

Scrutiny Overview Committee – 20th October 2009.

Special Education Needs Transport Update

An investigation into Special Education Needs Transport was conducted by the Scrutiny Overview Committee in February, May and November 2008. Subsequently The Executive agreed to a revised SEN Transport policy with the introduction of Pick-up Points. Following this an internal audit of SEN Transport was undertaken and this paper updates the Scrutiny Overview Committee on the salient points of it.

Pick-Up Points

Awarding the Contract

Following EU Tendering for the Pick-Up Points contract a local Coach Company was awarded the contract after a rigorous interview process. The company (OSL) had a good track record, and being local they had a maintenance depot nearby and could guarantee a replacement vehicle in half-an-hour.

OSL were keen to work in partnership with Sutton Council and so we were able to negotiate OSL sponsoring high visibility vests for all pupils on Pick-Up Points and so reduce expenditure for the Council.

Risk Assessments

Risk Assessments were carried out for each pupil to ensure that the Council was recommending the safest route to walk from the home address to the Pick-up Point. Due to a number of hazards, some of these routes were walked a number of times, before determining the number of routes. Hazards included; the lack of an appropriate crossing point, the lack of a suitable pick-up point along busy roads, number of accidents on a road and too many at one pick up point and so the need to create another pick-up point, always considering safety as the main concern. Risk Assessments cost were approximately £100 per pupil.

All parents / carers were informed in good time about their pick-up point and their timings for pick-up and drop-off.

Implementation

On 20th April 2009 Pick-up Points were introduced and all pupils got to school on time; and fortunately the sun shone all week and parents and pupils enjoyed their walks to the Pick-up Points. On the whole the weather has been favourable in the Summer Term, to the extent that young people have said that they prefer Pick-up Points to taxis, as it makes them feel like mainstream

peers. Obviously this will change in the Winter Term when the weather may not be so clement.

More pupils have joined the Pick-Up Point scheme, and from September 2009 the new cohorts started at both Carew Manor School (not ASD) and Muschamp Primary School (Speech and Language Base).

Savings and Benefits

The introduction of Pick-Up Points has allowed the Council to save almost £200,000 for the financial year.

Schools have been surprised at how much calmer pupils appear to be in the morning, and the children do appear to be benefitting from the additional exercise.

We are hoping that Pick-up Points will be a pre-cursor to independent travel, which will be discussed at Annual Reviews for all pupils in Year 9 to consider if they can travel independently during their Key Stage 4 education.

In addition, we have been rationalising routes. In 2006/7 there were 534 pupils being transported over 234 routes and in September 2009 there were 533 pupils being transported over 212 routes. Pick-up Points has been a major contributing factor in route reduction, but the loading capacity, that is the number of pupils carried per taxi, is now also more efficient.

Internal Audit

As can be seen from Appendix A: Internal Audit of SEN Transport, June 2009, recommendations have been made and are being taken forward and are regularly monitored.

Sutton is above average in its expenditure on SEN Transport, but there are factors beyond the Council's control in contributing to this expenditure e.g. Sutton has to provide transport to 55% of children purely on statutory distance, due to the fact that both LA Special and Independent Schools are located in the East of the Borough; this compares with Reading which only provides 39% statutory transport due to more centrally located provision.

Sutton has a high number of statements, but the Audit Commission states that Sutton has a higher than average number of adults with learning difficulties than other London Boroughs and so there may be a correlation. The Council is working with schools, to consider the 'Inclusion Agenda' and is supporting them in how to meet needs within a mainstream setting. The recent Government Guidance – Inclusion Development Programme aims to upskill schools to enable them to widen the range of disability within mainstream schools.

All decisions regarding SEN Transport are stringently audited and cases are flagged as to when independent travel may be considered.

The Future

SEN Transport is now more efficiently run with good local loading capacities. However, there remains the issue of the number of pupils at independent places at some distance from Sutton. Sutton and Croydon are currently working together to consider joint transport for shared independent places. It is hoped that this will be in place for September 2010, and so realise more savings for the Council.

Sharman Lawson
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