

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Education and Children's Services
DATE	1st June 2017
REPORT TITLE	The Provision of Children's Escorts and Associated Costs
REPORT NUMBER	ECS/17/023
DIRECTOR	Gayle Gorman
REPORT AUTHOR	Eleanor Sheppard

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT:-

The purpose of this report is to respond to a Committee request to provide assurance and advise:

- of how the implementation of a presumption of mainstreaming has impacted on escort costs;
- to share the outcome of an analysis of escort costs;
- outline the criteria for the provision of a children's escort.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that Committee:

- (i) note the content of this report for reassurance; and
- (ii) note that escort costs will continue to be monitored as part of service financial monitoring arrangements.

3. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES / OTHER HEADINGS AS APPROPRIATE

3.1 Implementation of the Inclusion Review

Aberdeen City Council has worked to implement a 'presumption of mainstreaming' since August 2014. It could be reasonably presumed that increasing numbers of children accessing local schools would reduce the number of escorts required.

Despite this policy change financial reports have indicated an increase in the overall costs associated with escort provision.

3.2 **Reviewing arrangements for the provision of an escort**

Some children have a physical or sensory impairment or severe, profound or multiple learning difficulties which require specialist transport arrangements or supervision. At times parents and carers are keen and able to support their child's journey to school; at other times the needs of the child can lead to consideration of the requirement of transport and an escort.

An initial review of arrangements to secure the provision of an escort highlighted that many children and young people retained the provision of an escort for many years despite their changing needs. This arrangement did not support children and young people to develop independence and impacted on escort costs.

A draft procedure for the provision of escorts was circulated to all schools and services for comment in November 2016. Feedback informed a final procedure that was issued to all schools and services in January 2017.

3.3 **Investigating the Rising Costs of Escort Provision**

The budget for escorts sits across all school budgets. This arrangement means that it is difficult for one budget holder to have clear oversight of all costs and to be able to quickly identify and mitigate risks.

Considerable work has been undertaken to ensure that one budget holder now has clear oversight of all escort costs.

A detailed analysis of costs spanning the last 4 years has been undertaken to inform decision making.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17
	£	£	£	£
Primary	227,026	224,512	210,560	206,413
Secondary	112,895	116,707	128,762	126,937
Specialist	257,538	277,464	340,877	367,000
Preschool ASN	71,322	77,134	84,891	88,590
Total costs	668,781	695,816	765,090	788,940

Analysis of spend shows an emerging downward trend in escort costs for children of primary school age. There is a slight increase in secondary costs and steadily increasing costs for specialist provisions.

3.4 **Analysis of Escort Provision in Primary Schools**

The majority of escorts in Primary Schools support children attending the 16 schools who previously offered ASN Base provision. 58 children in total are escorted to these provisions.

The children accessing an escort fall into 2 groups, those who the Local Authority have historically placed outwith their local school (P3 - 7) and those who have a level of physical or emotional need requiring escorted travel arrangements to ensure their safety (Nursery to P2).

Most of the children being escorted are in the middle and upper stages of primary school. It is anticipated that escort costs will continue to decrease as children transition to their local secondary school.

3.5 Analysis of Escort Spend in Secondary Schools

The majority of the escorts in Secondary Schools support children attending the 4 secondary schools who previously offered MICAS Provision. 24 young people are currently escorted to secondary schools.

The young people accessing an escort fall into 2 groups, those who the Local Authority placed outwith their local school (S3 - S6) and those who have a level of physical or emotional need requiring escorted travel arrangements to ensure their safety (S1 and S2).

The majority of escorted transport runs are for young people in S4, S5 and S6. New arrangements in place should reduce the number of escorts in place for session 2017/2018.

3.6 Analysis of Escort Spend in Specialist provisions and Services

Children and young people attending our Specialist provisions have increasingly complex needs and require escorted travel arrangements. In some cases children and young people have life limiting conditions and require an emergency plan. In the most complex of cases this plan can require 2 members of staff to be available to safeguard children and young people.

The provision of escorts is spread evenly across year groups.

The opening of Orchard Brae will bring significant efficiencies as groups of learners will be able to travel to school together and share the provision of an escort.

3.7 The Revised Procedure

The procedure requires staff to undertake a robust risk assessment to include consideration of:

- medical needs requiring an emergency medical protocol, procedure or specific adult support;
- safety needs resulting from other factors such as behaviours due to an additional support need;
- physical or psychological capabilities in some cases; and
- the age of the child.

The procedure contains a series of questions for colleagues to consider as part of the risk assessment process. Consideration of the questions will help to identify the most efficient means of supporting and empowering children and young people. The procedure crucially ensures that arrangements are reviewed annually or sooner if needs change.

The impact of the revised procedure will be closely monitored with a review planned for November 2017.

3.6 **Conclusion**

The Primary escort budget will continue to decrease as children access their local school. The revised procedure being used to access the provision of an escort is anticipated to reduce the number of children who retain the support of an escort when their needs change; this will lead to a reduction in the provision of escorts in secondary schools from August 2017. The impact of the procedure will be carefully monitored and improved as necessary.

The increasingly complex cohort of learners accessing specialist provision is unlikely to lead to a reduction in the need for escorted travel. However, the opening of Orchard Brae will bring efficiencies as small groups of learners will be able to travel together.

4. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

If costs are not reduced in line with agreed savings within the 2016-17 budget process, this budget is likely to be overspent by approximately £50K by the end of the current financial year. Any overspend would require to be met from existing service budgets.

It is anticipated that costs will fall in August 2017. This will be closely monitored to inform longer term budgeting.

Close links with the Public Transport Unit will continue to be necessary.

5. **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

Aberdeen City Council must comply with the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004 which provides the legal framework for the provision of additional support for learning. The legislation guides Local Authorities to make adequate and efficient provision for the additional support required for each child or young person with additional support needs. The legislation also stipulates that arrangements must be routinely reviewed to ensure they remain appropriate.

6. **MANAGEMENT OF RISK**

Financial – Not managing escort spend within agreed constraints could lead to budget not being available to fulfil other Council commitments. The increasing escort costs have been mitigated by putting a revised procedure in place. The procedure will be subject to on-going review to ensure that the risk remains low.

Employee – Not having effective procedures for the provision of an escort could result in staff being vulnerable and not able to safeguard children and young people confidently. The routine review of escort arrangements will ensure that this risk remains low.

Customer / citizen – Not having effective procedures for the provision of an escort could lead to vulnerable children and young people being unable to access their entitlement to education safely. The procedure for the provision of an escort helps to mitigate this risk and ensures that decisions are taken based on individual needs. The risk is low.

Environmental – The provision of an escort is linked to the provision of school transport and associated environmental risks based on emissions although the provision of an escort does not directly present any environmental risks.

Technological – The provision of escorts does not present any technological risks.

Legal – Aberdeen City Council has a duty to provide education to children and young people and must make adequate and efficient provision for such additional support as is required and not making such provision could be challenged. The procedure for the provision of an escort mitigates this risk. The risk is low.

Reputational – Not providing an escort when necessary could present a reputational risk to the Council in terms of how effectively it meets the needs of children with additional support needs, and particularly those with medical needs. The personalised approach advocated in the procedure will help mitigate this risk and ensure that recommendations made about the provision of an escort are based on robust risk assessment processes that include parents and carers. The risk is therefore low.

7. IMPACT SECTION

Economy

- 7.1 The revised guidelines for the provision of an escort will improve the Council's use of resources through modernising and transforming our services.

People

- 7.2 The provision of escorts ensures that children and young people affected by disability or additional support need access education and get the support they require when they need it. The proposal has the potential to advance equality of opportunity by:
- removing or minimise disadvantage;
 - tackling prejudice; and
 - promoting understanding.

Many children and young people with additional support needs are capable of a level of independence that will help equip them for independent living. We have a duty to empower children and young people to lead full and independent lives and the revised procedure for the provision of an escort will help us empower children and young people to develop independence skills based on their individual needs. The revised procedure will help us to provide more personalised services based on the individual needs of children and young people.

The revised guidance on the provision of an escort supports delivery of several of the Equality Outcomes most notably:

E.O 3: Physical and social barriers are removed for those with a disability to access services and public realms.

E.O 5: Aberdeen is a "City of Compassion/ Sanctuary".

E.O 9: We have engaged and committed leaders, with the council and partners working together to reduce inequality, remove barriers and promote a culture of respect.

E.O 10: Article 2 of the UNCRC states that no child should be treated unfairly or be discriminated against.

An EHRIA was completed in respect of this report.

Place

- 7.3 The Council is committed to ensuring that children and young people can access educational support within their locality wherever possible and the provision of an escort supports this commitment.

Technology

- 7.4 There are no technological implications arising from this report.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Education and Children's Services 17/11/16 article 6 of the minute

9. APPENDICES (if applicable)

- 9.1 Revised Procedure for the Provision of Escorts

10. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

Name: Eleanor Sheppard

Job title: Transformation and Improvement Manager

Email address: esheppard@aberdeencity.gov.uk

Phone number: 01224 522707

HEAD OF SERVICE DETAILS

Name: Helen Shanks

Job title: Head of Education

Email address: hshanks@aberdeencity.gov.uk

Phone number: 01224 522473