

AGENDA ITEM NO. 5

SCHOOL TRANSPORT OF PUPILS WITH ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS

C 5. There was submitted a report (docketed) dated 17 February 2006 by the Director of Education (1) referring to the Council's policy for the provision of free school transport for mainstream schools and, in particular, to the categories for which the Council currently provided transport for children with additional support needs; (2) advising, for the reasons detailed therein, that the projected outturn for support needs transport for 2005/06 showed an overspend of £231,000; (3) outlining the measures taken by the Department of Education to manage the budgetary process, to date, and (4) recommending that, in light of the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, and following consultation with the Department of Social Work and the Department of Housing and Technical Services, the transport arrangements specified in Section 4 of the report be included as part of the existing policy for children with additional support needs.

Decided:

- (1) that the policy for the provision of school transport for pupils with additional support needs be revised to include the following arrangements:-
 - (a) that where a pupil with additional support needs was attending a special school or unit outwith their catchment area, transport would continue to be provided where appropriate, taking into account individual needs and circumstances;
 - (b) that the current distance criteria for the allocation of free school transport would apply to children with additional support needs attending mainstream catchment schools, and that, in circumstances, where there was a clear medical or mobility issue, exceptional transport arrangements would be made;
 - (c) that in the case of children who, due to social reasons, reside in temporary accommodation outwith their local area, transport would continue to be provided for 28 days where there was a clear plan to enable the child to reside in the catchment area of their current school, and that, following the 28 day period, the Director of Housing and Property Services would support the travel arrangements;
 - (d) that where children were being looked after and accommodated in foster care or other accommodation outwith the catchment area for their current school, transport would continue to be provided:
 - (A) where there had been prior discussion between the Department of Social Work and Department of Education regarding the foster placement and the need for continuity of schooling beyond the 28 day period, and
 - (B) where the placement itself lay within the Council's geographical boundaries and complied with the current distance criteria, and
 - (e) that where pupils were placed in care situations outwith the Council's geographical boundaries the appropriateness of providing travel arrangements would be agreed between the Department of Education and the Department of Social Work, and
- (2) that the report be remitted to the Social Work Committee and the Housing and Technical Services Committee for their interest.

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: Education Committee	Subject: Additional Support Needs – Transport
From: Director of Education	
Date: 17 February, 2006	
Ref: JL/BB	

Purpose of Report

This report seeks to inform members of the education department's proposals for transport arrangements for pupils with additional support needs, in light of recent Additional Support for Learning legislation.

Recommendations

The education committee is recommended: -

- (i) to note the contents of the report
- (ii) to approve the proposals contained therein
- (iii) to instruct the director of education to implement these proposals
- (iv) to remit this report to Social Work and Housing & Technical Services committees



Members wishing further information please contact:

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NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL – DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Transport of pupils with Additional Support Needs

Report by the Director of Education

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 North Lanarkshire Council Education Department currently operates a free school transport policy for mainstream schools which is based on a distance criteria from home to school, for pupils attending their catchment area school and safety of walking routes.
- 1.2 At present transport contracts are provided for 1285 pupils with support needs medical and/or mobility conditions, to allow them to attend school.
- 1.3 Transport requests for children with support needs and with medical/mobility conditions are currently received from head teachers, psychologists, or the school medical officer and approved by the education officer, support for learning.

2. CURRENT PRACTICE

- 2.1 The categories for which the education department currently provides transport for children with additional support needs are as follows: -
 - (i) pupils attending special schools and units within North Lanarkshire who require to be transported due to home to school distance or a safe walking route not being available
 - (ii) pupils attending special schools outwith North Lanarkshire – either in other authorities or in places provided through independent provision – where the authority has an obligation to transport the pupil because of distance
 - (iii) pupils with long and short term medical conditions who, as the result of medical advice received from the school medical officer, require to be transported to and from school
 - (iv) pupils for whom short term transport provision is arranged, due to social reasons, or displaced from catchment school or home for a period of up to 28 days, to allow them to continue to attend school. These arrangements are agreed with colleagues in the housing department.
- 2.2 All transport contracts are awarded to private contractors or community services internal transport. The contract arrangements are organised to meet pupils specific additional support needs. Contracts are awarded in line with North Lanarkshire Council tender procedures and in a best value context.

- 2.3 As a result of consultation with schools, parents and medical representatives it has been recognised that contract allocations for autistic children should, where possible and appropriate, remain with the allocated contractor for the duration of a child's school career. This can also be the case for certain severe and complex medical conditions.
- 2.4 In addition a training event is organised on an annual basis by the education department to provide contractors and escorts with training on issues relating to the safe transport of children with additional support needs.
- 2.5 Over recent years the education department 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 such arrangements result in no additional costs to the council and can be accommodated within existing contract arrangements the department is flexible in approving such arrangements.
In addition, the department also helps facilitate such arrangements where an existing contract can accommodate such changes but where parents pay any additional costs that these changes will incur.

3. BUDGETARY POSITION

- 3.1 The current budget for Additional Support Needs transport in financial year 2005/6 is £2,433,710.
- 3.2 The projected outturn for 2005/6 is £2,664,710, a projected overspend of £231,000.
- 3.3 The projected overspend can be attributed to a number of factors:-
- (i) Increased demand in response to children's changing circumstances
 - (ii) breakdown in some transport arrangements due to behavioural problems or contractual failure, which results in new contracts being awarded
 - (iii) increasing difficulty in finding independent contractors with vehicles which can accommodate wheelchairs and therefore higher costs
 - (iv) integration into mainstream schools of an increasing number of pupils with medical conditions which require escort supervision.
- 3.4 The education department has already taken a number of measures to help manage the budgetary process. The majority of the departments special schools and units have been allocated with specific catchment areas. It is expected that this will begin to reduce transport costs due to a more local geographical spread of pupils. Contracts are also now awarded, where possible and appropriate, for a three year period to increase continuity of service and to reduce costs.

4. PROPOSALS

- 4.1 As a result of the introduction of the Additional Support for Learning legislation, the education department would propose that the following transport arrangements be included as part of its existing transport policy for children with additional support needs.
- 4.2 Where a pupil with additional support needs is attending a special school or unit outwith their catchment area transport will continue to be provided where appropriate, taking into account individual needs and circumstances.
- 4.3 The current distance criteria for the allocation of free school transport will apply to children with additional support needs attending mainstream catchment school. However, where there is a clear medical or mobility issue, exceptional transport arrangements will be made.
- 4.4 In the case of children who, due to social reasons, are residing in temporary accommodation outwith their local area, transport will continue to be provided for 28 days where there is a clear plan to enable the child to reside in the catchment area of their current school after this 28 day period. After the 28 day period the housing department supports the travel arrangements.
- 4.5 Where children are being looked after and accommodated in foster care or other accommodation outwith the catchment area for their current school, transport will continue to be provided :-
- (i) where there has been prior discussion between social work and education regarding the foster placement and the need for continuity of schooling beyond the 28 day period.
 - (ii) where the placement itself lies within the council's geographical boundaries and complies with the current distance criteria.
- 4.6 Where pupils are placed in care situations outwith the council's geographical boundaries the appropriateness of providing transport arrangements will be agreed between education and social work departments.

5. SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

- 5.1 All other aspects of the current school transport policy apply to pupils outlined in paragraph 4.2 – 4.6.

6. CROSS DEPARTMENT DISCUSSION

- 6.1 The content of this paper has been agreed in collaboration with colleagues in social work and housing departments.

7. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The education committee is recommended:-

- (i) to note the contents of the report
- (ii) to approve the proposals contained therein
- (iii) to instruct the director of education to implement these proposals
- (iv) to remit this report to Social Work and Housing & Technical Services committees