

## Children's Services Overview & Scrutiny Budget Working Group Conclusions – Part 2, School Transport Costs

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### Key Lines of Enquiry

The Working Group undertook a deep dive into the budget associated with School Transport Costs, raising detailed data and information requests. These are detailed in the Key Lines of Enquiry (KLOE) background document (available upon request).

Working Group Findings and Recommendations	
Question for consideration	Working group conclusions
How much is in the budget?	<p>The group focused on School Transport as a topic in relation to the Children's Services budget. The group received an overview of the budget position and the cost of home to school transport taking account of the total budget for School Transport and the various elements within this. The total budget for School Transport in 2024/25 was £14,788,900 and the forecast projections showed an overspend of £190k.</p> <p>The reasons for the projected overspend were presented to the group, highlighting that an increase in demand for free assistance with travel costs had led to expenditures on travel and transport surpassing the home-to-school transport budget. The home-to-school transport function was complex, with various factors contributing to the continually rising costs in that area.</p> <p>The group noted the significant impact on the budget of transport to support Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) pupils and the reasons relating to this. It was noted that the budget for school transport was divided into SEND transport, which accounted for £14,055,600, and mainstream transport, which accounted for the remaining amount of £733,300. Officers emphasised the need to ensure that every penny spent within this budget was well-utilised and provided value for money.</p> <p>In relation to the 2025/26 budget, the group was advised that the Directorate had put in a growth request for an additional £2,234,000 for the next year, reflecting the increasing demand and complexity of needs behind school transport costs. This had now been included within the schedule for growth proposals next year to be scrutinised by corporate colleagues.</p>
What does the data tell us about demand or unmet needs?	<p>The group noted that there was no unmet need as it was a statutory service and the budget for it was demand led. It was noted that there had been a large growth in demand and the reasons for that were discussed.</p>

	<p>The group was provided with clarity regarding the law relating to school admissions and home to school transport and were provided with details of where discretionary transport provision was considered alongside the number of appeals for refusals of transport provision.</p>
Is the council meeting its aims and objectives?	<p>The working group acknowledged that school transport costs were a very complex and challenging area, with many intricacies outside of the Council's control which negatively impacted on the budget. The group noted that the national framework and statutory guidance which Children's Services had to work within was no longer fit for purpose and needed updating.</p> <p>The working group acknowledged the mitigations detailed by Children's Services officers to ensure the service was as efficient as possible and welcomed the introduction of the sustainability projects and felt further work in this area would reap cost savings and a positive impact on those in receipt of the service.</p> <p>The working group concluded that the Council was meeting its aims and objectives in this complex area but felt that there was more that could be done, albeit with limited resource, to strengthen take-up of more cost-efficient transport modes and agreed that the need to prioritise the inclusion agenda to enable children to attend local schools removing the requirement for transport provision was key.</p>
Do we have any recommendations?	<p><b><u>Recommendations to the O&amp;S Board</u></b></p> <p><b>That the Board recommends that Cabinet:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>1. Supports and promotes inclusion as a key priority for Children's Services enabling more SEND pupils to be educated in mainstream, local schools, therefore reducing the need for school transport provision and associated costs.</b></li> </ol> <p><b>That the Board recommends that Children's Services Officers:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>2. Increase awareness of school transport options through engagement and co-production with parents and carers, in order to reduce the impact on the school transport budget wherever possible.</b></li> </ol>

	<p><b>That the Board recommends to the Children’s Services O&amp;S Committee:</b></p> <p><b>3. That the committee scrutinises the progress of the delivery of sustainability projects to continue to improve service provision and mitigate against cost growth in the area of school transport, particularly the first two planned projects as follows:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <b>Implement a replacement operating system to manage Home To School Transport (HTST). (Noting that the existing system will cease to be supported from February 2025).</b></li><li>• <b>Develop an Independent Travel Training (ITT) programme including exploring future development of ITT to include opportunities for children and young people who are successfully trained to participate in mentoring of future trainees.</b></li></ul>
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