

AMBITIOUS PLYMOUTH SCRUTINY PANEL

23 September 2013



PLYMOUTH
CITY COUNCIL

SEN Transport

The transport budget is always under pressure due to the responsive nature of the service. Last year's outturn was £3,394,831 compared to budget of £3,373,934 (overspend of £20,897). The projection for 2013-14 is currently showing an underspend of £77,000. This however should be treated with extreme caution as we are at the start of a new academic year and still in the process of finalising transport requirements and Passenger Assistant hours.

The Transport Team reviewed all routes in readiness for the Autumn Term including a reallocation of Passenger Assistants across all schools in order to reduce mileage costs, running time and Passenger Assistant hours.

Passenger Assistants

The Passenger Assistant budget is constantly 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 IMASS (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 do not receive pay when on sick leave.

We currently employ 146 PCC staff (73%) and 54 Network Health Staff (27%). 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 19). 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 some children require one to one support on transport. There are currently 19 children requiring this level of support, 11 of whom are on shared transport and 8 who require their own vehicle.

- Due to very complex autism and behavioural issues requests are now being received for two Passenger Assistants to escort one child, where a child receives 1:2 support at school this is also required for transporting the child. There are currently 2 children requiring this level of support. The Teaching Assistants are escorting the children on the transport as part of a wrap-around package. These children require transport in a minibus rather than a taxi to give the space to manage their behaviour and give space to protect the passenger assistants. These 2 minibuses cost £202.57 per day, a total of £38,198 per year.
- 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. Approval has now been received for replacement of the fleet and the contract awarded. It is anticipated the new vehicles should be in place around January 2014. This will show an immediate saving on repairs and maintenance.

Support for Families on low income

PCC have received a grant totalling £139,600 in 2012/13 towards the cost of providing low income transport. The cost of providing low income bus passes was approximately £125,300. There are also a few children provided with taxi transport under this criteria, however the cost is difficult to quantify on an individual basis as they are shared with other children. We have been notified that the grant will decrease to £89,500 for 2013/14 which will leave a shortfall to be met from the existing budget.

Last academic year a total of 227 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, 158 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 faith 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.

Commercial Operator School bus Service Cuts

On 28th June Plymouth Citybus notified the Council that they were planning to make changes to school bus services with effect from 3 November 2013. In summary the changes have been confirmed as follows:

- 109 & 115 Plympton services will be cancelled and replaced by the 103.
- 142 and 104 will be withdrawn
- 112 which was previously at risk will be retained following Cllr Coker's and Williams' intervention.

There are a number of other changes proposed on both First and Citybus's commercial services over the coming weeks but first impressions seem to suggest that they will not have a major impact on any of the city's schools. First have confirmed that as a result of their changes, the dedicated school buses for Coombe Dean (the 800 series) will be retained.

Conclusion

The 2012/13 budget was overspent by £20,897, and this year is 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.

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People Directorate

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