

# CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

20 September 2012



PLYMOUTH  
CITY COUNCIL

## SEN Transport

The transport budget is always under pressure due to the responsive nature of the service. Delivery plans for 2011-2012 were all achieved resulting in savings being made and the 2011/12 budget coming in on target with an underspend of £12,515.

## Delivery Plans 2011 - 2012

1. Concessionary transport ceased with effect from September 2011. (Savings September 2011 to March 2012 - £98,978). Some families now qualify for free travel under the Low Income Policy (see below).
2. Special School routes (rolling programme) - The Transport Team reviewed all routes in readiness for the Autumn Term including a full review of transport to Downham School which has moved to the new Cann Bridge site in Estover starting in September.
3. To reduce the cost of early years transport with effect from September 2012. A review of assessment places in nurseries in the city has been carried out as part of the SEN review, whereby nurseries will be provided with additional funding for individual pupils at a nursery within their locality. (Savings to be identified)

## Support for Families on low income

PCC have received a grant totalling £176,368 in 2012/13 which is split between the Children's Services Transport Team (£116,368) and the Sustainable Transport Team (£60,000).

I can confirm that the statutory free travel scheme will not change for 2012/13 and the Green passes will continue to be valid for free travel.

Last academic year a total of 193 free bus passes were issued to children who qualify for free travel under the government low income policy. To date, at the start of this academic year, 153 passes have been issued, with new applications being received on a daily basis.

School children may be eligible for statutory free travel from Plymouth City Council if they meet all the criteria listed below:

- 1) Is attending one of his/her three nearest schools (or the nearest RC school), and
- 2) The school measures between 2 and 6 miles from home, and
- 3) The pupil is eligible for free school meals or the family are in receipt of the maximum award of Working Tax Credit.

## 16 – 19 Bursary Fund (previously Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA))

For students aged between 16 and 19 years and who might struggle with the costs for full-time education or training they may be eligible for a bursary.

Students in the following groups may receive the maximum bursary of £1,200 a year:

- young people in care
- care leavers

- young people claiming income support in their own name
- disabled young people who receive both Employment Support Allowance and Disability Living Allowance in their own name

To receive the maximum bursary the course must last for 30 weeks or more. If the course is shorter than 30 weeks, you may receive less.

Other students facing genuine financial difficulties may be awarded a bursary at the discretion of their school, college or training provider.

Unlike the EMA which was a national system, schools, colleges and training providers are responsible for awarding bursaries to students. With the exception of the £1,200 bursaries for students most in need, the individual establishments decide on the amount. They will also have decided when bursaries are paid, and will have set conditions that students should meet to receive a bursary, for example, linked to behaviour or attendance.

### **Passenger Assistants**

The Passenger Assistant budget is always under pressure due to the reactive nature of the work. When a Passenger Assistant is off sick the post always has to be covered in order to meet the authority's statutory duty of transporting children with Special Needs to school or college. This problem has been addressed in two ways:

- 1) Very close monitoring of sickness absence, well-being meetings and prompt referral to Occupation Health for those on long term sick.
- 2) Recruiting to our relief pool of Passenger Assistants from Network Health (Pertemps). These employees are paid only for the hours worked and also they are not paid if they are off sick.

We currently employ 151 PCC staff (76%) and 47 (24%) Network Health Staff. The PCC employees are mainly allocated to permanent on-going routes, with Network Health Staff covering for sickness and leave. Currently, however, if a PCC employee leaves the authority their posts are being filled with Network Health employees, which means some Network Health employees, are being used to cover permanent on-going routes (currently 28). Up to now the % split between the two employers has worked reasonably well and is manageable. It is anticipated that the % split will remain at around this level, with new PCC staff being employed in the near future to the vacant on-going routes, in order to maintain this balance.

### **On-going variables**

There are a number of variables which can affect the budget position at any point which need to be taken into account:

- Increase in the complexity of need for the children requiring transport both challenging behaviour and medical requirements to both mainstream and special school provision.
- Due to the increase in complexity many children require one to one support in taxis rather than on minibuses where numbers of children travel with one Passenger Assistant (Escorts) which can also affect the number of routes allocated.
- Requests now being received for two Passenger Assistants to escort one child, where a child received 1:2 support at school this is also required for transporting the child.
- Due to very complex autism and behavioural issues some children require to be transported on their own in a minibus with two Passenger Assistants rather than a taxi. There are currently 3 children requiring this level of support.

- Due to a child's severe medical needs an Ambulance has been provided as we are unable to recruit suitably trained medical staff to escort the child in a taxi.
- PCC minibus fleet vehicles increased costs in servicing and parts due to their age.  
Procurement is currently in the process of seeking approval for replacement of these fleet vehicles.

## **Conclusion**

The delivery plans were all achieved in 2011/12 and service came in just under budget. The projection for the 2012/13 budget is also currently looking favourable, but again the on-going variables listed above need to be taken into consideration as they could have an adverse impact depending on the level and numbers of pupils requiring additional support. We also need to take into consideration the level of sickness and the impact of any adverse weather conditions as we move into the winter months.

Julie Roantree

Principal Transport & Allowances

People Directorate

7 September 2012