

## **Report of the Strategic Director of Children's Services to the meeting of Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee to be held on 20 December 2023**

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### **Subject:**

**Overview of the Travel Assistance Service**

### **Summary statement:**

**This report provides an overview of the Travel Assistance Service together with current costs and how this compares to previous years.**

### **EQUALITY & DIVERSITY:**

The Travel Assistance Service encourages and promotes diversity in the workplace. Our aim is to ensure that all employees are given equal opportunity and that our organisation is representative of all sections of society. Each employee will be respected and valued and able to give their best as a result, creating a working environment free of bullying, harassment, victimisation and unlawful discrimination, promoting dignity and respect for all, and where individual differences and the contributions of all staff are recognised and valued.

We will aim to contract and commission locally wherever possible so that we can support our local economy. This will help us build a local supply chain connected to its wider social responsibilities and offer high quality employment and training opportunities to local people, while delivering equitable services that are value for money.

We aim to deliver services that are accessible, inclusive and responsive to the needs of people and communities.

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### **Portfolio:**

**Childrens Services**

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### **Overview & Scrutiny Area:**

**Childrens Services**

## 1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report will provide an overview of the Travel Assistance Service and how it operates, alongside information relating to current costs and how these compare to previous years. Information will also be provided on the work that has been undertaken by the service to encourage children to be more independent.

## 2. BACKGROUND

The Travel Assistance Service (TAS) is responsible for the processing of applications and the delivery of assessments and transport for Bradford's children and young adults, taking them from their homes to their schools and colleges. It also provides transport for looked after children and vulnerable adults to their educational settings on behalf of the Bradford's Children's and Families Trust (BCFT) and Adult Social Care (ASC).

- 2.1 The TAS provides travel assistance for over 3000 pupils to their schools and colleges. Eligibility for assistance is determined by current legislation and the Council's travel assistance policies. Pupils can either travel by bus (using commercial and dedicated bus services), taxi's, minibuses (owned by the Council) or via a budget that is paid directly to parents. The method of transport is based on the pupil's needs, the journey to school and the parental circumstances.
- 2.2 The TAS is based at Shearbridge depot. It has a team of assessors, planners, contractors, minibus drivers and personal assistants. The total number of staff is approximately 450.
- 2.3 Bradford Council has a statutory duty to provide home to school transport to children assessed as being "eligible". The categories of eligibility are established in legislation and the statutory guidance issued by Central Government enables the Council to determine which children are "eligible" for free travel assistance.
- 2.4 Eligibility is assessed by the TAS and the offer will be made as set out in the policy. This may include:
- A bus pass for independent travel
  - A place on a PTS bus
  - A place in a shared taxi
- 2.5 In exceptional circumstances (and according to assessed need) students may be offered a taxi on their own. This offer will be regularly reviewed with the aim of moving all children who can be safely transported into a shared vehicle.
- 2.6 Wherever possible, the team will look to utilise the in-house fleet of vehicles to provide journeys but the service also procures taxis and buses from an agreed provider. These are from a list of approximately 55 private hire/hackney carriage and minibus operators, acquired via a dynamic purchasing system for each journey.
- 2.7 One third of the pupils are transported on buses due to the distance they live from the school they attend. The remaining two thirds travel in taxis and minibuses due to their needs. There are 2000 children who have an EHCP that confirms the name

of the school they attend. The number of EHCP's has risen steadily over the last few years and is now 50% higher than 5 years ago. This has resulted in a 30% increase in taxi journeys every day. Numbers generally reach a peak in April so we anticipate that numbers will rise again significantly.

### **A comparison of contracted “home to school” taxi costs from 2019 to 2023**

	<b>Oct 19</b>	<b>Oct 20</b>	<b>Oct 21</b>	<b>Oct 22</b>	<b>Oct 23</b>
<b>Runs</b>	357	338	419	521	531
<b>Pupils</b>	932	904	1136	1350	1455
<b>Daily Cost</b>	£22552	£22921	£31419	£48169	£53899
<b>Occupancy</b>	2.61	2.67	2.71	2.59	2.74
<b>Daily Mileage</b>	9624	9476	11044	13610	14100

- 2.8 The number of applications that the service has received has risen steadily. The current year figure is on track to double last years total.

### **A comparison of assessments from 2021/22 to 2023/24**

	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24 (forecast)
Number of application forms received	595	795	1300
Number of applications approved	432	558	950

- 2.9 The Core service (in-house fleet) currently operates 49 daily back-to-back runs, transporting 345 children between home and school and 259 Adults between home and day centre. They travel over 35,000 miles per month, covering the Bradford, Keighley and Ilkley areas.
- 2.10 The Social Care contracted services currently arranges transport for looked after children, respite journeys, adults and the immigration service via contracted taxis.

The TAS currently receives approximately 600 requests per month and it provides transport for 250 children and 195 adults on a daily basis (in addition to ad hoc requests)

## **3. OTHER CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1 There is an increasing problem with the recruitment of drivers. The TAS owned minibuses require a D1 class entitlement. Drivers who passed their test prior to 1997 have this entitlement on their license, however, drivers who passed after this date have to undergo a further test to attain D1 class entitlement which costs around £2000. The average driver age is over 50 years old.
- 3.2 The IT systems that the service uses are outdated and in danger of failure. The service is actively seeking a solution to this problem.
- 3.3 The service continues to work with providers to commission travel training.

## **4. FINANCIAL & RESOURCE APPRAISAL**

- 4.1 The budget for the service is £14.5m (of which £1.9m comes from ASC to pay 50% of costs for the in-house core transport service).
- 4.2 Until two years ago the actual costs of the service matched its budget. In the last two years the taxi related costs have increased significantly. Due to this the cost of the service has increased by £3m.
- 4.3 Due to increasing demand, children who have more complex needs, the cost of fuel, personnel and general living costs, this increase shows no sign of reducing.

## **5. RISK MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE ISSUES**

- 5.1 The cost of the service continues to increase in line with demand.

## **6. LEGAL APPRAISAL**

The Education Act 1996 as amended makes provision for local authorities to ensure that travel arrangements are made, where necessary, to facilitate a child's attendance at school. Such travel arrangements are concerned with travel to the child's school from home and back again. These arrangements are not concerned with travel between educational institutions during the school day.

The Act places a duty on local authorities to make and provide free of charge such travel arrangements as they consider necessary to facilitate attendance at school for eligible children.

In addition to the statutory duty, local authorities also have discretionary powers to go beyond their statutory duties and provide transport to children who are not eligible for free transport under the statutory duty. These arrangements do not have to be provided free of charge.

Local authorities also have a duty under the Care Act 2014 to provide support for adults assessed as needing transport for social care activities.

## **7. OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **7.1 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1.1 Wherever possible the team will always look to utilise existing transport routes by increasing occupancy on the in-house fleet or existing taxi runs to reduce the number of vehicles used for school travel.
- 7.1.2 The promotion of personal transport budgets and bus passes may further reduce the number of children and young people accessing taxis and increase public transport use.

### **7.2 GREENHOUSE GAS EMISSIONS IMPACTS**

The Bradford taxi fleet is the cleanest in the country and 99% of the 4,800 Bradford

Licensed Taxis (Hackney Carriages and private hire vehicles) meet Clean Air Zone requirements. Most taxis are electric hybrid, some larger vehicles are Euro 6 diesel or Euro 4 petrol, with a small proportion exempt from CAZ charges due to a national exemption for disabled tax class vehicles.

### **7.3 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS**

There are no community safety implications.

### **7.4 HUMAN RIGHTS ACT**

There are no human rights implications.

### **7.6 TRADE UNION**

None.

### **7.7 WARD IMPLICATIONS**

None.

### **7.8 IMPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE**

There are no implications for children and young people as a result of this report.

### **7.9 ISSUES ARISING FROM PRIVACY IMPACT ASSESMENT**

None.

### **8. NOT FOR PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS**

None.

### **9. OPTIONS**

Not applicable.

### **10. RECOMMENDATIONS**

The report is for information only.

### **11. APPENDICES**

None.

### **12. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None.