

Appendix 4

Home to school travel consultation: Kids First Steering group response 4 March 2022

The Kids First Steering Group would like to thank Tom Procter, Merton's Head of Contracts and School Organisation and Philip Wells, Merton's Interim Transport Specialist for engaging with Kids First members and keeping them up to date at all the stages of the home to school travel consultation, and for presenting and taking questions at the four online meetings in November 2021 and February this year. The meetings were very helpful, with information presented in a clear way, and questions fully answered. We were pleased that so many Kids First members were able to engage in this process and present their views via the survey.

Thank you for presenting the draft recommendations:

1. Continue to meet our statutory requirements for home to school travel for statutory school age children
2. Continue to support families with children of pre-school age and post 16 with the most significant needs where it is essential to get their child to school, especially for those with severe and profound learning difficulties
3. Continue not to charge for receiving travel assistance.
4. Increase investment in travel training to support independence
5. Review policy and practice for ease of use of travel budgets (PTABs) and increase their promotion
6. More formal reviews with schools to ensure we meet the needs of children as effectively as possible including identifying children who could be supported towards more independent travel
7. Travel support for post-16 students to be more predominantly through independent forms of travel assistance, such as travel training and travel budgets. Organised transport only for those unable to use independent forms of travel or where approved course of study is too far away to be reached independently.
8. Revising policies for September 2022 applications to reflect the above

We hope that all of the feedback from children and young people and their parent carers, including the most recent feedback from the meetings in February, will be taken into full consideration during any revision of the policy and during discussions at the meeting on 7th March.

Going forward, the Kids First Steering Group still have concerns that changes to SEN Transport policies may impact the access to education or wellbeing of children and young people in Merton and their families.

There was concern expressed by parent carers at meetings that the primary motivation behind the consultation is to cut costs and that Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets, rather than organised transport, would be forced on families. We were pleased that Tom and Philip were able to reassure parent carers that this was not the case, acknowledging

that this type of support is not for everyone, and emphasising that in all cases the local authority must liaise with children and young people and their families about the right travel support for them on a case-by-case basis.

We know that independent travel training and personal travel budgets work well for some children and young people. However, we would suggest that any change in policy in this area considers both how it identifies children and young people where there is potential for them to be supported towards more independent travel, and fully supports those who would be negatively impacted by these changes.

Feedback has also shown that there are issues and concerns with the current transport provision and these need to be taken into account to improve the quality and ease of access for children and young people.

There is also a need for clear and unambiguous guidance and support for both SEN Transport (for children and young people under 19) and also in Adult Social Care (ages 19-25) where the transport protocols are less clear for young people with EHCPs. Once funding for a placement is agreed, could there be additional transport discussions, so that it is clear what arrangements are being made for transport and how they would be funded?

The Kids First Steering Group would like to be engaged with any revision of current policies in the lead up to September 2022.