

# **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Education Skills and Wellbeing Cabinet Board**

**1<sup>st</sup> February 2024**

### **Report of the Head of Support Services and Transformation**

**Rhiannon Crowhurst**

**Matter for:** Information

**Wards Affected:** All Wards

**Subject:** Information update following the introduction of Personal Travel Budgets (PTBs) as an additional home to school travel assistance offer

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide an update for Members following approval to introduce Personal Travel Budgets as an additional means of travel assistance under the Council's Home to School Travel Policy 2017.

#### **Executive Summary**

2. This report provides information to Members on the uptake of Personal Travel Budgets since their introduction at the start of the new academic year 2023/2024. Additionally, this report shows how Personal Travel Budgets are contributing to reducing pressures on the Council's Home to School Travel Assistance Budget.

## **Background**

3. Personal Travel Budgets have been introduced as an additional means of the Council meeting its duty to provide travel assistance to those who have an entitlement under the Council's Home to School Travel Policy 2017.
4. Personal Travel Budgets can be used for:
  - Purchasing a travel pass for public transport (so the child may be accompanied)
  - Paying a responsible person deemed to be appropriate by the parent/carer to help the child use public transport
  - Paying a responsible person deemed as appropriate by the parent/carer to walk or cycle to school with the child
  - Paying a responsible person deemed as appropriate by the parent/carer to drive the child to school
  - Paying for fuel
  - Paying for travel by taxi
  - Paying a childminder (e.g. to look after siblings)
  - To organise travel to separate home addresses where there is split custody

Personal Travel Budgets offer more choice for parents/carers to make arrangements according to their personal circumstances, and which meet the needs of their child. The list above provides examples of what the budget can be used for, however, usage is not limited to these as other examples include a respite carer being paid for taking additional responsibility for transporting a pupil to school following the end of their night-time respite care shift. Authorisation given for the budget to be put towards car repairs so that the parent continued to have a working vehicle available to them to transport their child to and from school.

Whilst offering flexibility for the parent/carer Personal Travel Budgets are also a cost-effective solution for the Council. However, to ensure effective use of public resources a Personal Travel Budget will not be offered if it is found to be more expensive than alternative travel assistance options.

### **Level of take-up of new Personal Travel Budgets**

5. Between September 2023 and the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2024, 51 Personal Travel Budgets have been taken-up.
6. Personal Travel Budgets are offered where there is no alternative travel assistance available and to minimise the use of a single-occupancy contracted vehicle.
7. The current average cost of a single-occupancy contracted vehicle is £147 per day (£27,930 per annum) meaning the cost of 51 single-occupancy

vehicles equate to around £7,497 per day (£1.4 million per annum). This compares to the cost of 51 Personal Travel Budgets at £1,757 per day (£333,830 per annum).

8. The difference in cost between 51 Personal Travel Budgets and 51 single-occupancy contracted vehicles equates to £5,740 per day (£1m per annum).

### **Transfer of existing single-occupancy contracted vehicles to Personal Travel Budgets**

9. As at the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2024 there are 37 pupils travelling in single-occupancy contracted vehicles, of these an initial 17 pupils have been identified as having the potential to be offered a Personal Travel Budget as an alternative offer to a single-occupancy contracted vehicle. The cost of the 17 single-occupancy vehicles amounts to an average £2,499 per day (£474,810 per annum). When compared with the cost of Personal Travel Budgets for these 17 pupils at £686 per day (£130,340 per annum), this equates to a potential saving of £344,470 per annum if the 17 pupils transferred over to Personal Travel Budgets.

### **Transfer of pre-existing mileage allowance claims over to Personal Travel Budgets**

10. The Council already provided mileage reimbursement, however, Personal Travel Budgets offer further choice because of the available more flexible arrangements the parent/carer may wish to make.
11. Prior to Personal Travel Budgets being introduced in September 2023 some parents/carers were already receiving a mileage reimbursement. For the purposes of fairness these parents/carers are being transferred over to Personal Travel Budgets. As a result of the changeover 19 parents/carers are entitled to be offered a Personal Travel Budget.
12. The previous mileage allowance rates were £0.45p compared to the new Personal Travel Budget rates of £0.65p per mile and £10.00 per hour journey times. This means there will be an additional sum of £387 per day (£73,530 per annum) for the 2023/2024 budget.

### **Personal Travel Budgets are influencing operator prices**

13. External environmental factors have influenced an increase in the cost of procuring home to school transport contract vehicles from operators, however, the introduction of Personal Travel Budgets has reduced the need to procure expensive single-occupancy contracted vehicles. With a smaller number of contracts available this may impact competition in the market place and as a consequence mean more favourably priced operator bids.

## Financial Impact

### 14. Financial Information comparator for 2022/2023 - Home to School Travel costs

	<b>2022/2023</b>
Primary Education - In County	£1,042,274
Primary Education - Out of County	£87,939
Secondary Education - In County	£1,576,693
Secondary Education - Out of County	£274,164
Special Educational Needs - In County	£2,774,992
SEN – Maes Y Coed	£804,489
Middle Schools	£923,199
Special Educational Needs - Out of County	£169,689
Special Educational Needs Post 16 - In County	£462,825
Special Educational Needs Post 16 - Out of County	£18,336
Post 16 – In County	£1,012
Transport Delivery	£65,094
<b>TOTAL COST</b>	<b>£8,200,705</b>

*\*2023/2024 budget figures will be available following closure of the financial year in March 2024.*

## Integrated Impact Assessment

15. There is no requirement to undertake an Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) as this report is for information purposes only. However an IIA was undertaken for the initial report introducing the PTB and this is attached as Appendix A .

## Valleys Communities Impacts

16. The impact on Neath Port Talbot's valley communities is the same as all other areas of the County Borough. The Council's duty to offer travel assistance to all those with an entitlement is the same for all pupils across the whole of the county borough.

## **Workforce Impacts**

17. There are no workforce impacts associated with this report.

## **Legal Impacts**

18. Section 3 of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 imposes a duty on local authorities to provide travel arrangements for learners of compulsory school age who attend their nearest suitable school and meet the relevant criteria. Travel arrangements made in accordance with section 3 may include the payment of the whole, but not part, of a child's transport expenses (section 3(4)). Section 1(2) of the Measure defines travel arrangements as including "the payment of the whole or any part of any person's reasonable travel expenses, and the payment of allowances in respect of the use of particular modes of transport"
19. The Council's Home to School Travel Policy 2017 (the Policy) sets out how the Council will discharge its duty and the Council must comply with its Policy. The Policy sets out that travel provision may be provided by way of a parental allowance or the provision of the whole of reasonable travel expenses. The intended use of Personal Travel Budgets concerns the provision of transport and not the issue of eligibility and is in line with the Policy. Personal Travel Budgets are designed to reimburse parents/carers for the costs incurred in providing the home to school transport.
20. Personal Travel Budgets provide an additional means of fulfilling the Council's legal duty to provide travel arrangements for learners of compulsory school age who attend their nearest suitable school and meet the relevant criteria.

## **Risk Management**

21. The risks to be taken into consideration are:
  - The Council has a statutory duty to provide home to school travel assistance to those pupils who are eligible to receive it
  - The Home to School Travel Assistance Budget is increasingly coming under pressure from increased costs

## **Consultation**

22. There is no requirement for consultation.

## **Recommendation**

23. That Members note the updated information provided in this report.

## **Reasons for Proposed Decision**

24. No decision report is for information purposes only.

## **Implementation of Decision**

25. This report is for information purposes only.

## **Appendix**

A. Education Skills and Wellbeing Cabinet Board - 25<sup>th</sup> May 2023

## **List of Background Papers**

NPTCBC Home to School Travel Policy 2017

The Education Act 1996

The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008

The Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance 2014

The Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009

## **Officer Contact**

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