

Haringey SEND Transport Learning Review

Summary of Key Headlines and Recommendations

December 2021



SEND

Haringey
LONDON

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Home-school transport is a vital service for families and one which we know must work efficiently. To ensure this, the SEND service initiated a learning review to identify what went wrong in September 2021 at the start of the current school year. The learning review was conducted over November and December involving different stakeholders who shared their insights and experiences. Most importantly, parent representatives were part of this learning review, and we really appreciate the time and commitment given to this project.

1.2 Working with families and other partners is vital in supporting children with special needs and disabilities, and this review is one of many initiatives to improve SEND provision. Hearing frank views and experiences has led to many positive recommendations for change which are set out in the report. These are now being implemented and incorporated into the Council's SEN Transport Policy and will be kept under review.

The report and recommendations are below.

2. Background

2.1 Whilst there is usually always some level of disruption to home-school transport at the start of the academic year, this is generally minimal and managed swiftly as was the case in September 2020. However, for this academic year, the level of disruption was unprecedented.

2.2 Operational and system failures in relation to transport for children and young people with special education needs and disabilities resulted in significant numbers of children not being provided with timely transport to their place of learning throughout September 2021

2.3 In order to identify the problems, and implement systemic changes, the Assistant Director for Early Help, Prevention and SEND conducted an informal learning review on 16 November 2021. Key stakeholders were invited to review the events that led up to this incident and identify learning to ensure this type of incident does not happen again.

2.4 Participants who attended the learning review were either directly involved in delivery or most impacted by the disruption, critically parents, schools and transport providers and local authority officers. Invitations were sent to representatives' groups such as Haringey Parent Carer Forum, Headteacher groups and Governors. Numbers of attendees were limited to ensure qualitative discussion to inform robust planning, and due to social distancing measures in place as a result of Covid restrictions. A list of stakeholders participating in the learning review can be found in para 2.7

2.5 The review focused on four key areas of transport planning to determine any weaknesses which contributed to the incident. These were:

- a) Data collection and migration to the new electronic route planning software
- b) Procurement of Transport, looking at routes awarded and how these were calculated
- c) Communication with families and schools to inform transport arrangements required
- d) Staffing and capacity to deliver the SEN Transport Service

2.6 To underpin the learning review, and to ensure transparency, a template was sent to all key stakeholders with key questions to answer from their perspective, which informed the key lines of enquiry. Questions included:

- a) What do you understand the process to be for arranging SEN school transport each year.
- b) What happened? (provide a chronology of events)
- c) What was the impact of this?
- d) How did you respond?
- e) What do you believe went wrong/ was responsible for the failures?
- f) What ideas and suggestions do you have that may prevent this incident from happening again?

2.7 We received responses from all 17 stakeholders, comprising a 100% return with over 56 pages of written submissions.

- Parent Carer Forum representative/ Parent Governor
- Transport provider
- Headteachers
- Passenger Transport Assistant, Escort Team Co-ordinator,
- Business and Communications Manager, SEN Transport Manager
- SEND Project Manager
- Head of Service for SEND
- Chair of Governors for Special Schools
- Strategic procurement
- Mission software provider

2.8 Whilst this learning review focused on the failures at the start of the academic term, this is part of a wider piece of work to inform the refresh of the council's SEN Transport Policy. This included a survey published in the November 2021 edition of the SEND newsletter, for parents and carers which asked them to share their experience of SEN transport. This survey will provide further critical information. In addition, the SEN Transport Manager is establishing a task and finish group including parents, carers and schools to support the development of the refreshed policy.

3. Summary of feedback from the Learning Review

3.1 At the event attendees were asked to talk through their submission and experience of what happened, and to describe the impact this had on themselves and those they were representing. A summary of key headlines is outlined below:

- a) Implementation of a new route planning system was completed by officers who no longer worked for the SEND service within the council. In addition, the SEND service was in the middle of a restructure of staffing following an organisational review.
- b) The new system was implemented at the start of the academic year which tends to be the time when there is most disruption.
- c) Training provided to staff to implement the new route planning system was insufficient with minimal trial runs to test the model.
- d) Information used to inform route planning for transport was incorrect, resulting in parents and carers not being notified of transport arrangements or the wrong details provided.
- e) When information was corrected, this still resulted in errors on the route planning software. There was a fundamental issue with the system which did not correct data as it was entered.
- f) The communication with parents, schools/colleges and transport providers was poor. Route details were not provided in a timely way to inform planning. Many parents did not receive confirmation of transport arrangements in the summer, some did not receive any information. New applications were not processed and there were significant delays in responding to parents and carers contacting the SEN Transport Team for an update on arrangements.
- g) Some transport providers simply did not turn up to provide transport with no warning. This was also further impacted by vehicle breakdowns.

3.2 The impact of this disruption led to:

- a) incorrect pick-up points/times and insufficient transport for children and young people with complex needs.
- b) inconsistency for children with numerous changes to Travel Escorts/Passenger Assistants
- c) distressed children, parents, and carers

- d) significant disruption for schools, with some children missing education by arriving too late for school or missing their education altogether. Some children arrived too early which led to staffing pressures for schools.
- e) long bus journeys for children and young people.
- f) some schools had to provide transport at their own expenses
- g) some parents were not able to go to their employment
- h) unnecessary financial costs to the local authority

3.3 One of the parent/carer representatives emphasised the emotional impact and stress these failures had on parents and children. Whilst parents had generally expected there to be 'teething problems' at the start of term, many parents did not expect it to be to this extent and experienced a high level of stress. Parents reported being involved in the SEND transport engagement event in February 2020 where they had received assurance from the Director and Cabinet member that there would not be such disruption again. As a result of the failures at the start of the academic term, this has led to a lack of trust that things will improve.

3.4 The Chair of Governors also commented that parents are used to problem solving and their lives being disrupted, therefore if they knew more of the detail of the issues the SEND service were experiencing at an earlier stage, there would have been more understanding. Some parents only found out there was an issue with transport on the day.

3.5 Local authority officers spoke about the challenges in responding to parents, schools and providers simultaneously alongside support children and young people directly with their transport needs.

3.6 Schools spoke about good practice arrangements and having shared accountability with a Chair of Governors providing an example of how as part of their scrutiny role, they seek assurance that transport arrangements are in place.

3.7 Other areas of discussion noted:

- a) The route planning software is focussed on route optimisation and shortest routes, however all attendees agreed that route planning also needed to consider individual children's needs, ages and length of journeys. The new software does allow you to influence the routes, in addition there are many other benefits of the system which is only being used to approximately 30% of its capacity, The system has an 'app' which will allow parents to track their children's journey and record their health needs and requirements.
- b) Eligibility criteria for transport is generally based on distance from home with flexibility considering need. As part of the development of the SEN Transport policy, there will be greater flexibility and creativity in using personal budgets, using green transport to reduce carbon emissions, parental choice and control, considering the needs of children and young people. Through discussion, it was agreed that better terminology was required to highlight the various ways that children and young people can be supported to travel to their place of learning. It was suggested that 'Travel Assistance' would be more inclusive of the wider remit home-school transport has.

4. Conclusion

4.1 Overall, the main factors that contributed to the failures at the start of the academic term were as a result of a lack of co-ordination, planning, insufficient capacity and a lack of management oversight. It is encouraging to note that since the new SEN Transport management team has been in place, providers, schools and staff have all commented that they have seen a positive difference and commitment to improvement.

4.2 All attendees commented that the learning review was a good practice model and had enabled transparency with a commitment to implement learning to avoid this level of disruption in future.

4.3 Schools are a valuable resource that can help and should be made best use of to confirm transport arrangements and communication with parents. The involvement of parents in planning is crucial as they are best placed to identify the requirement for their children.

5. Recommendations

5.1 Recommendations to improve practice and processes are within three key areas below:

<p>Operational process in place for transport requirements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Robust communications plan with key information and regular updates provided to parents, carers, schools and providers regarding policy and processes. Communication should be in a range of formats including, single messaging on social media, SEND newsletter, FAQ sessions at schools, drop in sessions for staff, providers/ summer sessions for parents and/or webinar guide on local offer. ○ Procurement should be done in conjunction with operational service delivery. ○ Robust process in place for the collection of data for students who require transport to school to inform effective planning. ○ Passenger assistants to be assigned to the routes so the needs of the children are met where possible. ○ Trial runs of the routes should take place prior to schools returning with Passenger Assistants and in usual school times. ○ Consider having a ‘transition day’ on last week of term. ○ Data/ Route sheets need re visiting at regular intervals so we have a continuous record of accurate information with children and families ○ Meeting with new contractors prior to new school year to ensure all requirements are in place. ○ Schools to offer training re: the registration process to apply for travel assistance. ○ Risk assessments to be signed off by parents to ensure all information is considered fully. ○ Identify which schools offer travel training and incorporate this within the offer to reduce duplication
<p>A protocol to be established setting out:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An agreed clear timetable between Schools, SEND service and Transport providers for joint planning of routes, dates and times, taking account of individual needs of children. ○ Include arrangements and timescales for informing parents of the arrangements and what information parents need re personnel, contact details etc. ○ Details of how contract difficulties, pandemic requirements, staff shortages will be dealt with to be included including what happens if school time is missed. ○ A commitment statement and policy that sits underneath this and should be parent friendly, co produced with parents. It should be included on the Local Offer and sent out in June each year to relevant and new parents ○ Parents should be contacted with regards to the arrangements their children will have within a set timescale and before the end of the summer term. ○ Schools should be notified of the arrangements within a set timescale. This should also highlight new applications as parents apply as schools do not always know this information.
<p>Operational changes within the SEN Transport service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Move to one number for all transport queries. ○ Ensure there are sufficient training, support and resources to support the delivery of the service including at peak times eg) mid August to mid September. ○ Procure a longer transport provider contract with incentives/sanctions. ○ All Passenger Assistants to have completed induction and regular training.
<p>Other</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Task and finish group to be established with stakeholders including, parents, carers and schools to inform the refreshed transport policy which will now be called Assisted Travel Policy. ○ Documentation translation to ensure parents have equal access to information, particularly those whose first language is not English ○ Independent travel assistance to be regularly considered within EHCP plans or annual reviews

6. Next Steps

- 6.1 The SEN Transport Manager will develop an action plan based on the recommendations with leads and timescales for implementation. This action plan will be subject to regular scrutiny and oversight from the Head of Service for SEND. Key progress updates will be published in the SEND newsletter and the local offer webpages.
- 6.2 The Assistant Director for Early Help, Prevention and SEND has made contact with all parents and carers whose children received travel assistance informing them about the progress of the learning review.
- 6.3 Review progress formally with attendees from the SEND Transport Learning Review, six months post implementation of the plan (July 2022) and again in November post academic year implementation.