NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: Learning & Leisure Services Committee
From: Head of Educational Resources
Date: 13 July 2009
Ref: MM/BB

Subject: Additional Support Needs – Pupil Transport

PURPOSE OF REPORT

This report seeks approval for the updated learning & leisure services transport arrangements for pupils with additional support needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The learning & leisure services committee is asked:-

(i) to approve the revised transport arrangements contained in the report

(ii) to remit this report to housing & social work services committee for its information.

Members wishing further information please contact:

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 In March 2006, a review of transport arrangements for pupils with additional support needs was approved by the then education committee. The agreed changes were the result of the implementation of new Additional Support for Learning legislation.

1.2 These transport arrangements have been in operation since the approval of the committee paper in March 2006.

1.3 Subsequently, experience has indicated that additional arrangements require to be made particularly when contracts for existing pupils are awarded to new operators. This report makes the appropriate recommendations.

2. CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS

2.1 The service currently provides school transport for 1438 pupils with additional support needs, which include medical and/or mobility conditions. The budget for additional support needs transport for financial year 2009/10 is £4,628,109.

2.2 Transport requests for children with additional support needs are submitted by heads of establishment and approved by the education officer, support for learning. A dedicated team is responsible for procurement and contract monitoring.

2.3 Transport is provided for pupils in the following circumstances:-

- pupils attending special schools and units in North Lanarkshire

- pupils attending special schools and units outwith North Lanarkshire – either in other authorities or in independent provision, where the authority has agreed these placements

- pupils with long and short term medical conditions who, as the result of medical advice received from the medical officer, require to be transported to and from school.

- pupils who, due to social reasons, are residing in temporary accommodation outwith their local area. In these circumstances transport can be provided for 28 days, where there is a clear plan to enable the child to return to the catchment area of their current school after this 28 day period. Any transport requirements beyond this period would require to be supported by housing and social work services.
pupils who are looked after and accommodated in foster care or other accommodation outwith the catchment area of their current school:-

(i) where there has been prior discussion between services regarding the placement and the need for continuity of schooling beyond 28 day period.

(ii) where the placement itself lies within the council's geographical boundaries and complies with the current distance criteria.

(iii) where the care situation is outwith the council's geographical boundaries and the appropriateness of providing transport arrangements has been agreed between services.

pupils attending mainstream catchment schools where there are medical or mobility issues or where the pupil's individual needs merit the provision of home to school transport.

pupil attending a school outwith their catchment area as the result of placement by the authority.

2.4 All transport contracts are awarded to either private contractors or the internal transport section. The contract arrangements are organised to meet the specific additional support needs of pupils. All contracts are awarded in line with North Lanarkshire Council's approved tender procedures and within a best value context.

2.5 Where a pupil with additional support needs is attending a special school or unit or a mainstream school as the result of a placing request, transport will not be provided.

3. ADDITIONAL PROVISION

3.1 In some circumstances it may be necessary to continue an individual transport contract for a child or young person with autism. A decision in such circumstances will only be made in exceptional circumstances where there is assessed evidence that the child or young person at that time is not able to cope with a change in transport arrangements. In such circumstances, if it is considered to be in the best interest of the child or young person to continue an individual contract, it will be necessary to either invite tenders and accept the one from the current contractor as being the most suitable and advantageous, even though it might not be the lowest, or, alternatively, seek authority from the Committee to negotiate the contract with the current contractor. However, the situation will be kept under annual review thereafter and, where there is future evidence that the child or young person concerned has the social skills and aptitude to cope with – and indeed – benefit from adapting to change, the normal contract tendering process will apply.

3.2 Where an existing contract is awarded to a new contractor, as soon as reasonably practicable following this award, arrangements shall be made to
introduce the contractor to the parents and pupil and discussions should be held between them in relation to the vehicle, route, uplift times, contact numbers and any other relevant issues relating to the transportation of the child in terms of the contract.

3.3 In addition contractors and escorts should complete training on issues relating to the safe transport of children with additional support needs. This training will be arranged and delivered by Support for Learning staff.

3.4 Over recent years the service has received an increasing number of requests to extend the provision of free school transport for children with additional support needs beyond home to school, for example to a care setting. Where the additional costs of these arrangements are not substantial and can be accommodated within existing contract arrangements it is proposed that the requests be approved.

3.5 In addition, it is proposed the service should facilitate this where an existing contract can accommodate such changes but where parents pay any additional costs that these changes will incur.

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

The learning & leisure services committee is asked:

(i) to approve the revised transport arrangements contained in the report

(ii) to remit this report to housing and social work services committee for its information