distance	% Of total passengers
Mainstream	977	36%
SEN	110	12%

4.11   In respect of mainstream and making comparison to our work with other rural and county local authorities we commonly see around 15-20% of passengers provided transport when under statutory distance for reasons such as the absence of a safe walking route or for low-income. The table outlines the much higher number of passengers under statutory distance in CEC. Indeed, there are at least 102 passengers that are transported despite there being a safe route. This was determined by a dedicated project in 2016 which categorised reasons for all passengers under statutory distance.

4.12   It is expected that many routes could be deemed safe and that with an expectation that parents accompany children as necessary, like in other local authorities then there is an opportunity to reduce door to door transport. However, CEC has experienced many challenges to implement safe walking routes and there is much political involvement in each specific route examined.

4.13   It is recommended that a strategy and protocol is agreed for the service to implement safe walking routes as appropriate and under the banner of what is right for the child in terms of health and independence. Parental and political expectation will have to be carefully re-set along with the implementation of

   I.   An up-to-date available walking route database and re-invigoration of the 2016/17 project to identify routes which were safe

   II.   Re-assessment of all 740 pupils who receive transport due to their walking route not being safe

   III.   An identification exercise of remedial works which would open-up safe walking routes. The number and cost of the passengers transported should be calculated against each of the schemes to determine annualised cost to the Council. This can then be weighed up against

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costs of rectification to determine if work should go ahead and in what priority

IV.   Members should agree the general strategy/policy and protocol and leave it for the transport team to implement. Removal of transport should be part of re-assessment.

Appeals against decision making

4.14   There are on average only around 6-8 second stage appeals per annum. This is significantly lower than most authorities which commonly receive 10 times as many for a similar sized cohort of applications. This could indicate that the council is lenient in granting transport and not re-assessing.

4.15   It is also noted that second stage appeals panels are attended by political members. It is recommended that these be officer led so that decisions are consistent and follow clear protocols based on statutory guidelines.

Shifting the travel offer.

Overview

4.16   Changing user expectation in SEND and mainstream from expensive door-to-door transport to travel alternatives will be essential to underpin the objectives of reducing future costs, meeting future demand, and driving independence of children. There is also a general duty on local authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to and from school. This covers walking, cycling and public transport options and these modes should be made easier and more pleasant and accessible for everyone. In turn, this will support wider local authority objectives of improving air quality, carbon reduction and tackling congestion, and help provide a more equitable transport network, as set out in the Local Transport Plan and other transport policies.

4.17   It is recommended that policy and communications support this concept and that the offer and branding of the service be aligned to 'Travel' solutions rather than 'Transport'.

4.18   This shift will be supported by the development of travel training and PTBs as offers.

4.19   Identifying travel support needs and the management of parent expectations should begin at the point of initial assessment and in the development and then re-assessment of EHCPs.

Independent travel training

4.20   The long-term transport process for mainstream school children is that they attain increasing levels of travel independence as they develop and learn to either walk to school or catch public transport.

4.21   For children with SEND this is not always possible. In many cases they receive door-to-door transport from the time they start school until the time they leave College such that they do not gain the necessary travel skills that other children do. However, whilst many children with SEND will never be able to travel independently, those that can, should be given the opportunity to do so.

4.22   In many authorities funding is provided for travel training. Methods of coaching include tuition in timetable reading and practical coaching in catching buses. The scheme can be extremely successful and in some authorities over 50 children every year are helped to travel independently. CEC appears to be out of kilter with the benchmark group in not making the offer of travel training.

4.23   Funding of Independent Travel Training is a long-term commitment which will produce better outcomes for children over the long term and will have benefits for their future mobility, social integration, and employability.

4.24   Other authorities either conduct travel training with in-house resources or have an external partnership with a provider such as Mencap who provide travel training, or they have a mix of the two. The table below compares resource levels across a range of other authorities.

Authorities	CEC	A	B	C	D
SEN passengers	925	600	755	341	900
FTE	0	5	1	4	3
Support contract	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Trained per year	0	30	40	22	50

4.25   There are some key observations in respect of travel training in CEC

I.   In respect of policy or offer, there is no focus on ITT or promotion of it.

II.   Those capable of receiving travel training are not routinely identified in the application process, the EHCP or the assessment process, nor are schools encouraged to identify them.

III.   Some local authorities have made travel training the travel 'offer.' If children are capable of being trained, then this is the offer and there is no alternative. It is recommended that as a first step those who are travel trainable need to be identified at EHCP development stage, the application for travel stage and as part of the re-assessment process.

IV.   Where schools are engaged and on board then great success has been delivered. Schools play an important role in identifying capable children, facilitating training and motivating children and parents to want to achieve independence. However, it is evident that schools are not properly engaged. This appears to be the result of little resource applied to generating interest and no focus on travel training in the strategic direction for the service. Successful travel training generally needs strategic focus, energy, resource, and engagement of schools.

4.26   With successful school engagement, improved identification of candidates, and an enhanced training resource model then, if results are compared to other local authorities, CEC should successfully train at least 50 children per year.

4.27   To support delivery of this the following initiatives are recommended to be implemented,

I.   Identify resources to focus on developing relationships with schools, with the backing of strategic support including efforts to raise the profile of travel training across all stakeholders both within the council and across schools.

II.   Investigate and develop a business plan for engaging a support model from a training partner with clear commitments of successful outputs for fees. In high level terms and based on experience from elsewhere a training partnership will approximately be cost neutral in year 1 of the model. i.e., there will be enough children trained that generate transport savings to pay for the training resource and savings for those trained will be recurring and have a life-long impact on reliance on council services.

III.   By way of a simple illustration. If at least 50 children are trained these will generally result in savings of 30% of their average transport costs, given that some children will be converted from individual transport but some from group transport in minibuses and shared vehicles.

Therefore 50 x (£3,200 average cost per passenger) x50% = £80,000 per year

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We typically see training partnerships costing around £30,000 to train 30-50 children per year.

IV.   The real financial benefits kick in from year 2 and beyond where the benefit of the trained children in year 1 are totally net of costs. Also, the momentum of freed up minibus spaces and shared car spaces prevents additional cost of new passengers, which are harder to estimate benefits.

V.   It is recommended that a training support partnership model is engaged because this can be flexed up and down depending on demand and number of identified children over time, which may dwindle after a few years of easy identification of candidates. It also allows internal resource to focus on school engagement and identification of children which a support model will be dependent on to deliver training to. It is common from our experience for local authorities to engage a delivery partner for a fixed price and then not focus on identification of candidates for them to train. This is a risk to avoid.

Private travel budgets/parent grants/ cash grants

4.28   PTBs or cash grants provide flexibility to parents to make their own arrangements and represent an opportunity for a council to reduce its cost burden and management time for day-to-day arrangements, in many cases travel arrangements can typically be made for significantly reduced cost.

4.29   In most local authorities PTBs are typically offered to SEND passengers as they largely represent those in receipt of special door to door transport arrangements which are costly. However, in CEC there is much more opportunity than is the norm to offer PTBs given the higher number of mainstream passengers travelling by specially arranged contracted transport because of geography/ rurality.

4.30   The council has put in place only 63 (SEN passengers) by March 2022 which is 6% of SEN or 1.7% of total passengers.

4.31   As a comparison, Dudley Metropolitan Council and Enfield Council both offer PTBs to at least 12% of their total SEN passengers many councils achieve 6% of total passengers, and unlike CEC, apply dedicated roles to developing and identifying offers.

Local authority	PTBs as % of passengers
Council A	6% of total
Council B	12% of SEN
Council C	12% of SEN

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Council D	6% of total

4.32   Anecdotally and from our experience the likely reasons for the lack of take up of PTBs include,

    I.   The amounts offered are not enough to be appealing and are typically based on HMRC mileage allowances. This is broadly the case in CEC where 25 pence per mile is offered for the outward and return leg of each journey.

    II.   There is little resource and focus applied strategically to generating interest, identifying, influencing, and negotiating with likely candidates.

    III.   Parents could be concerned about the impact on their tax or benefits.

4.33   It is recommended that PTB opportunities are pursued with clear drive and with resource applied. Not least because the potential for savings on some route costs will be significant.

4.34   From our experience, where the following factors are implemented, then there will be significant benefits,

    I.   Some level of dedicated role/resource for at least a 2 year period to evaluate the current cohort of passengers.

    II.   Target offers to single person journeys as a priority and then move strategically onto routes with vehicles with valuable spaces which can be filled.

    III.   Negotiate the payments with parents and carers with the knowledge of what the current real cost of transporting the child is to ensure a saving is made.

4.35   There are 163 single person SEND journeys to focus upon which is a significant number and the average cost of a single person contracted journey is at least c£15,000 per annum.

4.36   In other councils we typically expect to successfully negotiate a PTB for 50%-60% of the cost of a procured transport route. Therefore, being conservative and basing calculations on a saving of 50% then there is potential for a saving of £7,500 per annum for every PTB secured and much more for a single person route.

4.37   It is perhaps not sensible to target the number of passengers in line with other authorities because there are likely be some level of impact of the demographics of the region.

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4.38   However, by way of an example if a modest target of 50 passengers can be
        moved to a PTB and these are from the priority group of single person
        journeys then the saving will build to be £375,000 per annum.

4.39   Concern about a PTB being a benefit and therefore subject to taxation is a
        common query. However, it is our understanding that the payment is in
        respect of the child and is in lieu of funding an individual child's travel
        entitlement and could often be paid wholly or in part to a provider and is
        therefore not income for the recipient. Some example statements from other
        authorities support this,

        ### Kent CC

        *Source: Personal Transport Budgets - An informative guide for parents
        (kent.gov.uk)*

        Frequently Asked Questions

        Q. Will the payments be taxed?

        *A. The budget is a payment made in relation to the child not the parent and
        so should not affect your tax situation. It is used to enable your child to get to
        and from school each day in a safe and legal way and should not be used for
        any other purpose. If you have concerns that it may impact on your tax
        situation, you will need to seek your own advice from a tax expert in relation
        to your personal circumstances.*

        ### East Riding

        Source: Personal Travel Budgets (PTB) (eastridinglocaloffer.org.uk)

        Statement from East Riding local offer

        *Personal Travel Budgets are not a benefit. Any income from a Personal
        Travel Budget is neither taxable nor will it affect any benefit claim for parents
        or carers participating in the scheme. However, it is the responsibility of the
        recipient of the Personal Travel Budget to check with any relevant services
        that this is the case for their own personal circumstances.*

4.40   Other common concerns include ensuring that the scheme is equitable
        across parents. This is sometimes achieved by payments made in bands
        according to circumstances, however, to be most effective the scheme must
        consider that every circumstance is different dependent on factors such as
        the other children in the household, vehicles at the parent's disposal,
        distance, needs of the child etc. and therefore ultimately the council will be
        best able to negotiate a mutually acceptable payment.

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4.41   It is recommended that clear arrangements are agreed with parents for payment. These will normally be based on the number of times children are taken to school and not be linked to investments and other commitments made such as investments in vehicles. As a specific example there would therefore be no liability for payment when schools are closed for reasons such as Covid-19.

4.42   Feedback from parents indicated frustration in time taken to be paid their grant/PTB. This appears to be caused by waiting for attendance confirmation data before authorisation of payment and the manual nature of the payment processing. It is recommended that payments are automated and are not held waiting for attendance data. Trust in the payment system will be critical for the scheme to be taken up.

Exceptional travel for social care reasons

4.43   There has been a growing trend for requests for 'exceptional' travel arrangements to be put into place. Exceptional travel arrangements are often at short notice, for short terms spells and therefore very expensive in comparison with routine routes.

4.44   Transport arrangements typically include situations where parents cannot transport children to school due to illness or other domestic circumstances or for other social care reasons such as respite care, contact visits etc. Covid could have been a contributing factor.

4.45   This provision falls outside statutory obligations, is discretionary, and would typically not be considered in a mainstream or SEND policy. In 2020/21 c£0.5milion was spent and the forecast for 2021/22 is similar. Whilst there are likely to be some good social care reasons for offering this transport it recommended that controls and checks put in place to ensure clear understanding of causes and accountability for decision maker.

    I.   Analysis log kept with clear reason code for decision

    II.   Guidance notes developed for when these requests will be considered

    III.   Bespoke budget code and budget identified to consider these requests so as to provide accountability to decision makers.

    IV.   Clear end dates for the transport, or at least dates for when it is to be reassessed.

    V.   A clear protocol for making decisions which falls outside those covered by other travel policies such as SEN

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4.46   Social workers are not aware of the fiscal impact of some decisions and there has been little understanding that it is parent/carer or establishment responsibility to organise travel which does not fall into the wider statutory duties to provide care/placements.

4.47   Exceptional transport requests are not unusual in local authorities. However, it is key that clear agreement on when it is to be provided and accountability for decision making is in place, which it is not across the board in CEC, however disability services have recently put in place a panel to make decisions and gain understanding of costs/travel decisions, sign off any exceptional travel.

4.48   Social Care transport is often requested without notice which naturally results in higher prices. Efforts should be made to understand the benefits of a longer lead time to secure better prices from the market.

Other discretionary travel provided

Post 16 provision

4.49   For Post 16 passengers there is no statutory obligation for CEC to provide door to door transport, but there is a duty to ensure that provision for travel to an educational setting for SEND students is made where necessary and to outline this in policy.

4.50   It is acceptable to ensure travel is available with other forms of provision such as a public route at the students cost or a financial payment made in lieu of transport made to the passenger.

4.51   Where CEC provides post 16 transport it makes a charge of £450 per year. However, this is mitigated by offering a reduced contribution where there is evidence of low income. There has been no increase to charges for at least 4 years.

4.52   In the main CEC offers post 16 transport to SEND passengers and 176 post 16 SEND passengers are provided transport with 107 contributing by payment of £450 per year. Only a handful of Post 16 mainstream passengers are provided transport.

4.53   The average cost of transporting a post 16 student is more than a compulsory school age pupil with SEND expenditure for post 16 costing around c£1million per year. There has been an increase of 35 students with an EHCP who are eligible for travel assistance between December 2020 and November 2021 and this is expected to increase as the total number of young people with EHCPs continues to increase across the borough.

4.54   Any changes will require communications through the Parent Carer Forum and individual conversations with families will be required to make changes to

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this policy. This makes it impossible to make a new offer for September 2022 and therefore any changes are recommended for September 2023.

Spare seats

4.55   CEC offers a spare seat scheme for pupils who are not eligible for free transport and may attend a school which is not their nearest. Generally, children who do not attend their local school, are responsible for making their own transport arrangement. Support for these passengers may include:

- Paid/charged for seats on our school transport
- commercial bus services
- Trave-line - journey planner, apps, and telephone help line
- disabled person's bus or rail pass
- 16/17 saver railcard
- 16-25 railcard

4.56   There are very few spare seats sold and there is currently c27 passengers buying seats which does not include the bespoke high school scheme.

4.57   The price for a spare seat is £460 per year and this has not increased since 2018.

Changes to Post 16 and spare seat schemes

4.58   CEC have set out options for change to charges in post 16 and spare seat travel, these are set out in the table below

No	Policy changes option	Mitigation	Cost Implications
1	Increase the parental Contribution for post 16 from £450 per year	£450 since 1/9/2018. Other LAs charge more than this	An increase to £900 which would be in line with neighbouring Cheshire West and Chester and would increase income by £48,100
2	Increase the Spare Seat cost from £460	Must be in line with post 16 for equity reasons. In 2017/18 £920 charge was piloted. Other LAs charge higher rate and some LAs do not offer parents the opportunity to buy a "spare seat"	Small impact, only a handful of seats

4.59   A comparison to other Local Authorities indicates that CEC charges are out of line. When combined with the facts that the current scheme charges fall significantly short of the cost of providing each seat and there has been no inflationary rise since 2018 it creates a powerful rationale to increase charges. We recommend that charges at least in line with neighbouring Cheshire West and Chester would appear sensible.

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	Post 16 2021	Spare Seat 2021	Bespoke scheme
Cheshire East	£450	£460	£700
Council A		£880	
Council B	£625		
Council C	£1,000		
Council D	£779	£779	

Bespoke school scheme

4.60   There is also a scheme for ineligible passengers which has been contracted by a high school via TSS and now CEC, which are subsidised by contributions by charging parents.

4.61   Transport Service Solutions (TSS) previously held a contract with the high school to provide a school transport service for children who are not eligible for free school transport. When TSS ended in March 2022, the contract novated to the council, who have continued with the same transport providers and arrangements until the end of the academic year (end of July 2022). A decision now needs to be made around whether this arrangement continues from September 2022 onward.

4.62   When services provided by TSS were transferred to the council from 1 April 2022, the bespoke contract was novated to Cheshire East Council up to the end of term (July 2022), whilst a decision was made on the longer-term viability of this provision.

4.63   Eligible and ineligible pupils are transported to the school on the same vehicles. Those pupils who are not entitled to free transport must carry a travel ticket, purchased prior to travel. The buses operate a cashless system and drivers do not accept money.

4.64   A total of 289 pupils are currently transported to the high school as at May 2022

- 221 pupils are Cheshire East mainstream eligible children
- 66 pupils purchase a travel ticket for a spare seat
- 3 pupils are receiving transport via SEND and travel on contracted services.

4.65   In addition to the above some pupils also buy ad-hoc tickets issued by the school.

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Clear overall recommendations for all scheme

4.66   In the main any changes to these schemes are unlikely to generate many
        benefits but have the potential to create significant noise. If charges are re-set
        to around £900 per annum, then the following increases are projected

Passengers paying	No	Increased income £
Bespoke scheme	66	13,200
Spare	27	11,880
Post 16	107	48,150
		73,230

4.67   Nevertheless, CEC is recommended to implement the following initiatives

   1-   All scheme seat charges should be equitable and consistent and be
        subjected to similar inflationary increases.

   2-   Spare seat/ post 16 and the bespoke scheme fares should rise in line with
        inflation each year, routine protocol, and be re-set to mitigate more of the
        cost of delivering the schemes and be in line with other neighbouring
        authorities. This is recommended to be around £900 per annum.
        Implementation for current paying passengers is recommended to take
        place over 3 tranches of increase to be affordable.

   3-   The bespoke scheme should be continued for the reasons outlined in the
        options appraisal but individual routes should be considered for private
        operator take-up. (a combination of option 1 and option 3)

   4-   The dedicated school scheme should not be expanded to other schools,
        schemes are unlikely to avoid adding to the cost burden for non-statutory
        travel.

   5-   In line with post 16 and spare seats, it is recommended that the
        contribution paid by the high is reviewed to reflect the increase in tender
        prices and the fact that CEC has no statutory obligation to continue
        providing the scheme.

   6-   Negotiations with the school are recommended to consider their annual
        payment to mitigate the shortfall in income to the cost of the scheme.

   7-   Ticketing software should be explored to assess loads and capacity to
        offer more spare seats/ bespoke seats where appropriate given

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mainstream routes rarely operate at 100% loading and capacity and spare seat charges represents valuable income.

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5.0   TRANSPORT (TRAVEL) DELIVERY

General overview

5.1   The home to school transport service provides daily transport for 2,609 mainstream passengers and 925 SEND passengers to reach 195 different schools. This is delivered on 527 routes utilising 150 different contracted suppliers. In addition, there are a small number of bus passes given for those passengers using public bus routes.

5.2   The table over provides headline metrics which can be a useful starting point to understand performance, to compare client groups and to compare CEC with the average metrics of other similar, county authorities where we can be sure of comparable data. Benchmarks present many challenges and pitfalls because of different geography, demand demographics and supply markets and therefore we do not use it to calculate opportunity, they can nevertheless indicate where investigations should be made to qualify opportunities

5.3   The data raises some headline observations and lines of enquiry which provide direction for the review of performance. These include,

I.   The cost per SEND passenger appears significantly higher than other authorities. It will be important to understand the value from the prices achieved, also to examine factors which determine costs per passenger such as the utilisation of each vehicle and the distance of journeys.

II.   Vehicle utilisation, or passengers per vehicle indicators, appear to be low. This is a key driver of cost. Geography and degree of rural isolation of passengers might be contributing factors but comparators are arguably similar or more challenging geography. it will be critical to assess the effectiveness of routing and the process of allocating new passengers to routes.

III.   The number of PA's used on SEND routes is lower than normally expected. This could represent tight controls or be an indicator of difficulty in recruiting this role.

IV.   The offer of travel training and PTBs are very low. This was covered in the last section

Ref:	Item:	CEC	Council A	Council B	Council C	Council D	Council E	Council F	UNITARY BASKET (5)	AVERAGE
1	**School System:**									
A	Number of Special Schools served by transport	130	72	176	20	39	26	110	35	
B	Number of mainstream schools with transport provided	65	96	n/k	81	142	108	189	40	
C	Number of EHCP's	3,000	3,500	8,500	n/k	n/k	1,870	5,900	1,700	
***	*% of EHCP receiving transport*	31%	42%	41%	n/k	n/k	50%	56%	42%	46%
2	**Pupils Receiving Transport:**									
A	Number of mainstream children with transport provided	2,609	3,369	15,000	4,700	3,575	1,542	14,657	3,900	
B	Number of SEN pupils with transport provided	925	1,474	3,501	1,144	2,421	929	3,281	719	
C	How many first stage appeals received per year	83	300	90	n/k	n/k	n/k	60	32	
D	Number receiving Personal Transport Budgets (PTB's) SEN and mainstream	63	10	400	334	148	54	98	118	
***	*% PTBS offered of total passengers*	0.20%	0.20%	2.10%	5.70%	2.50%	2.20%	0.50%	2.50%	2.24%
3	**Operations:**									
A	Mainstream - number of routes (not public bus routes)	172	265	n/k	139	190	44	915	38	
***	*Mainstream passsengers per route*	15	13	n/k	34	19	35	16	103	36
B	SEN - number of routes	355	501	713	555	678	476	689	208	
***	*SEN - passengers per route*	2.61	2.94	4.91	2.06	3.57	1.95	4.76	3.46	3.37
C	SEN- number of single passenger routes	163	204	281	248	269	174	280	54	
***	*SEN - number of total routes with single passengers*	46%	41%	39%	45%	40%	37%	41%	26%	38%
D	SEN- number of passenger assistants (escorts)	145	467	476	114	568	281	410	139	
***	*SEN routes with escorts %*	41%	93%	67%	21%	84%	59%	60%	67%	64%
E	Number of seats sold on a discretionary basis (spare seats sold to parents)	27	3,113	n/k	236	127	110	n/k	11	
F	How many pupils receive Independent Travel Training each year?	0	0	64	0	32	18	30	28	
4	**Contracted Transport**									
A	Total number of individual suppliers available for use on DPS or approved list	150	307	114	85	112	135	259	162	
B	Number of suppliers providing between 5 and 10 routes	22	41	24	19	17	8	33	11	
C	Number of suppliers providing more than 10 routes	16	21	15	13	22	6	45	9	
D	Number of contracted buses (over 8 seats)	67	349	n/k	40	10	38	228	112	
E	Number of contracted saloons and MPVS	342	774	628	654	1077	482	960	135	
F	Number of passenger assistants	155	527	3	115	568	281	410	165	
5	**Transport Costs**									
A	Total SEN direct route cost per annum (contract + internal fleet if used) £	8,400,000	10,800,000	13,105,000	8,436,364	13,908,492	9,479,000	13,400,000	2,782,000	
***	*SEN cost per child per year*	9,081	7,327	3,743	7,374	5,745	10,203	4,084	3,869	6,049
B	Total mainstream direct route costs (contract + internal fleet if used) £	6,000,000	4,000,000	n/k	5,187,057	2,361,408	3,480,000	13,800,000	2,890,999	
***	*Mainstream cost per child per year*	2,300	1,187	n/k	1,104	661	2,257	942	741	1,148
6	**Question:**									
A	Approximate geographical size of the Local Authority?	1,165km2	2,230km2	3,075km2	3,150km2	1,643km2	1,792km2	5,921 km2		
B	Rural classification	Largely rural	Largely rural	Rural with signifcant urban	Largely rural	Urban with significant rural	Largely rural	Mainly rural		
C	Population	386,700	527,000	1,495,000	633,000	1,195,000	558,000	756,000		
***	*% of population receiving mainstream transport*	0.7	0.6	1.0	0.7	0.3	0.3	1.9		
***	*% of population receiving SEN transport*	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.4		
***	*Population per km2 (density)*	332	236	486	201	727	311	128	NA	348
D	Spare seats offered and sold?	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes	no		
E	Transport provided to social care passengers?	no	yes	yes	no	yes	yes	yes		
F	Vehicles / routes shared across adults and children's transport?	no	no	yes	no	no	no	no		
G	Route optimisation system in place?	partial	no	yes	no	yes	no	no		
H	Evidence of robust annual or periodic reassessment?	no	no	yes	no	yes	no	no		

Procurement, development, and management of supply

Overview & background

5.4　Contracted costs are high and are rising. The service explains rising costs of providing transport as reducing levels of supply and inflation associated with a faltering supply market. These are the key reasons for contract prices rising on re-tender.

5.5　Rather than provide analysis of the impact of each factor, which will typically not clearly conclude the impact of each, this review has sought to highlight opportunities to make improvements to the way suppliers are procured, and to work with suppliers to improve the value from contracts.

Supply/market engagement observations

5.6　There are over 150 suppliers on the existing DPS which appears to be a good base for healthy competition and represents laudable performance since its inception. This good base is also indicated by the spread of contracts across suppliers. In CEC 14 suppliers carry out 50% of the total demand which compares well to many other authorities where only 3 or 4 suppliers have evolved into providing majority of the supply.

5.7　Despite reported supply issues the team have resisted the currently typical reaction to re-negotiate or extend contracts as they come to an end, which is common across other authorities attempting to mitigate potentially higher prices by re-tender.

5.8　Despite some good practices in recent years by successfully engaging 150 suppliers, there are indications highlighting that even better and more focussed engagement with existing and new suppliers could be achieved.

5.9　There does not appear to be a clear whole service strategy in place to rectify escalating costs or mitigate the risks of further escalating costs. There is a real opportunity to better provide dedicated effort to manage and understand and develop the supply market.

5.10　Key metrics and information were not available and evidenced. As an example, there was no plan for routinely targeting more suppliers, and limited data on route costs using cost per mile indicators which is useful in indicating the value of a contract.

5.11　The work has not yet been carried out to identify where new suppliers might be and whilst there have been supplier engagement days and training offered on procurement processes, the approach of targeting and influencing those suppliers that are not engaging has been limited. This is a resource hungry activity and the team has struggled to identify resources to conduct this work

5.12   We carried out a basic task to identify suppliers in each of the key towns/areas in the region and whilst some of these may not be suitable suppliers it represents evidence of the presence of a larger supply market, with at least 200 additional suppliers over those already used identified in the largest 9 towns that serve Cheshire East, although please note that there may be small number of double counts where towns are close together.

Town	Current DPS	Within 2 miles	Within 5 miles
Congleton	7	20	24
Crewe	17	34	53
Macc	12	25	25
Nantwich	4	3	38
Northwich	12	25	50
Sandbach	8	13	54
Stoke	16	26	60
Wilmslow	2	25	48
Winsford	3	13	51
Total	**81**	**184**	**403**

5.13   We carried out a confidential telephone survey with a random selection of suppliers who were not on the current approved DPS. The results indicated some key reasons and common perceptions for them not engaging. From experience these can be typically easily overcome with engagement. The key themes to the reasons for not currently engaging include:

I.   There are too many hurdles to secure council work.

II.   Work is given to a few regular suppliers.

III. Would be keen, but do not understand how to go about it.

Other reasons which the Contracts and Performance team commonly experience include the following, and are issues which engagement and influencing suppliers may help overcome

I.   They will not agree to terms and conditions

II.   They are not able to guarantee supply as they do not have a back-up option (i.e., if their vehicle is broken/staff sickness)

III. They are unwilling to undertake the clearance process for their staff

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    IV. They make more income from airport runs/party hire etc therefore tying vehicle up 2 x a day not viable

    V. Not willing to commit to long term contracts

    VI. Technically challenged and not even willing to take up the offer of support on The Chest

5.14 In terms of current suppliers, it was evident that whilst there are some annual forums and periodic supplier days there is an opportunity for greater engagement of individual suppliers where a greater understanding of the business could be gleaned, confidence given, and innovation sought in new ways of tendering, including how batches of routes might be best developed.

5.15 Feedback from current suppliers included that it was not made easy for new suppliers to join the DPS and windows were open only at certain times which put many off. The processes insisted upon by licensing such as a 5 weeks course to support tests, was unusual and prevented many new drivers engaging. It is recommended that if anything can change to make the process more appealing, it should be considered.

5.16 Contracts are for a variety of durations but commonly 4 years duration and are reasonably well written with suitable performance clarity and penalty regime. However, the following points were noted for improvement

    I. A re-fresh of the contract will provide greater clarity in respect of the contracts appear to be written with a leaning toward bigger bus contracts. Important to reference smaller vehicles.

    II. The notice periods are not balanced. The council must give 30 days of notice for changes to routes with smaller than 16 seaters and 90 days for 16 seat and above. This is unusual and requires termination clause for convenience.

    III. No mention of electronic tendering. This will be important in the future.

    IV. Contracts have not been digitalised.

5.17 The existing DPS contracted to by TSS will now need to be replaced by CEC and efforts now must be focussed on this process. This work can be done in parallel to engaging more suppliers for the new DPS in the lead up to procurement for September 2023.

5.18 The very nature of a DPS is an open contract which can allow new suppliers to join at any time. However, there is evidence that TSS and now CEC only allow windows of access to the DPS. This is restrictive and every effort should be made to make access for suppliers easier.

Competition and value achieved from the current procurement process,

5.19   A critical observation when examining how competitive the procurement
        process is, is that contract end dates are not synchronized. The 530 contracts
        have over 35 different end dates roughly organised in 6 different periods of
        time. This is a fundamental issue can stifle competition because suppliers are
        unable to bid for new contracts and provide better prices because they are
        already at capacity providing another contract or contracts which are not yet
        ready to end. It is recommended that contracts are synchronised on a
        geographic basis to one of 3 end dates.

Competition and value achieved from the current procurement process,

5.20   Assessing the value achieved from competitive bids is challenging in this
        marketplace because comparisons of cost per passenger are impacted by
        geography. However, where route mileage data is available, we can compare
        the cost per mile charged by suppliers and compare this to other similar
        authorities and we can also compare the cost of CEC contracted routes
        against the cost per mile that the licensed taxi tariff charges in the area.
        However, the council does not routinely identify and keep data on route
        mileage, and this plays no part in any routine evaluation of the value that
        contracts deliver. Capturing this data will be an opportunity for the future and
        enable more robust route value and procurement assessment. For the
        purposes of this review, we were able to generate and secure route mileage
        data.

5.21   By examining saloon car contracts for the route sample, the table below
        shows CEC has one of the highest overall costs per mile and highest cost per
        mile over the longer distances. The comparisons are made against other
        authorities' routes.

	Overall £ per mile	£ per mile for a 5-15 mile journey	£ per mile for a 15-25 mile journey
Council A	4.74	6.20	4.05
Council B	5.10	6.70	4.60
Council C	3.11	3.50	2.53
Council D	6.89	8.50	4.56
Council E	5.50	5.50	5.50
CEC	6.10	7.10	5.88

Average costs per mile on contracted transport

5.22   We can also examine the cost of a journey using CEC's contracted cost per mile for saloons versus the rate that would be achieved by calling a private hire taxi and charging the licensed tariff. The council's standard tariff is a £3.20 for the first half mile and £2.00 per mile thereafter.

	10 mile journey	20 mile journey
Licensed Tariff cost £	22.20	41.20
Average CEC Contracted cost £	71.00	118.00

5.23   It is quite   normal to see higher contracted prices for home to school type of work as suppliers add a premium as this work can stifle their ability to take customers in the lead up to collection times and there is often waiting time on collection and drop-off. However, the difference in price is not usually so marked, we expect to see premiums of around 20-25% for contracted supply but in CEC a 10miles journey is nearly four times as much and a 20 mile journey three times as much. This indicates that there is likely to be an opportunity to competitively secure better prices and it also indicates the importance that suppliers will likely place on securing profitable council work, this evidence shows that council work is still lucrative and is likely to be highly valued as well as an opportunity to secure improved prices.

Other observations in respect of managing bids and suppliers.

5.24   There is little analysis of how contract prices have moved after original award, it is recommended that these measures are monitored as they are essential to aid understanding of the cost of new demand, and to ensure all avenues are taken to ensure best competitive value. This will be important in trying to rationalise recent escalations in the cost of children and young people's travel.

5.25   Consideration should be given to setting out a standard fixed mechanism of price adjustment to control variations mid contract term, which all suppliers will be requested to contract to.

5.26   Batches of contracts are not commonly issued. It is recommended where tactically appropriate that batches of routes are only biddable as a composite. There is an opportunity to be much more tactical. For example, using batching to ensure all contracts receive many bids by placing a potentially unpopular route/contract with popular ones and stipulating bids will only be considered for all of them together.

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5.27   There appears to be a deficiency in focused contract management and
         monitoring of suppliers. Whilst there are provisions in the contract to penalise
         suppliers and there is some evidence of this happening, it is recommended
         that performance reviews and performance summaries are developed which
         will support the objective of understanding suppliers better and helping them
         to develop for the future

Recommendations for effective market engagement and procurement

5.28   Good work has taken place to generate participation in a DPS and develop
       the supply base. It is noted that temporary arrangements are in place whilst a
       new DPS is developed. However, there is an opportunity to develop the
       supply base further, and competition can be improved if more suppliers are
       engaged and trained to access the DPS and bid electronically, and then
       further to encourage more engagement in procurement/bidding activities for
       available work. It is therefore recommended that a comprehensive
       engagement exercise is undertaken to encourage suppliers to bid for council
       work and an effort to educate them in how to do so. Areas of poor supply and
       low numbers of bids have been identified and now need focus on for supplier
       identification. The effort to set up the current DPS with the number of
       suppliers is recognised and this compares well versus other authorities.

5.29   The Contracts and Performance team have concerns over the low number of
       bids received for some tenders. However, analysis of the recent tender round
       in May 2022 shows an average 5.8 bids per tender, which is comparable to
       analysis done for the 2017 internal audit. Nevertheless, there are 13 lots with
       3 bids or lower although there are explanations for those with 1 bid such as a
       more remote area and a large coach for a short journey.

Bids	No of lots
1 bid	3
2 bids	2
3 bids	8
4 bids	5
5 bids	13
6 bids	6
7 bids	6
8 bids	3
9 bids	4
10 bids	2
11 bids	1
12 bids	2
Total lots	**55**

May 2022 tender round

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5.30   Whilst comparable to 2017, there still appears to be a low number of bidders
       than we would normally see and all efforts to increase suppliers is a sensible
       course of action.

5.31   Electronic reverse auctioning will add competition to the bidding process with
       suppliers able to see where their bid sits, see the winning bid, and consider
       bidding an improved price. The exercise will require significant resources to
       offer engagement, training, and support to suppliers as well as manage the
       electronic reverse auction process

5.32   There may be reservations about using electronic reverse auction on the
       grounds that the Contracts and Performance team are unsure about the
       evidence of potential savings opportunity level against the level of resources
       that will be required to educate suppliers and manage the process.

5.33   However, there are likely to be significant benefits and evidence of success in
       local authorities where electronic auctioning has been deployed is provided
       later in this section.

   Recommendation

5.34   It is recommended that a full re-procurement is carried out in three tranches
       to coincide with September 2023, January 2024, and April 2024 term
       commencement. Carrying this out in three tranches will allow careful
       management of the workload, and better communications regarding the
       changes with schools, parents, and suppliers. Commencing the
       transformation in January 2023 will allow time to engage, educate and train
       the supply market, re-route, and create tenders, communicate with schools
       and parents, and implement and train staff in the required systems. Notice will
       need to be given to allow changes to contracts to enable their synchronisation
       into one of the 3 procurement events. The tranches are recommended to be
       designed geographically to further increase competition.

5.35   An exercise of re-procurement will be a huge task requiring careful supplier
       and user/parent communications and management. The task has some clear
       interdependencies with other key recommendations in this report including,

       I.   Exercise to identify and engage the supply market.

       II.   Evaluation of new supplier bids to access the DPS.

       III.   Varying with agreement or retender the proposed new DPS to
              accommodate process of reverse auction

       IV.   Re-routing of all areas and development of new contracts and tender
              batches.

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V. Implementing procurement software that supports electronic reverse auctioning and ensure suppliers are educated and coached to engage and engage effectively.

5.36 Competition will be improved by better routing. A routing overhaul, explained later, will release vehicles into the supply market and therefore provide greater competition for routes.

Benefits of procurement improvements.

5.37 Significant savings are expected by increasing competition and procuring using the initiatives recommended. The table below summarises the impact made where local authorities had similar circumstances to CEC, such as opportunities to engage the supply market, to coach in the use of electronic tendering, and benefit more from a healthy DPS and use reverse auctioning. Sustainable savings will be the result after the operation has settled down and any initial hand-backs have been managed.

5.38 Whilst there are significant opportunities to improve value from suppliers in CEC from the current position there are likely limitations which are bespoke to this area on the remaining size of the supply market and other factors such as suppliers having the potential to bid for work in arguably more lucrative surrounding local authorities.

5.39 These factors have been carefully considered and we have conservatively reduced the typically expected minimum returns of a full re-procurement exercise. Therefore, we expect a full re-procurement exercise will realise at least 5% saving of current supplier costs. These savings will be phased given the recommended tranches of implementation

5.40 The table below summarises the benefits achieved in councils with similar circumstances and provides good evidence and surety that the benefits outlined for are conservative, achievable, and sustainable.

	Increase to suppliers used on framework	System before	System after	Saving %
Council A	12%	Tender per route from approved list	DPS and electronic reverse auction per route	15%
Council B	16%	Paper pence per mile	Electronic reverse auction per route	22%
Council C	24%	Paper tender per routes	Electronic reverse auction per route	19%
Council D	34%	Full tender prices per route	Electronic reverse auction per route	18%
Council E	8%	DPS but no electronic tendering	Electronic reverse auction per route	17%

Routing and logistics

Headline observations

5.41   In most local authority operations, it is common practice to continually evaluate, on top of the initial overhaul, all opportunities to re-route throughout the year to reflect changes in demand and to carry out a fundamental route overhaul periodically and sometimes annually. Many authorities have some form of routing software to support this activity.

5.42   Detailed below are some key observations made of the services routing,

I.   CEC has procured routing software in MTC and experimented with using it on some routes.

II.   There is an apparent apprehension to conduct a major route overhaul. This is because of a lack of capacity and the potential to upset parents and schools of the children who have been transported consistently on routes for long periods of time and the perceived potential for a lack of support from CEC for an overhaul which has the potential to create disturbance. This hesitancy extends to upsetting suppliers who may have been carrying out set routes for long periods of time and are struggling to trade at a difficult time.

III.   Whilst routing software is available and has been used in part, there is currently no clear plan to how a more fundamental routing exercise might take place.

The scale of the opportunity

5.43   We used 'Q-Routes' a comparable routing software to examine the opportunity to re-route. We conducted a re-routing exercise on all routes to 3 large SEN schools.

5.44   With some clear assumptions and by ensuring that the following parameters were adhered we confidently and empirically gauge that there is a significant opportunity to conduct a fundamental re-routing exercise

   I.   New routes were calibrated against existing routes on the same software (we effectively applied current routes to the system to be the benchmark) so a like for like comparison could be made, and peak travel time was calibrated at Monday mornings.

   II.   New routes were never allowed to take longer than 75 mins for any passenger

   III. PA, wheelchair space and data on which children needed to travel alone was incorporated into the analysis.

5.45   The exercise resulted in some significant opportunities to reduce the current number of routes (currently 62 routes carrying 258 children) by half.

	Original solution	QRoutes solution
#Trips	258	258
#Routes	62	32
#Schools	3	3
Ave Route times	43.19	60.97
Ave Route miles	14	17
Total Rt times (hrs)	44.6	32.5
Total Route miles	861	528
Ave Trip time mins	33.40	37.44
Total Trip time mins	144	161
Care Assts required	62	32

Load Type Original

Load Type	Count of Load Type
Must Travel Alone	2
SEN Walk On	227
Wheelchair	29
Total	**258**

Load Type QR Soln

Load Type	Count of Load Type
Must Travel Alone	2
SEN Walk On	227
Wheelchair	29
Total	**258**

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5.46   When we do this exercise with similar assumptions in other authorities, we commonly highlight an opportunity route reduction of around 25% so there is certainly a big opportunity in CEC.

5.47   Naturally there will be specific operational reasons why the refined routes may not be exactly possible to implement such as particular requirements of passengers needing to be picked up in a certain order or children that need to be transported independently. There may be a shortage in supply of larger vehicles. For these reasons, we have assumed a conservative route reduction potential of 12.5%.

5.48   From experience, we are confident that we can apply the route reduction opportunity to schools/destinations which have 5 or more routes into them and not including routes which are serviced by coaches, large buses, and double-deckers as reductions in these routes are less likely to be possible.

5.49   By doing this extrapolation we conclude that around 300 routes are impactable from the 527 (ignoring cash grants) total routes in CEC. At an average cost of £22,000 per route per annum. A 12.5% reduction is 37 routes which would save £814,000 per annum over 3 phases in line with the re-procurement programme.

5.50   An important benefit would be the release of 37 vehicles which would serve to improve competition on tendering and reduce vehicles on the roads at peak times. Whilst a headline assumption, this is a powerful point. 37 vehicles reduction would also broadly equate to a reduction of 777 tonnes of carbon reduction.

5.51   It is recommended that Mobi-soft is used to plot the total solution and using cleansed and complete data. This will present the opportunity which can be further adapted with operational knowledge. Implementation will be complex exercise to co-ordinate, especially as it is best to coincide with re-procurement events and therefore it is recommended to be planned over 3 tranches.

5.52   Efforts to increase the supply of larger vehicle availability should be pursued, which will allow higher levels of re-routing efficiency.

Single person journeys

5.53   There are often good reasons for needing single person journeys such as the needs of the passenger mean that they cannot mix with others, or that the passenger cannot be placed on group transport for geographical/logistical reasons, and sometimes contractor drivers may refuse to carry mis-behaving or challenging children on group transport.

5.54   Examination of the key metric of the 'number of single journeys as a % of total journeys', can indicate leniency (more risk averse approach) to allocating journeys, poorer routing or geography necessitating single person vehicles.

5.55   In discussions with the team, it was evident that resources to continually re-appraise and re-consider single person journeys retrospectively are stretched, however initiatives to re-evaluate every single passenger have taken place and is further recommended as part of the change project.

5.56   In CEC 163 of the 355 SEN routes are single person journeys which represents 45%. Whilst this does not represent poor performance against the benchmarks it is still worth re-assessing and focussing on whether more single passengers can be combined into group transport or considered for a PTB.

5.57   The cost of transporting single passengers is always significantly higher and averages at c£17,000 per annum. Therefore, it should always be an important initiative to continually consider ways of routing passengers on group routes by better logistics and challenging the need for a single journey.

5.58   For mainstream the benchmark average is 10% with some authorities having none. CEC does not have an evident problem, with numbers negligible.

Customer/user focus

5.59   Customer focus forums with parents and Headteachers and survey of parents highlighted that there was a need for improvements to resolve the following issues and/or perceptions. Feedback is detailed in Appendix C however the headlines include

    I.   Who to contact is not always clear and this extended to not having confidence that any one part of the travel organisation is going to take accountability for resolving an issue.

    II.   Communications in respect of changes to transport are commonly last-minute causing anxiety. Information on the needs of the child were not always passed to the new contractor.

    III.   Parents are not sure what to expect in respect of changes to routes and when changes may happen. Their expectations were not being managed.

It is recommended that the following actions are considered and implemented

    I.   Publish the complaints process and make alterations to CEC website where complaints in respect of transport can be confused with public bus complaints.

    II.   Publish clear contact information with times of the day when someone will be available to resolve issues. The team are now looking at including clear contact details on the footers of all correspondence.

    III.   Whilst subcontracting is permitted it must be reinforced that CEC must be made aware of the arrangement and the details of the arrangement so that ownership of vetted driver and P.A is evidenced. New/ changed arrangements must be communicated to parents up front. To this end, guidance to suppliers and appropriate sanctions should be strengthened. The same conditions and tests should be levied to sub-contractors used such as English Language tests.

    IV.   Ensure a child 'passport' is developed containing all relevant information about a passenger, including needs and this is shared with the driver/PA.

    V.   Put into place a clear protocol for changes to routes and new routes. This should include

           a. Aspirational notice period for parents to know a change is coming. The team do currently send 'out to tender' letters

           b. Details including photo of new driver/PA within a time span before the change

           c. A re-focus on pre day 1 meet and greets with parents and re-introduction of the 'meet and greet' performance measure to enable management of suppliers.

           d. Include clear measures of performance in overall reporting. Such as % of meet and greets achieved.

5.59   It is recommended that a passenger charter is developed in co-production with parent groups, published and shared to outline what parents can expect to see in respect of their arrangements and how change of driver/route will be implemented. This should include some commitments to users and parents which should include

    I.   Changes to routes/drivers will be communicated in advance and with notice

    II.   Likely dates for changes resulting from known re-procurement events will be communicated

    III.   New drivers and PA's will meet and greet passengers before first pick up and if this is not possible then photos and details of the people and vehicle sent to passengers

IV.   Drivers/PA's will have details of each passenger on the route

V.   Drivers and PA's will have a good command of English

VI.   Subcontracting transport will not make any of the points above any less imperative to comply with.

6.0   SUMMARY RECOMMENDATIONS

General strategy, organisation	
GS1	Embark on a 3 year transformation programme to deliver recommendations in this report and commence in early 2023. For the remainder of 2022 commence detailed timeline plans and identify additional capacity and capability required to support implementation.
GS2	Re-launch the CYP Travel service with branding, strategy and focus on travel support, child independence and reduced reliance on 'door to door' transport and towards alternative travel solutions.
GS3	Integrate all aspects of travel delivery into a dedicated and integrated travel team and ensure a joined-up strategy and direction for travel with Corporate wide support and overall accountability for total expenditure
GS4	Implement clear performance management reporting on costs and delivery performance to allow more accurate forecasting and management.
GS5	Provide communications and engagement to schools, parents and users of transformation and culture shift, re-setting expectations and importance of the changes required.
Policy, Assessment & Demand management	
P1	Combine service and integrate systems, extend use of Mobi-soft to assessment and therefore streamline the process from application to delivery. Carry out in a modular fashion beginning with improving Mobi-soft data integrity, ownership, and user training on the system.
P2	Introduce controls on social care, gatekeeping of requests and reporting use against available budget and reason codes. Work with social care decision makers on costs and importance of notice period to allow effective procurement of supply.
P3	Ensure policy wording re-sets expectations of travel, independence at the core, provides clarity, and ensures robust application of entitlement.
P4	Re-brand policy and all assessment and delivery process into 'Travel solutions' and away from transport and implication of a 'door to door' transport offer being the norm.
P5	Highlight and develop alternative travel solutions through the policy, assessment process and resources dedicated to promotion, such as private budgets and travel training. Integrate travel needs into assessment and reassessment process for EHCPs.
P6	Highlight that travel is not granted for life and will be robustly re-assessed periodically. Put re-assessment process in place and bring back from school accountability.
P7	Ensure application forms are completed for SEN by parents with full evidence of circumstances requested and checked
P8	Enhance the application process to draw out more supporting evidence required for entitlement to be determined and highlight opportunities to offer alternative travel offers such as PB's and travel training.
P9	Ensure resources are made available to re-assess all passengers as a one-off exercise and then on a routine basis and ensure record of review and outcome is kept. Prioritise those under statutory distance and lacking distance data, and expensive single person journeys. Ensure transport is discussed as part of the annual EHCP review to reflect changing needs that may impact transport requirements.

P10	Clarify clear grounds for appeal in the policy and ensure appeal process is not used for dealing with service delivery complaints.
P11	Approve business case and implement strategic effort to promote travel training across all schools, re-set expectation. 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
P12	Develop a flexible and negotiated offer of PTBs for all appropriate passengers. Re-assess all passengers for PTB in line with prioritising expensive single passenger routes
P13	Automate PTB payments and eradicate process of waiting for attendance data before approval
P14	Re-assess passengers, prioritising those under statutory distance and agree protocols for implementation of changes with services and members.
P15	Conduct programme of identification of small capital schemes to improve safe walking routes on potential high-volume routes. Agree protocol and strategy for implementing safe walking routes.
P16	Harmonise the post 16, spare seat and bespoke scheme charges and bring into line with other authorities and reflect inflation. Annual routine inflation protocol implemented for all schemes.
P17	Continue the bespoke scheme but re-negotiate contribution from the high school, examine possibility of private route take-up of the largely ineligible routes
P18	Do not expand the dedicated scheme, but use spare seats and larger vehicles on the basis of being economical advantageous to do so and ensuring there are no long-term obligations to continue providing (avoid legacy schemes)

Operational Delivery

TD1	Embark on a comprehensive supply market engagement exercise to better understand the market and encourage new suppliers to access the DPS and bid for work
TD2	Consider improvements to the licensing process to make entry for new applicants more appealing.
TD3	Ensure DPS window for new applicants is always open
TD4	Synchronise contract end dates
TD5	Update contracts with re-balanced notice periods, more specific to smaller vehicles etc
TD6	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
TD7	Develop use of tactical batching of tenders

TD8	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
TD9	Provide coaching and support to suppliers to use electronic and reverse auctioning. Focus on communications to schools and users.
TD10	Capture data on route mileage and test value on a cost per mile basis during tender process and during lifetime of contract.
TD11	Embark on MTC data cleanse exercise
TD12	Encourage participation from suppliers in neighbouring councils for work on the county borders.
TD13	Ensure all routes are tendered using electronic reverse auctioning, even routes commencing mid-term or where changes are required. Utilise an ad-hoc/ emergency framework of prices for short term requirements.
TD14	Continue the process of appraising all single passenger journeys for alternative solutions including group travel or PTBs
TD15	Engage with suppliers with regular performance reviews where aspirations and concerns can be understood, confidence provided for growth. Understand the supply market better
TD16	Develop suite of performance reports and performance regime
TD17	Develop improved database functionality ability to communicate, send messages, forecast, and develop reporting
TD18	Share clear complaints procedure and report complaint numbers, update website to provide clarity on how to make a complaint for the service
TD19	Implement clear protocols for change to routes including an aspirational timeframe of notice for parent, child 'passport' outlining information to needs to supplier, detail of driver (photo) to family before day 1.
TD20	Begin to manage expectation of change so families know when the retender events are likely to happen for their route. This will be easier with synchronisation of contract end dates on a zonal basis. Publish a passenger charter to outline what they can expect to see in respect of delivery and when changes are made.
TD21	Clarify and manage conditions for subcontracting by suppliers

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7.0   IMPLEMENTATION

Overview

7.1   The recommended strategy and initiatives now required to achieve this transformation will need support across the council including strong political leadership with the proposed transformation programme delivering the following critical themes

I.   Creating an Integrated Travel Team that delivers a joined-up travel offer, policy, strategic direction and which performs effectively and has clear accountability for overall costs and service levels.

II.   Overhauled and effective routes that best consider the individual needs of passengers, best use of suppliers, and benefits from newly developed routing software

III.   A better developed and ignited supply market with improved competition. Through effective and innovative procurement therefore maximising value.

IV.   An effective travel service with robust Governance and clear accountabilities, benefitting from an enhanced performance culture supported by improved data, systems, reporting and measurement.

V.   A shift of the travel offering to one with improved management of the expectations of parents, schools, and users so that the offer moves to the provision of 'travel solutions' in the most cost-effective way and in a manner that promotes life-long independence through better use of private travel budgets and supported by policy re-branding.

7.2   The programme will be complex and intensive, will likely take around 3 years to fully deliver and will require robust planning, and complex stakeholder communications. Successful implementation will be dependent on significant additional resources, strong leadership, and Governance.

7.3   Momentum and speed are now key to maximise the benefits outlined in the transport review. For every month of delay there is a lost saving opportunity of approx. £175,000 which will be the sustainable monthly saving benefit at the end of the programme, and the lost benefits of improved services and greater independence for some of your most vulnerable children.

7.4   It is recommended that the programme is considered as one programme of initiatives which combine to produce overall benefits. Any cost benefit proposals to secure funding for resources to support delivery should consider

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the transformation as one programme not least because there are many initiatives that are dependent on one another and have a common theme of culture change, performance improvement and managing expectation of users.

Resources

7.5   The review could not easily identify the required resources and expertise to carry out this transformation from internal teams and therefore it is recommended that the council appraises a range of options to secure the resources required. This may be from an in-house source or engaging the services of a niche provider of expertise in a partnership arrangement.

Leadership & capacity

7.6   Resources will be required to lead and deliver transformation and must supplement those required to deliver the day-to-day operation and will not be insignificant. It is imperative that these resources possess the skills and practical knowledge of a Children and Young People travel service, to be effective.

7.7   Generic managers, project managers or general consultants/interim managers are not normally successful and specific abilities and skills will be required such as those detailed below (not exhaustive).

    I.   Programme leadership, transformation leadership, not just project but hands-on change leadership and complex planning of re-procurement

    II.   Ability to influence and inspire confidence whilst fronting supplier forums and coaching suppliers through bidding

    III.   Experience in developing transport tenders, tactical batches, development of lots and re-procuring using e-auctions

    IV.   Experience of re-routing using software and then understanding local knowledge and talking, influencing, and consulting with parents and schools

    V.   Making performance culture changes, influencing teams, implementing performance regimes

    VI.   Developing and making systems work for users, transport database and routing capability.

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     VII.   Assessing children for travel entitlement and best form of travel using EHCP, application forms and other evidence to support Assessment teams

     VIII.   Supporting a re-assessment programme and implementing decisions in an effective and low risk way

7.8   Additional resources will need to flex to meet peaks and troughs in demand for the programme and may be as high as 6 FTE in peak periods. This flexibility requirement usually is a key factor in favour of a support partnership.

7.9   A support partnership is sometimes more effective with a risk contract. This is where a provider will commit to deliver the outputs or risk their fees from not delivering targets.

7.10   The table on the next page seeks to compare the different options available to secure the resources which will be required.

	Support partnership	In-house team	Rationale
Cost over 3 years		£0.75m	In house team would not have ability to fluctuate
Flexibility of resources	YES	NO	Resources flex between peaks and troughs in the programme in partnership but challenging for in-house team
Fixed cost	YES	NO	Support partnership is procured to deliver outputs and will add resources to meet the outputs if required
Downsize implications	NO	YES	There will be a need after the programme to return to normal staffing levels
Knowledge & expertise in travel	YES	UNLIKELY	Experience of doing this before
Skills to deliver	YES	UNLIKELY	Vey specific skills in developing supply, influencing culture of parents and schools
Guarantee of delivery	YES	NO	Partner can offer risk model to protect council and guarantee savings
Leadership	YES	CHALLENGING	Support partnership can work alongside delivery team taking a leadership role, in-house team likely to be subsumed
Independence	YES	NO	Significant experience and understanding of changing the culture of expectation is crucial and influencing decision making across stakeholders
Time to mobilise	IMMEDIATE	3-6 MONTHS	The Council loses guaranteed savings of £200,000-250,000 for every month of delay

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8.0 HEADLINE IMPLEMENTATION TIMELINE

Ref:	Description:	2022 Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	2023 Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	2024 Jan	Feb	Mar	April	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	2025 Jan	Feb
1	**Project Design & Initiation**																																	
2	Complete CEC Passenger Transport Review report and present findings	■																																
3	Internal CEC evaluation of review report and key decisions on next steps			■																														
4	Options appraisal and detailed design of change program for passenger transport operation				■																													
5	Develop business case, gain approvals and select / procure implementation partner for change programme delivery				■																													
6	Finalise content and targets of H2S transport change program and develop detailed timeline								■																									
7	Project initiation. Agreement of targets and set-up of governance structure								■																									
8	Sequence of Transport Steering Group meetings (indicative)								▮ ▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮ ▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮	▮ ▮	▮
9	Formal commencement of passenger transport change programme								▮																									
10	Development of project Baseline Report from which to measure progress								■																									
11	Adaptation and agreement of form of contract and schedules for implementation partner; contract signed								■																									
12	Development of Communication Plan & ongoing communication as required								■	▨	▨	▨	Ongoing																					
13	**Transport Systems**																																	
14	Full data cleansing exercise on Mobisoft system to ensure robust base data in place								■	▨	▨	▨	Ongoing																					
15	Full data cleansing exercise on Mobisoft system to ensure robust base data in place								■	▨	▨	▨	Ongoing																					
16	**Integrated Transport Unit (ITU)**																																	
17	Role and structure redesign for the creation of an ITU based on existing teams									■																								
18	Job evaluation and development of updated job descriptions; role review; skills gap analysis										■																							
19	Staff and union consultation process in respect of structural change for ITU												■	■																				
20	Advertise for and recruit additional two staff required by ITU to improve resources and capability												■	■																				
21	Implementation of new ITU structure and reporting lines etc.															■																		
22	Ongoing development of ITU processes and interfaces with customer departments / SLAs												■	■	▨	▨	▨																	
23	Design and implementation of performance management regime under new structure												■																					
24	**Reprocurement**																																	
25	Contractual transfer process to formalise use of current DPS by CEC; upgrade DPS to enable e-tender and e-action as necessary								■	■	■																							
26	Review and re-draft of contract documentation for DPS re-tender								■	■	■																							
27	Preparation and set-up of e-tender systems and access arrangements; document uploads								■	■	■																							

#	Task
28	Contractor training, system testing and dummy tender / auction exercises in preparation for re-tender
29	Market engagement exercise in support of upgraded DPS framework
30	Phased re-routing exercises across passenger transport on an area by area basis
31	Phased notice on existing routes as required to dovetail with re-tender process
32	Re-tender via DPS Framework to dovetail with re-routing exercises
33	Implementation planning / contract awards / training / introduction and handover
34	Phased implementation of newly re-tendered and replanned routes
35	Post-tender follow up and route adjustments as required; contractor negotiations
36	**Personal Travel Budgets & Charging**
37	Rolling review of journeys, prioritising single passenger journeys & below statutory distance
38	Evaluate and implement PTB's where appropriate following journey review
39	Consultation on charging levels for spare seats and Post 16 transport
40	Communication to key stakeholders of new charging structure for spare seats and Post 16 travel & 'back office' preparation for chegre collection
41	Implementation of new charges and collection via existing systems
42	**Governance & Policy**
43	Design and implementation of governance structure for end-to-end H2S process
44	Review and re-draft policy to shift emphasis to 'Travel Support'.
45	Consultation on policy changes
46	Redesign Application process to gather additional data.
47	Re-brand and re-launch H2S service based on new policy, with communication as required
48	Design and agree eligibility reassessment process for review of all passengers
49	Rolling reassessment of passengers eligibility and adjustment to travel arrangements as required
50	**Travel Training**
51	Awareness campaign / engagement in schools and with parents in respect of Travel Training
52	Set-up Independent Travel Training capability / capacity & identify first tranche candidates
53	Rolling program of Independent Travel Training

Ongoing process as operational requirements change

Ongoing process as operational requirements change

9.0   FINANCIAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN

	Efficiency	Rationale	Potential annual returns				Risk
			23/24	24/25	25/26	On-going	
1	Reprocurement of current supply contracts	Ignite and develop market place, increase competition, use reverse auction, synchronise contract end dates, deliver over 3 phases (Sep 23, Jan 24, Apr 24) Delivering at least 5% of current contracted supply costs which is 11.8million p.a.	148,000	590,000	590,000	590,000	
2	Re-route	Conservative reduction of 12.5% of all routes which are part of routes going into schools where there are 5 routes or more. This means there are approx 300 routes of the 525 total which are impactable. Therefore a reduction of 37 routes with an average cost per route of £22,000 so saving £814,000 over 3 phases in line with re-procurement programme	204,000	814,000	814,000	814,000	
	TOTAL		352,000	1,404,000	1,404,000	1,404,000	

	Demand, income, alternative, cost	Rationale	Annual returns				Risk
			23/24	24/25	25/26	On-going	
3	Re-assessment	Re-assess all under statuatory distance passengers in SEN and mainstream to be more in line with other authorities and implement element of SWR. Reduce by a conservative 5% of those under distance currently. Reducing SEN by by 5 passengers at 9,018 p.a. and mainstream by 48 at £2,208 p.a. = total of £157,806	52,602	105,204	157,806	157,806	
4	Introduce travel training	Train 50 children per year for cost of £30,000 ramping up and saving 50% of average cost per child across mainstream and SEN. This will support and help and includes inititiave to move to public bus. Overall average cost per child £3,200. 50*1,600 = 80,000	50,000	130,000	210,000	210,000	
5	Promotion of PTB's	Convert 50 passengers over 3 years to private budgets with a saving of 50% of the average cost per single person journey of c£15,000 p.a. We normally expect a 50% saving on average from contracted transport to parental payment of own arrangement. This is still less than 1.5% of the full travelling cohort.	125,000	250,000	375,000	375,000	
6	Post 16/ spare seats/ PHS	Increasing seat charges to £900 per annum in line with neighbouring Cheshire West	35,000	70,000	70,000	70,000	
7	Extra staffing	2 extra FTE in the ITT at 35,000 per annum each	-70,000	-70,000	-70,000	-70,000	
	TOTAL		192,602	485,204	742,806	742,806	

| TOTAL | | | 544,602 | 1,889,204 | 2,146,806 | 2,146,806 | |

OFFICIAL-SENSITIVE

In Commercial Confidence

Appendix A   Summary feedback - current suppliers

1	CEC must rectify licence process. It compares as very stringent to other authorities. A 5week college course and knowledge test. This is putting drivers off. It can take 6 months to get a licence.
2	Must rectify the access to DPS/ approved list. They do not allow open access apart from at specific times. New drivers are walking away. Must make it easier to sign up.
3	Poor communications on big ticket issues such as inflation. Nobody replies and we lose trust which means we are inclined to let the work dwindle and focus on other stuff
4	No development work and understanding our business with us. If I knew availability and trusted direction I would invest in vehicle. Come and talk to us.
5	They are making too many planning and routing mistakes such as: 1- 6th formers just roll through into transport, we know and see it happen 2- they include kids that have left on the route sheets, their records are poor, meanwhile I am providing too bigger vehicle for the number of kids 3- they don't have the knowledge to route effectively so I push back a lot
6	Chest is a nonsense and too complex…..just use email which they are doing right now
7	There is a big problem in them being able to sort issues as they are not together in the office. Decisions do not get made and they have to email one another which sometimes creates delays when the situation is urgent. Phones ring out.
8	Not enough staff in the transport ops team to handle the queries and understand us.

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Appendix B　　Summary feedback - suppliers not currently engaged

Discipline	Summary response
Taxi/Minibus	Worked for CEC in the past. Looks out for tenders. Is interested but not sure how to look forward and to get bids in on time. Would welcome advice on how to get on current framework/ approval list
Taxis	It appears to be the usual few providers who have contacts in the council and are savvy with their computers
Taxi/Minibus	You need an army of pen pushers to keep up with their requirements.
Coach hire	Too much paperwork, also not sure if work type suited their business model but were interested in what type of rates were on offer
Taxis	Have worked before but too awkward. Having said that it would be good to have it to fall back on at the moment.
Taxis	They know it pays well if you can get a good contract, used to work for a council, but seems sewn up with regular suppliers
Taxi Minibus	Not enough money in it. Takes too much out of the day.
Minibus Hire	Not our model, so don't really look. Where do you see the jobs that they are looking for?
Coach and minibus hire	Not interested "Just not the kind of thing we do".
Taxis	Not interested as too much paperwork and never open to get on the list
Taxis	Ties you up but for the right price, who knows? How do I find out what's available?
Taxis	Made enquiries a few years ago but thought it was quite a rigmarole to become approved. Too complex. However, given airport work is dried up they regret not having a chance of work and would welcome finding out how.

Appendix C   Summary feedback -users/ parents/setting stakeholders

Stakeholder	Summary response
Head	Would like more input into solutions to reduce safeguarding risks e.g., when children shouldn't travel together
Head	Very limited use of PA's. School would always travel with staff to child ratio but sometimes 5 children might be alone with a driver which is risky for the driver
Head	Difficult to get hold of the transport ops office at times when problems most likely to occur e.g., 8am
Head	Some cars not suitable for the size and number of passengers
Head	Because assessment protocols have changed over years it causes lack of equity in those entitled and offered transport. Children are being rejected for needs which were previously met.
Head	Parents believe they are entitled to free transport if their SEN child travels further than their nearest mainstream school based on need. This is not the case if they are travelling less than statutory distance.
Head	Schools take on board most of the communications with parent's ref transport
Head	Drivers and PAs don't have to carry out safeguarding training. This would be ideal.
Social care	Social workers little fiscal awareness of travel decisions outside of what are statutory requirements
General	Parental expectation is high and reinforced by articulate and powerful parent groups and supported by member led appeals
General	CEC is often parental needs led, rather than the needs of the child
Parent	Hard to know who to contact as there are many departments involved. Hard to find someone to take accountability for a problem.
Parent	There is a lack of understanding of eligibility criteria across each team

Parent	Cash grants take a long time to pay and I have to chase each month and they are not automated and finding staff that understand them is not easy
Parent	I have never had an inflationary rise for my cash grant
Parent	Transport arrangements are never discussed in my child's annual plan review, it would be useful to consider this as it's an important part of my child's day and needs.
Parent	Poor communications on changes to transport arrangements. We feel anxious at the beginning of each term regarding which driver and PA will turn up. Changes happen without notice and without communication. ''Meet and Greets'' before day 1 do not happen, even a photo of the driver would help. We understand changes need to happen but they are managed poorly.
Parent	If my driver changes there is rarely any knowledge and understanding of my child's needs and we are forced to start again and the onus feels like it is on us.
Parent	We have little visibility of the complaint's procedure, is there one?
Parent	Contractors are subcontracting to others without our knowledge which has on occasions left me not knowing where my child was and who they were with
Parent	Some drivers do not speak English which is very distressing for our children
Parent	Cannot get hold of anyone at peak times when issues occur such as at 0730 in the morning
Parent	There does not appear to be any penalty for poor performing supply firms, we all know the ones to avoid but nothing ever happens to the ones that fall short of safety and performance. Some firms have a reputation for handing back their contracts and causing operational chaos.
Parent	We are very keen to explore travel training but this has never really taken off and there does not appear to be anyone who can talk to us about it
Parent	The approval process for transport was OK and happened smoothly

Appendix D   Stakeholders engaged in the review

Area	Stakeholder Name	Position
School Transport and Admissions Team	Jo Bowkett	Manager, Admissions and School Transport
School Transport Team	Clair Kiffin	Manager, School Transport Operations Manager
School Transport Team	Helen Rawlinson	Transport Manager, School Transport Team
Transport (Place)	Richard Hibbert	Head of Strategic Transport and Parking
Transport (Place)	Trevor Robinson	Contracts & Performance Manager, Transport Contracts & Monitoring
Transport (Place)	Jenny Marston	Policy & Accessibility Manager
Corporate services	Helen Green	Group Finance Business Partner (TSS finance)
Corporate services	Steve Reading	Principal Accountant, Children and Families Services
Education Services	Jacky Forster	Director of Education and Skills
Children and Families	Gill Betton	Head of Service for Children's Development & Partnerships
Education Services	Sally Ashworth	Interim Head of Service: Pupil Participation and Support
SEND	Laura Rogerson	Head of Service for Inclusion
Children's social care	Kerry Birtles	Director children's social care
Children's social care	Louise Hurst	Head of Service, CIN/CP
Children's social care	Keith Martin	Service Manager – Children with Disabilities
Children's social care	Annemarie Parker	Head of Cared for children and care leavers
Licencing	Tracey Bettaney	Head of Regulatory Services
Licencing	Kim Evans	Licencing Manager
Providers (ANSA)	Sarah Tunstall	Fleet Manager
Head Teacher	Nevin Deakin	Marton & District Primary
Head Teacher (PRU)	Gemma Bailey	Oakfield Lodge School
Head Teacher (Special)	Lisa Hodgkinson	Springfield Special School
Head Teacher	Matthew Dean	Poynton High School
Post 16	Mark Jones	Cheshire College South and West, Post 16 rep
CEPCF	Kate Walters	Parent carer forum