

<b>TITLE</b>	<b>Home to School Transport - Training for Drivers and Passenger Assistants</b>
<b>FOR CONSIDERATION BY</b>	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 September 2023
<b>WARD</b>	None Specific;
<b>LEAD OFFICER</b>	Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson

## **OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY**

Further information on driver and escort training provided for home to school transport.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

The Committee is requested to:

- 1) note the driver and escort training that is currently provided for those delivering home to school transport services
- 2) make suggestions on any further training which should be provided to drivers and escorts. The committee must demonstrate how any suggestions:
  - a) meet the Council's legal duty to provide the training
  - b) are a reasonable and proportionate request
  - c) are not being met by the current training programme

## **SUMMARY OF REPORT**

When providing school transport, the Council is responsible for deciding what travel arrangements to make, and ensuring they are suitable for the needs of the children for which they are made, this includes employing appropriate transport companies and ensuring their staff are provided with a reasonable level of training to meet the needs of the children they transport.

In deciding on the most suitable transport arrangements to make, the Council considers its legal duties, statutory guidance, its own transport policy, and any information provided about the needs of the individual children who require transport.

All drivers and passenger assistants required a basic level of training before working on Council commissioned transport. Through the commissioning processes the Council checks that appropriate companies are employed with staff that meet the basic training requirements. Where additional needs have been highlighted for individual children, the Council will seek staff with additional skills and training to meet these needs.

Statutory guidance places the onus on the Council to decide what training is required and how best to deliver the training. Wokingham Borough Council requires all transport companies to deliver a certain level of basic training for their staff. Proof of more formal basic training is then sought in relation to safeguarding, pupil management techniques, challenging behaviour, autism, epilepsy awareness and use of any equipment. Further training maybe requested in some circumstances. The Council commissions specific

training courses which transport operators can enrol their staff on prior to working on Council contracts. All training must be refreshed at least every three years, if not sooner.

The Council is always looking at ways to improve the services offered and would welcome suggestions from the committee of any reasonable and proportionate training which could be included within the basic training offer.

## **Background**

When providing school transport, the Council is responsible for deciding what travel arrangements to make, and ensuring they are suitable for the needs of the children for which they are made.

Schools are expected to support local authorities to deliver their home to school travel functions, for example, by promoting good behaviour on transport, and sharing information to ensure children's needs are met, and taking travel arrangements into account when making changes to their school day.

Local authorities also have a duty to promote sustainable and active travel to school.

## **Suitability of arrangements:**

Statutory Guidance for Travel to School for children of compulsory school age states:

*“Local authorities must ensure that the travel arrangements they make take account of the needs of the child concerned.*

*The arrangements should enable the child to travel in reasonable safety and comfort, and without undue stress, strain or difficulty, so that wherever possible they arrive at school ready to learn.*

*It may not always be necessary to provide children with ‘door to door’ transport in order to meet their needs. Many will be able to walk to a suitable pick-up point to be collected, provided they would be able to do so in reasonable safety, accompanied by their parent if necessary.*

*Some children may need particular arrangements to be made to meet their needs. For example, some children might require the support of a passenger assistant on their journey, or a child may use a wheelchair or walking frame that needs to travel with them.”*

It is in this context Wokingham Borough Council makes travel arrangements for eligible children, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

## **Managing Risk and Risk Assessments:**

When considering the suitability of arrangements for children, the Council must have regard to health and safety law. Health and safety law does not require a Council to eliminate every risk, but instead put in place reasonably practicable control measures to

protect children for whom they arrange travel and others (drivers and escorts) from harm.

It is for the Council to decide what is reasonably practicable in each circumstance.

### **Driver and Passenger Assistant Training:**

In relation to driver and passenger assistant training, statutory guidance states:

*“Local authorities should ensure that drivers and passenger assistants working on dedicated school transport have undertaken appropriate training and that this is kept up to date. It is for the local authority to decide what training is required, how it will be delivered and how often it should be refreshed. These decisions should be informed by their risk assessments. The training that a driver or passenger assistant requires may be dependent on the needs of the children who are travelling. Not all drivers and passenger assistants will need the same training.”*

It is for the Council to decide what is the best way for training to be delivered. Training may be delivered through a formal course or equally parents of a special educational needs' child may be able to advise of the best strategies to calm a child when they become distressed.

### **Safeguarding:**

For safeguarding purposes Council are advised that:

- an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check, with a check of the children's barred list, has been carried out for drivers and passenger assistants involved in providing dedicated school transport.
- drivers and passenger assistants have received any training they need to perform their role in relation to safeguarding;
- drivers and passenger assistants know how to report any concerns they have about the children in their care;

### **Home to school transport arrangements in Wokingham Borough**

Ensuring all children and young people who travel in Council commissioned vehicles are safe is of paramount importance. The Council will commission transport that is suitable for the needs of the children being transported, and as such will allow them to travel in reasonable comfort to and from school at the start and end of the school day.

The Council's transport team ensures that suitably trained drivers and passenger assistants are provided by considering any needs which the team have been made aware of for the individual children being transported. A child's needs are usually highlighted by either the SEND team, families, or by school. Drivers and passenger assistants are also encouraged to provide feedback to the Council, which can then be discussed with the SEND team and families.

The children's needs and the associated staff training required to meet these needs is fed into the transport commissioning process.

Initial safeguarding, training and compliance checks are undertaken through the transport commissioning process for all operators and their staff.

## **Transport Commissioning**

Transport commissioning is a two-stage process in Wokingham Borough. Firstly, the transport company must apply to be an approved home to school transport provider. As part of the application process, a transport company must demonstrate that they have the appropriate safeguarding policies and procedures in place, this includes within their recruitment, training, incident reporting and staff training policies. Transport companies are required to provide copies of their company policies which will then be evaluated as part of the approval process.

Once a transport company is an approved supplier, they may then apply to operate individual routes based on the contract specifications. It is the contract specification which will detail the vehicle type and any additional staff training required over and above the basic training which all transport staff are required to have.

On the award of a transport contract, the company will need to provide confirmation of the vehicle, vehicle licencing, names of staff who will work on the contract, evidence of staff DBS checks, driver badge and any other relevant training certificates, as identified on the contract specification. This information is required prior to the start of any contract.

## **Driver and Passenger Assistant Basic Training**

The transport companies themselves are expected to provide the following basic training:

- Familiarisation with company policies, procedures, and plans
- Familiarisation with appropriate codes of conduct and their duties
- Familiarisation with routes relevant to the contract/s they will be working on
- Safeguarding training
- Disability awareness training
- Health & Safety at work training
- Emergency First Aid at Work (HSE approved/certified)

Much of this training is also required to obtain either a valid Hackney Carriage, Private Hire, School Transport or PSV licence alongside a practical driving assessment and a group 2 medical.

For passenger assistants, attendance at a Passenger Assistants Training Scheme (PATS) training course (or equivalent) is required.

Wokingham Borough Council commission a further safeguarding and disability awareness course which is delivered at the Council offices over a full day. All staff working on Council home to school contracts are required to attend the course, which is delivered as an in-person course at the Council offices. The course outline includes:

- Safeguarding (in-person),
- pupil management techniques,

- challenging behaviour, autism, and epilepsy awareness (with practical exercise),
- demonstrations of assisting, boarding, and alighting ambulant and non-ambulant passengers,
- use of restraints and equipment

All staff attending the course must show to engage and participate in the course and reach a certain level of knowledge and awareness. Any person not, in the trainer's view, achieving the required standard would not be granted a course certificate, and in the case of a personal assistance, a PA badge.

### **Driver and Passenger Assistant Additional Training**

For those transport staff working with passengers who will be transported in wheelchairs, there is a mandatory requirement for staff to have attended "a safe transportation of passengers in wheelchairs" training which is run by BraunAbility, at Addington School during holiday periods. The 3-hour session is made up of two parts – 1.5hr of practical learning and a further 1.5 hour of classroom learning. The aim of the training is to ensure that all drivers and PAs are proficient in the safety procedures that must be adhered to when transporting a wheelchair client on and off a vehicle. The focus of the training is around correctly securing clients in wheelchairs into a vehicle using retractors, lap and diagonal belts.

Similarly for those transport staff who transport children requiring a harness, basic harness training must be completed. Makes and models of harnesses do vary and have different fitments. Transport staff may also take additional instruction from families on any harness which is suited to an individual child.

All driving staff and personal assistants are required to have basic first aid training. It is the Council's policy not to administer medicine on-board a vehicle, with the only exception being rescue medicine. In cases where rescue medicine is required, suitable training is sought from health care professionals for the administration of medication. In the cases of all other emergencies transport staff are instructed to call 999.

In addition to the above formal training, informal advice/training may be sought from families in relation to the specific needs of a child. Often families know the best ways to calm their children should they become distressed whilst travelling. This advice can be sought by the SEND team, the Council's transport team or by the transport staff (driver and PA) as any point, although it is most likely this will be before a child starts on any new transport arrangement, if the needs are highlighted to the transport.

### **Monitoring**

Contract monitoring takes place annually, with on-site monitoring during the academic year. Training certificates, including DBS checks, have a 3-year lifespan and then must be refreshed. In the interim if there is a valid reason to request refresher training or a renewed DBS check the Council's contract terms would allow for this.

If route contracts are varied, for example to add an additional child to a route and the child being added has additional needs, then additional training may be required before the child can be added or a PA/different PA may be added to a route.

## Continuous Improvement

Wokingham Borough Council is always looking at ways in which continuous improvements can be made to services, including the delivery of transport services. Following feedback from one Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) School the transport team are currently discussing additional behaviour management strategy training which can be added to the one-day course the Council already run. The training would be delivered by a senior member of staff from the SEND school.

## Legislation and Statutory Guidance:

- Section 508C of the Education Act 1996: travel arrangements for other children;
- The School Travel (Pupils with Dual Registration) (England) Regulations 2007
- School Information (England) Regulations 2008: publication of information about travel arrangements.
- Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999,
- Paragraph 2(1)(f) of Schedule 4 of the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006
- Regulation 3 of The Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006 (Miscellaneous Provisions) Regulations 2009
- Statutory taxi and private hire standards
- The Public Service Vehicles (Carrying Capacity) Regulations 1984
- Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations 2000

## FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

***The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.***

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	n/a		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	n/a		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	n/a		

### Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

Any recommendations by the committee may have financial implications

### Cross-Council Implications n/a

### Public Sector Equality Duty

Please confirm that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been taken and if an equalities assessment has been completed or explain why an equalities assessment is not required.

**Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030**

None

**List of Background Papers**

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