



SEND TRANSPORT ENGAGEMENT

Feedback Report

(Event of 5th February 2020)

Introduction

The Haringey special educational needs and disability (SEND) School Transport Service provides an important service to children, young people, and their families. Getting it right means that children and young people are ready to learn when they arrive at their educational establishments. Getting it wrong results in, amongst other considerations, children and young people being unsettled on arrival and not ready to learn. Of equal concern is the impact it can have on families, most notably their ability to work and to care for other children. The effective delivery of the SEND transport service is critical in ensuring that we can support children and young people accessing education.

The Local Authority recognises that school transport is an area of concern: the quality of the service being delivered and its efficiency and cost can all be improved and the involvement of service users and their parents in improving the service has to be central.

Background

The SEND Transport Service currently:

- Ensures that approximately **500** children and young people are transported from home to education and return daily

- Organises **8** private hire suppliers to deliver **90 routes** daily.
- Provides **600+** ad-hoc taxi journeys.
- Has **82** escorts and **33** travel buddies required daily to support young people.
- Has **33** walking with buddies, **8** travel trained in the last year
- Ensures **40** parents receive personal payments, mileage allowance and other direct arrangements
- Employs **5** managers and staff
- Spent **£4.792** million on providing this service in 2018/19.

Various concerns have been raised, and issues and problems identified, both internally and by partners and parents and carers, regarding SEND transport. The issues have been diverse e.g. procurement of routes; cost and overspends; efficiency of routes; timeliness of transport; the application process; communication and participation through to issues of customer service. Of particular concern is that a number of families were left without transport at the beginning of the new academic year - 18/19.

Due particularly to the high level of parental unhappiness with the service, the Local Authority (LA) considered various, different approaches to drive improvement. The service as it stood was not sufficiently efficient, effective, economic, high quality and customer focussed as it needed to be, and it thus needed to improve. As a result, further consultation and engagement work was planned and undertaken to better understand the issues and potential solutions.

Engagement with Parents, Carers and Partners

To understand the experiences, needs and wants of families in relation to SEND transport on the 5th February 2020, three engagement events were held with parents/carers of children and young people with SEND and with other stakeholders, including special school heads, governors, SENDIAS and other SEND partners. The purpose of the engagement was to hear directly from users of the service and those affected by the delivery of the service about its strengths and its weaknesses. Approximately 150 parents, carers and other partners attended these sessions and expressed their views and concerns. These sessions were planned and structured to

maximise their effectiveness. Each session starting with an introduction from the Director of Children's Services, the Cabinet member for Children's Services, the Assistant Director for Schools and Learning, a special school head and the Head of the SEND Service in Haringey. As part of these introductions, the Local Authority acknowledged that the SEND transport service needed significant improvement and overhaul if it were to properly meet the needs of our young people, our families, and our schools. The introduction also allowed for a short question and answer session followed by break out group discussions which were facilitated by officers and which focused on three key areas. These were:

1. Wider issues and impacts on the whole family
2. Impact on your child and their learning
3. Interactions with the SEND Transport team

Feedback from the SEND Engagement Event

These three engagement sessions garnered some detailed information regarding the concerns, needs, and wants of the service users, parents, carers and the schools and a great deal was learned. A recurring, core message was that the local authority, schools and parents and carers all had to work closely and collaboratively together to effect positive and lasting change and that unless they did the system would fail to significantly improve. This information, and the previous information gathered, supporting, and emphasising a collaborative approach, is central to further reviewing and shaping the service going forward.

While the different focus groups each had distinct membership and differing issues to focus on the concerns raised were broadly similar across the groups and events. Groups fed back that problems had been identified to the Local Authority (LA) over a sustained period but had not been acted upon. The groups also felt that the issues were not ones that could be dealt with by minor improvement but were systemic and ingrained. There was also recognition that the LA had got some things right in our SEND transport delivery but that we needed to learn from our successes and our failures and use this learning to constantly develop and improve the service. Below is a summary of the main themes coming out of the engagement.

Understanding Children's Needs

A common concern throughout the groups, one particularly highlighted by parents and teachers, was a perceived lack of understanding of the child's needs regarding transport: it was considered that this was having a negative impact on the children. An example was the importance of structure and routine to SEND children and parents stating that this was being lost due to transport issues (such as delay in transport timings and changes to personnel etc). Some parents advised that their children were losing classroom time due to arriving late to school.

Improving Communication

A further concern expressed was that many parents and carers felt that communication, and the clarity and accuracy of communication, needs significant improvement. An example given was that they believe they are constantly told the situation is good and working when this does not equate to what they see happening in practice. Some parents and carers believed a franker acknowledgment of service delivery is needed and that this would be helped by an accurate report of what is happening. It was also acknowledged that any service will be constrained by the budget available to deliver the service but that this should not be the only factor considered. The view was expressed that we needed to be more open with people and if that there is no money to deliver what people wanted then we must clearly state this.

Some parents/carers considered that their needs and perspective were not valued. Some parents stated that they believed that the transport team had a negative attitude to towards them which they found very difficult to deal with. Further, parents/carers felt that it was a poor service and that this created uncertainty (regarding when and if the transport arrived) and sometimes prevented parents from getting to work/getting to work on time. This uncertainty also inevitably impacted upon their child's wellbeing and mood which then often impacted the whole family.

Other Issues Raised

Although transport was the main concern, other concerns were expressed, with some parents and partners stating that there were wider problems across the SEND service.

Many parents/carers expressed an opinion that they were unhappy with the SEND services they received and that even where services were currently working well, parents and partners stated that there had previously been problems.

A consensus was that Haringey needed to have better communication, consultation, engagement and participation with parents and partners and undertake engagement events far more frequently in order to elicit views that would lead to change and improve services. It was also considered that such events need to be planned in collaboration with service users, focusing on different themes and service areas and that they need to be scheduled well in advance to ensure adequate notice for those who wish to attend.

SEND Transport Consultation Questionnaire

In addition to the above event and to augment it, a SEND transport online questionnaire was circulated however only six people completed this. Due to the low number of respondents it cannot be considered representative, but the views expressed by respondents fully concur with those gathered at the three engagement events.

Priority Areas for Improvement Identified at the Engagement Events

The consensus from these engagement events is that SEND services, particularly transport, need improvement. The feedback from the event has identified lots of areas where improvement could be made, some of which can be done quickly, and which would give a basis for future service improvement. In total, there were 6 main improvement areas raised by participants in the events (all of which we accept):

1. Improve our SEND transport service including the application process
2. Improve communication with children, young people and parents/carers.
3. Improve co production, consultation, engagement, and participation.
4. Personal budgets – a regular review of best practice to inform our approach and practices in Haringey.
5. More parental engagement in the development of training for officers and in the child centred approach that we will continually further develop in all that we do.

6. Transitions, to continually review and seek improvement.

Conclusion

We are very committed to improving our services, we want efficient, effective, economic, high quality user focussed services that meet the needs and wants of the service users. We engaged with parents, carers, and other stakeholders to gain their perspective and better understand the issues, find potential solutions, and thus improve services.

Our engagement with stakeholders has been very informative, the message we received is that we need to improve the SEND Transport Service significantly and quickly. Our aim is to improve the Transport Service in particular, but also wider SEND services in general, as much as possible as soon as possible and we want to create a service that continuously develops and improves. Specifically, we want to communicate, consult, engage, and involve service users in these developments.

Though we operate within tight financial constraints, our aim is to develop services that are exemplars, and which are bespoke and fully consider the needs of the individual. It is even more important, that because resources are limited, that we involve parents, carers, and stakeholders in the co-production of services so they can influence the deployment of the resources on the services that most matter to them. Our improvement journey will be centred on communication, consultation, engagement, and participation and workings with stakeholders we will aim to create outstanding services.

Next Steps

- All identified “quick actions” e.g. ending the need for an annual form completion for all will be implemented
- There will be further engagement with Parents/Carers, service users and partners regarding what they would like to see in any plan to improve the SEND services.

- A detailed outline plan will be produced that will consider all of the information garnered at this event and through other feedback from parents e.g. through the online questionnaire and other service user, parent, carer and other stakeholder feedback previously received.
- The plan will be implemented, and improvements made