

Business Support Overview and Scrutiny Committee

BRIEFING NOTE – No. 09/14

Date: 16 April 2014

Briefing paper to: All Members of the Business Support Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Purpose: This briefing note was as a result of discussion at the meeting of this Committee on 5 December 2013

SEN Transport Benchmarking – December 2013

METHODOLOGY:

The RCC Performance Hub contacted 55 Unitary Authorities (UA's) to request information regarding the management of SEN transport w/c 18 November 2013. Authorities were asked to provide data on their SEN transport budget, number of statemented children, number of statemented children eligible for transport, and average number of routes operated; 18 Authorities responded (just over a third). To provide an appropriate context Medway has been benchmarked against 5 of the 18 authorities that have a household size within 20,000 of Medway Councils, which stands at 106,209. These authorities are:

Authority:	Household size:
Southampton UA	98,254
Milton Keynes UA	98,584
Medway UA	106,209
Stoke-on-Trent UA	107,575
Brighton and Hove UA	121,540
Leicester UA	123,125

IMPORTANT NOTE - Even though these authorities have a comparative household size, a number of factors, including available infrastructure, area geography and social demographics, make a like-for-like comparison with Medway Council's SEN transport provision very difficult. For example, Southampton UA has a child population around half the size of Medway. It should also be noted that the data for this analysis was independently returned by the responding authorities and cannot be verified by Medway Council officers. Any conclusions drawn from this project should be viewed in this context.

Budget 12/13

Of the 6 Authorities analysed, including Medway:

- ◆ The average budget for 2012/13 was £2,786,178.
- ◆ Of the 6 organisations Medway Council had the largest budget, but also the highest number of children eligible for transport. Southampton has the lowest budget at £1,374,650, and also the lowest number of children eligible for transport at 317.

Budget 13/14

Of the 6 Authorities analysed, including Medway:

- ◆ The average budget for 2013/14 was £2,679,216.
- ◆ This ranged from Southampton at £1,291,950 to Leicester UA at £4,131,100
- ◆ Of the 6 organisations Medway Council had the second highest budget in 2013/14 at £3,355,900.
- ◆ 2 authorities increased their budget from 2012/13 to 2013/14, 1 remained static and 3 decreased their budget. The largest increase in budget of this period was in Milton Keynes (£244,957) and the biggest decrease was in Medway (£672,100).

It should be noted that authorities that responded provided budget information for 2012/13 and 2013/14, but did not clarify whether this equalled the amount actually spent on SEN transport for these years. In Medway's case the budget for 2013/14 was £3.3mill but the anticipated spend for the year is £4.4mill.

No of Children With Statements

Of the 6 authorities analysed, including Medway:

- ◆ The average number of children with statements is 1,197.
- ◆ At 1,410 Medway Council had the second highest number of children with statements with Leicester being higher at 1,490. Southampton had the lowest number at 655.

No of Children Eligible For Transport

Of the 6 authorities analysed, including Medway:

- ◆ The average number of children eligible for transport was 596. At 1,056 Medway Council had the highest number of children eligible for transport out of the 5 authorities; the second highest was Milton Keynes with 589. The lowest was Southampton at 317.
- ◆ Out of the 5 other authorities Medway Council (75%) has the highest number of children with statements that are eligible for SEN transport.

It should be noted that eligibility criteria for SEN transport is set nationally, and is the same criteria utilised by all authorities.

Average Daily Cost Per Child

Of the 6 Authorities analysed, including Medway:

- ◆ The average daily cost per child was £23.60, this ranged from £19.67 in Stoke on Trent (544 children eligible) to £29.59 in Brighton and Hove (472 children eligible).
- ◆ Medway Council had the second highest average daily cost per child at £24.18, £5 over the average cost.

It should be noted that calculations for the average daily cost per child were based on a school year of 191, and all eligible children travelling 191 days. Information as to the number of children travelling weekly or per term was not provided by authorities so could not be taken into account when calculating the daily cost per child. This may have an impact on the outcome of this analysis.

Average Number of Routes

The number of routes reported by those authorities that responded differed greatly, ranging from 11.58 in Slough (with no clarification provided on the 0.58 of a route) to 11,780 in Leicester. The large range in figures suggests difference in the reporting of this figure, or possible error in calculation on the authorities part. As such, a comparison to Medway Council's current 255 routes would not be beneficial.

Do They Use Personal Budgets For SEN Transport?

Of the 6 Authorities analysed, including Medway:

- ◆ 67% (4/6) stated that they did not use personal budgets for SEN transport.
- ◆ 33% (2/6) use personal budgets (Brighton and Southampton)

Do Authorities Manage SEN Transport Contract Themselves?

Of the 6 authorities within Medway Council household size 3 have the contracts themselves (Southampton, Medway UA, Stoke-on-Trent), 2 have private sector contractors (Milton Keynes, Brighton and Hove) and 1 operates both (Leicester)

CONCLUSION:

Whilst the figures provided by those comparative authorities that responded provides an indication as to the extent of SEN transport operated in these areas, the information is not conclusive enough to provide validation for Medway Council's own SEN transport provision.

If confirmation is required as to whether Medway Council's arrangements are typical of any national trends in SEN transport provision it would be necessary to try and obtain more focussed information. Research would need to be undertaken to determine which Unitary Authorities have demographics, geography, social composition, and infrastructure that is comparative to Medway's (if indeed there are such comparative UA's). These UA's would then need to be approached for detailed information on their

SEN transport services so that a more direct comparison can be carried out with Medway's SEN transport provision. This may then provide an indication as to whether the extent, method and cost of SEN transport in Medway is above or below the provision in comparable areas.

As stated, this does make the assumption that comparable UA's exist. Given the number of different factors that impact on the provision of SEN transport (social, financial, geographical, etc) finding similar UA's to make a useful comparison may not be possible. For example, the unique geography in Medway, the mix of river / urban/ rural, has a significant impact on the availability of SEN transport routes and public transport in relation to school and passenger locations. Finding a comparative UA with this same combination of geography alone in order to make a worthwhile comparison may prove difficult.

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