



**PaCConnect on Home to School Transport and Independent Travel Training – June 2015**

**1st Part: Parent Carers get together ...**

A group of around 40 parents and carers attended the forum. During the first hour participants worked in smaller groups, facilitated by PaCC Parent Reps. Each group identified some key concerns, questions, comments and suggestions with regard to their child/young person’s home to school transport in regard to:

- eligibility
- different types of home-school transport
- Independent Travel Training (ITT)
- any other issues

Parent carers wrote their contributions on post it notes which are collated on the Appendix 1.

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**2nd Part: Parent Carers are joined by professionals ...**

For the second part of the forum parents and carers were joined by three professionals who briefly introduced what they do:

Michael Nix - Head of Education Planning and Contracts at Brighton and Hove City Council: Michael's role is to strategically overview home-school transport at Brighton & Hove City Council (B&HCC). Earlier this year (April 2015) the new Home to School Transport Policy was sent to parent carers organisations for consultation and copies of the policy were given out to people attending the forum. Go here to read the policy in full <http://www.brighton-hove.gov.uk/content/children-and-education/schools/school-transport> .

Michael pointed out that all local authorities (LAs) across the country are under pressure to reduce their home to school transport budgets. LAs need to consider opportunities and solutions available, some are discretionary while others are statutory, and find effective arrangements and efficient ways to provide travel for children with special and additional needs. At the moment the default position is to provide a taxi to go to school, is that right? Are children becoming dependent on this system? What about future improvement in their lives? There is a drive towards independent travel.

For some children it is not going to be the best thing. Will some children be able to travel independently? It is recognised that independent travel is not suitable for everyone; for those cases travel will be provided. We are looking for a dialogue with schools and parent carers, this is a genuine principle.

First of all children need to be safe, to travel safely from home to school and back. In terms of putting the policy in place, every year we will have a dialogue with a child's parent (s) as part of the annual review. We are aware that this creates anxieties for parents. We aim to inform every parent carer by 10th July about which transport they will qualify for. We are also in conversation with taxi companies. For Downs View School & Downs View Link College we are aiming to release letters sooner than 10th July, so arrangements can be made with taxi companies.

Graham Read - Interim Head of Special Educational Needs at Brighton and Hove City Council: Independent Travel Training (ITT) is not straight forwards but it has been advantageous for some youngsters. Patcham House School, Downs Park School and Cedar Centre were visited. If children attend Downs View School or Hillside School, they will need and they will get home to school transport. We will look at case by case but they are the most vulnerable children. That said we are in discussion with the three schools mentioned before about possibility to develop independent travel.

Adrian Carver: Headteacher at Downs View School & Downs View Link College:

The two schools work with children with disabilities. While we haven't seen an increase of number of children attending there, we are aware that services are becoming more stretched, that has been going on for a while. The LA has been listening to parents' concerns. For example they provide bigger vehicles for children who don't feel confident about travelling on small vehicles. They are listening.

Very few children are likely to be on independent travel. We help families and work with them about public transport and we are working on children's abilities to be more independent. Some young people have suggested that they would like to use public transport.

Risk assessment is carried out all the time. The transport policy looks in to that too. And we are aware of things that need to be done on time before the transport arrives and the parent carer's stress to get the child ready. Council is taking that into consideration.

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### **The discussion was then open to the group:**

A heated discussion ensued. Below here questions (Q) and comments (C) from parent and carers and answers (A) from professionals.

### **Eligibility**

Q: Children with behaviour problems, no complex needs, will find very difficult to get to school in a taxi. How they can go to school independently?

A: This something that risk assessment will look into. It will also require discussion with the school and with the parents. Are children of secondary age able to travel independently? We are looking at secondary age children that can become independent.

C: Some children may be ready to learn how to travel independently but so far it seems that letters are being sent indiscriminately to everyone

C: Parents do not always know details of policies and eligibility

Q: Talking about the risk assessment: are parents involved in writing the risk assessment? And if not do they see the risk assessment?

A: Parents contribute to the risk assessment. Parents need to be clear in the form and write down as much detail as possible. There are some people who are not good at writing everything down. Sometimes independent assessment can provide extra information. The home to school transport application and the risk assessment will be looked at by a panel which is formed of members of the Home to School Transport and SEN teams.

Q: I submitted four different forms!

A: When an application for transport gets refused the parent(s) can appeal and there is a clear time scale and clear information in the policy. Request for review of refusal needs to be made within 20 days of receiving the letter from the first and second stage. Review of the decision will be carried out by a senior officer within 20 days of receiving the parent's request. We are aware of the long waiting; can we do it more quickly than that?

Q: It takes time to write an appeal, 20 days are not enough!

A: We need to learn from what you said today.

Q: What sort of transparency for transport eligibility? What are criteria for children to qualify for transport?

A: Criteria are not fixed in stone; they will need to be refined. They need to be linked with the annual review. Professionals will contribute at that stage.

Q: B&HCC Home to School Transport Policy, appendix 2, page 26 gives eligibility criteria, they are very vague statements. There is nothing about the child.

A: The child needs to have a statement/EHCP, if you don't agree with this please look at the policy.

Q: Why post 16 are excluded?

A: Post 16 transport is discretionary and same for youngsters who are at preschool age. We will look very carefully at those cases.

C: Letters are not informative. Parents don't know what they appealing against.

C: The school recommended by the LA is not possible because of my child's needs, I think this needs to be sorted. There must be legal equality issues linked with that.

C: Only 18 children at preschool age receive the preschool support. These are the most severely affected children of their age-group.

Q: How much does the application cost? Would be good to partner with NHS? Is there any other money available, from example from the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)?

A: This is an idea we can take away, the answer can be that they (NHS and CCG) are under the same pressure as us...

Q: Regarding health and safety, who are responsible for travel by buses for example when leaving the school?

A: One solution is an escort to bus stop, schools have money to provide that support. Can a child gradually be confident on getting in the bus on his/her own?

C: No reason why my child's transport got cut.

C: In relation to a school risk assessment: my son never been in that school, they don't know him. I feel we haven't been part of the consultation.

Q: My son doesn't get transport from Tudor House so to benefit for short breaks and respite. Travel there is crazy, respite is not included in your policy. Respite is such an important service for us.

A: at The duty is to provide home to school transport – we can provide transport to respite care if this is the single after school journey

Q: I've received a letter about mileage, why?

Q: Many parent carers are worried about this year - now

Q: My child is on a wheelchair, he will get exhausted in a bus or more buses if that's the case - he gets tired even on a car. If I'll have to drive him to school, can you imagine the impact on my other children and what about my work?

C: Buses don't allow more than one wheelchair; some buses don't even stop when they see a person on a wheelchair.

**Other forms of transport:**

Q: There will be more people driving to school, consequently the school needs to provide parking, how that's possible? How can I safely unload my child?

C: Our aim is to move children off taxi in to public transport, but only where this is safe and right for the child or young person.

Q: You previously suggested that an escort picks him up and takes him in the bus and back; through this process the child will become more independent. Nationally we are thinking about millions of escorts, how is this cost effective?

Q: What about two carers, will you provide two escorts?

A: We gave money to schools. We are developing a programme with the schools to provide this support to children. The school we have been working with have put forward a costing and we are working on that.

A: We are also looking at logistics and we are going to have more buses on those routes. We want to reduce the number of cars on the road

C: This policy will have many parents driving at the same time.

Q: I start work at 8am. How can my children go to school safely?

A: None of us will put your children in danger or in a vulnerable position

**ITT:**

Q: B&HCC Home to School Transport Policy, appendix 2, page 28 gives examples of ITT: for me it means that we have to get two buses, I can already feel the stress and also the time - one hour to come down!

A: We need to keep in mind the legal aspect, that is, parents have the legal duties to get their children to school. Individual needs are taken into consideration during risk assessments.

C: ITT is not happening; you are making children more dependent on parents.

Q: How as a parent carer can I establish a dialogue with you? What happens in September?

A: Parent carers can call or/and email the Home to School Transport team or Graham Read

Q: By the time we establish a dialogue there will be a place somewhere else. How can you justify the educational impact? What actions come out from emails? We need to have a dialogue with you.

A: Preschool age is discretionary, that's the law.

C: With this new transport policy you will marginalise lots of children; you are cutting back in the wrong areas.

C: For those children who can travel is OK but not for those who can't travel.

C: We need to learn from what happened with Patcham House, people got together, some speakers today don't care about children. We need a campaign to stop all this nonsense.

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**Suggested actions to follow up forum:**

- PaCC will come up with a position statement on Home to School Transport, **to be shared with all attendees, and with the local authority.**
- Parents and carers to email directly the Home to School Transport team. For parent carers who have received a letter from LA, they still need to appeal, but do also email LA and provide lots of additional information. **PaCC to provide Home to School Transport team's emails.**

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The home to school transport team can be contacted by telephone on 01273 293501 or [HometoSchoolTransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:HometoSchoolTransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk)

The special educational needs team can be contacted on 01273 293552 or [sen.team@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:sen.team@brighton-hove.gov.uk)

For complaints

- PaCC to continue to work with the local authority to address the concerns of parents and carers communicated at the PaCC Connect

## Annex 1: Parent and carers key concerns, questions, comments and suggestions with regard to their child/young person's home to school transport

### **Eligibility:**

- Who decides what is considered respite?
- Are after school clubs included as respite for drop-offs?
- What happens if children go to another drop off, e.g. dad's respite?
- I work and my SEN and able child go every day to an After School Club
- How have they made their decision on who is eligible - criteria?
- If I appeal, will I know before September?
- DLA mobility award (low & high) should mean home to school transport automatically?
- Don't do it! I.e. change the policy
- Clarification of age cut off (8years old)
- More than one child with SEN attending special school?
- Is special school an issue relevant to transport? Not consistent/Suitable
- Why forms ask if we have own car and invasive questions?
- Why is a physically disabled young person turned down for transport to his placement?
- Who defines 'suitable' school?
- What is the acceptance level of 'damage' to child /young person/family/general public?
- Is it age related?
- Who is eligible?
- Why nothing about 'pain' in application form?
- Taxis withdrawn. No alternative given
- Policy is not reflected in reality! Eligibility is being manipulated.
- Equality! Why parents cannot choose best school for their child's needs? Transport are withdrawn if not nearby school
- Please can independent travel be core part of annual review!
- Appeals: how are they factored in?
- I cannot afford £30 for doctors' letter to support appeal
- Pre SEN kids don't get any opportunity to claim? How can this be justified?
- What opportunities for feedback by service users to the frontline people manning the application process and how these policies are working?
- Why can't a doctor's letter or existing Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) automatically guarantee a parent's choice of transport?
- Is LA already making decision before policy in operation?
- LA is looking at who is 'ineligible' before 'eligible'
- Have decisions on children using wheelchairs taken into account that they are not always allowed onto the bus?
- Pre-school: my child has been offered East Hill, but we can't get him there

- Clarity of family set up (children in different schools)
- Are you aware that children with learning difficulties and particularly Autism have problems with Transition?
- If my child has low rate mobility but severe LD can I get transport?
- If no younger sibling, will my child no longer be eligible for transport (13 years old)
- Child at Drove Road; wants to remain at Downs View. Will they be moved to Hillside?
- My son has no school choice, we have to travel further for the facilities of Downs View School, then can you now just stop home school transport?
- After nine years of travelling on coach with peers, this is being taken away, the only independent thing my son can do.
- It is very concerning that transport can be taken away from parents who no longer live together. Children need two parents and this would divide families and destabilise children
- Are other children in the family taken into account?
- Stress, suicide, stronger danger
- Carer of elderly; relatives not considered
- Why is transport being taken away for children under 4 years old? ('I Can' nursery needs assistance)
  
- If I live close to school will I still qualify?
- If not nearest school can they move him?
- If you appeal provision of school placement, do you still get transport?

#### **Different types of transport:**

- On the form could we 'tick' possible requirements for type and why for child?
- How will children be supported through a change of type of transport?
- If it is wrong type of transport can we appeal?
- Kids who 'run' and refuse and safeguards too exposed
- 'Better care fund' - why can't this be used?
- Shouldn't the EHCP dictate/steer the decision and not an invisible panel?
- GPs - could GP input be helpful shortcut?
- Lack of risk assessment for individual on charge
- It is penalising families who can't afford a car
- Will secondary age children need to accompany by parents if they can't travel independently?
- Will they be eligible for Home School transport if they can't travel independently?
- Is the LA keeping 'minibuses' service for SEND children and young people?
- What decisions have already been made on types of transports?
- Parents own transport shouldn't be a factor (regardless of whether or not mobility vehicle) for transport to school
- Children with special needs often need same service - so why bus drivers differ daily and escort?
- Complaints to transport provider are not followed up. I needed to get school to follow up. Not good enough

- If transport not fit for my child who can I talk to and what happens? When I ask for a change I'm told would you like to co-ordinate myself and be paid on budget amount. Why not use this process for all contracts. Give it to community transport and they manage all budgets, transport and training.
- Every year at the beginning of the new school year the transport is always totally disorganised and nobody knows what is going on and you don't find out who the driver escort is until either the night before or same day.
  
- What training is offered/imposed for drivers and escorts?
- What 'vetting' process is in place to recruit and safety of their vehicles?
- Drivers and escorts do not know needs of my family and SEN child
- How are escorts vetted?
- Who can I complain to and if the driver/escort unfit for contract, what happens?
- My child has built up a trust with escort
- The needs of the driver/escort need to be included, e.g. adequate space for safety
- Safety - escorts not trained to deal with children with SEN!
- What does escort mean?
- Better organisation. Better communication. Complaints about escorts should be taken seriously.
- Training for escorts and drivers
  
- Schools don't have space for drop offs individually
  
- We have organised home and work around existing transport
- I have another child at infants - how can I achieve both travels?
- Some of your suggestions are putting children at risk. I am single parent and not leaving young children unattended where I live because my son has to go to a special school nowhere near my daughter's school
  
- Asking a child to travel at the worst possible time on a bus! Impact on education...
- Why have we not heard from public transport?
- Safeguarding of vulnerable children liable for targeting on bus
- Children with limited immunity against winter bugs
- Unrealistic expectations about using buses, i.e. child can't be safely managed on but with other siblings. Need dedicated person for one.
- Can LA guarantee bus ramps for wheelchairs will always be working and drivers be willing to take time for let child out? They don't know!
- What if public transport strike?
- My son can't cope with buses and they've given key card
- On a public transport who would step in, e.g. bullying?
- If my son had to get two buses to and from school every day he would refuse to go to school and if you did manage to get him to school he would be highly anxious all day.
- Impact on the education of children and young people of making them travel noisy, busy public transport

- My son has autism and anxieties issues, he does not travel well on buses, he gets anxious around other children.
- My son suffers from rumination and he will be sick when buses are littered and dirty.
- With whom does the duty of care lie if a child or sibling is harmed?
- What safeguarding provisions - increased police? What about paedophiles? Will support on public transport be put in place?
- The danger of lots of cars arriving at school gate
- Impact on relationships between schools and their local communities of increased number of cars

### **Independent Travel Training (ITT):**

- Opposing views of professionals. Who I'll listen to?
- Who'll be responsible for risk assessment?
- What age/eligibility conditions for ITT?
- Different bus drivers, all buses seat-belted, weather, cancelled buses
- Who is on the transport panel?
- Who is on the appeal panel and what is their expertise, e.g medical?
- What views are taken into consideration? e.g. EP, school ext...
- What does it mean?
- How long will it take? Prepared?
- If ITT fails what then?
- How do you decide whether a child is able to travel independently?
- What eligibility for IT?
- Why aren't parents involved in decision about IT?
- Parents being
- Who will be responsible if anything happens to the child if he/she is made to travel independently?
- Parents taking children to school themselves, it defeats/limits child's independence
- Personal budget for your own car!
- When ITT will take place?
- What will LA do if school refuse to do ITT?
- Who will do ITT?
- During training who finds trainer? Who pays them? Who do I feedback to and who feedback to me?
- Independent travel is a term to remove responsibility from the council. Do they understand the implications to the families and kids?
- Bullying on buses
- Safety; seat-belts and roads; crossing from one bus route to another

- Age 8 is far too young to walk to school, especially with special needs
- Who supports all factors of unpredictability for our children?

#### **Other issues:**

- What knowledge and training have you given to your office staff at Home to School Team?
  - Policy needs to be publicly broadcasted
  - Need more formal recording of conversations - Wendy from transport said 'you son should change school' - who is she to say that?
  - Statement Team and Home School Transport Team are not joined up
  - Why are staffs in transport telling parents to change school when they have no educational expertise?
  - Policy changes are very stressful. Why make the process isolating parents from decisions - very negative
  - Stress on child and family
  - If transport is running late, why no contact parents/carers to let them know their child is safe (call or text if 10mins late)
  - Disorganised, co communication, no responses to parents, lack of understanding of family's needs
  - Should be about the welfare of the child and not just the money.
  - Life means emergency happens. How can I 'amend' to accommodate
  - Stressful journey undermines the school day and sacrifices education
  - School transport should not dictate my child's educational future
  - Could we form a convoy for local kids who can?
  - This is another step that punishes and excludes
  - This puts the parent carer 'noose' around our neck until they are 25
  - Why are you making even harder to get the support our children need?
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- Single parent, if sick child can't go to school!
  - If we don't accept the place at the specialist pre-school our son misses out. If we wait for the outcome of this, we will lose his place at his mainstream. Help!
  - Impact on siblings
  - Safeguarding issue for our children.
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- But what if we are on a route that is running?
  - Who will be accountable if things go wrong?
  - Taking away independence for most disabled
  - Follow national guidelines. Both to letter and moral spirit
    - Reduction in independence for the most disabled children and you people
    - Impact on families trying to maintain employment - opportunities already restricted by caring responsibilities
    - I'm a lone parent and non-driver. If I'm sick I will have to keep my son off school as I have no family/friends who can take him to school.
  - I suffer from stomach problems and anxieties, and also don't travel well.

- Impact on siblings and job life.
- Impact on children's school day, they will be tired after school journey.
- Transport is dictating my son's school choices.