



**People and Communities Select Committee**  
**Minutes of the Meeting Held on 15 March 2024 at 10am**  
**in the Council Chamber, County Hall**

**Present:**

Cllr Fran Whymark (Chair)  
Cllr Brian Long (Vice Chair)  
Cllr Sharon Blundell  
Cllr Ed Connolly  
Cllr Brenda Jones  
Cllr Paul Neale  
Cllr Mike Smith-Clare

**Substitutes Present:**

Cllr Michael Chenery of Horsbrugh for Cllr Claire Bowes  
Cllr Robert Savage for Cllr Julian Kirk  
Cllr Lesley Bambridge for Cllr Michael Dalby

**Officers Present:**

|                   |  |
|-------------------|--|
| Hollie Adams      | Committee Officer  |
| Michelle Brady    | Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting                    |
| Samantha Fletcher | Assistant Director Education Infrastructure & Partnerships |
| Sam Mee           | Senior Lead, Home to School Transport                      |
| James Wilson      | Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy   |

**1. Apologies for Absence**

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Claire Bowes (Cllr Michael Chenery of Horsbrugh substituting), Cllr Michael Dalby (Cllr Lesley Bambridge substituting) and Cllr Julian Kirk (Cllr Robert Savage substituting).

**2. Minutes of last meeting**

- 2.1 The minutes of the meeting held on 19 January 2024 were agreed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

**3. Declarations of Interest**

- 3.1 Cllr Ed Connolly declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Norfolk Foster Panel and as a Magistrate on the Suffolk bench.
- 3.2 Cllr Mike Smith-Clare declared a non-pecuniary interest as he ran a Community Training Provider with young people transported by Norfolk County Council transport

**4. Items received as urgent business**

- 4.1 There were no items of urgent business.

## **5. Public Questions**

- 5.1 One public question was received; please see appendix A of these minutes.

## **6. Member Questions and Issues**

- 6.1 No Member questions were received.

## **7. Home to School Transport**

- 7.1.1 The Select Committee received the report setting out an overview of the arrangements for delivery of home to school travel, highlighting the pressures on the system and actions and initiatives that the council was taking to improve outcomes, manage demand, reduce costs, and ensure compliance with statutory duties and best practice.
- 7.1.2 The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy introduced the report to the Select Committee:
- More than £60m per year was spent by the Council to provide school transport to children in Norfolk.
  - Providing school transport was becoming more complex each year due to the changing needs of children including children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.
  - Work was underway to see how the transport market and routes could be reshaped to meet the needs of children and families.
  - Alongside this piece of work, work was ongoing as part of Local First Inclusion to provide more Special Educational Needs and Disabilities education provision so that children would not have to travel as far to access education. It was hoped this would impact on the home to school transport.
- 7.2 The following points were discussed and noted:
- A committee member asked about TITAN training, querying how long it took to achieve the objectives of the training and whether the provision would be expanded. The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy confirmed that the time taken varied by child. This training was not appropriate for all children; some children would not require it, and some children would continue to require travel with a high level of support due to their needs. The training this would be targeted at children for who a benefit would be seen and who were able to take it up. Referrals were taken from schools, parents and young people.
  - A Committee member asked if community transport were able to support home to school transport. The Assistant Director Education Infrastructure & Partnerships replied that the passenger transport unit worked with community groups to see where transport could be shared with different services.
  - Officers were asked if there had been a decrease in the need for school transport since the increase seen in home schooling. The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy replied that this decrease had been offset by an increase in the number of children requiring specialist transport including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and those who had been excluded from school and requiring access to a specialist education facility.

- Officers confirmed that the home to school transport team worked with higher education settings and schools to see where transport opportunities could be maximised.
- Officers were asked how many children were projected to achieve TITAN training. The success rate of TITAN training was 40% and 165 young people had been trained this year, 2023-24. Around 73 young people were forecast to be trained next year although more may be ready for the training. The training took a different amount of time for different children.
- The cost for transport for children and young people who would always require specialist transport was requested and discussed. Due to the level of interest in this topic, the Chair **suggested** a report on TITAN training be brought to a future meeting. In the meantime, The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy agreed to send data on this cost to Committee members.
- The Vice Chair noted the cost for transport operators of increasing the environmental credentials of their vehicles and queried whether the Council could invest in their own buses. The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy replied that having in-house provision could be influenced via the provision provided by Norse. The Council had looked into influencing the modernisation of provider vehicles by providing financial incentives, but it was not financially viable.
- The budget showed that home to school transport was projected to overrun by 11% and so officers were asked if modelling for the upcoming year's budget was accurate. The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy replied that in 2023-24 an additional £5m had been put into the home to school transport budget to allow for increased factors such as inflation and fuel prices, however they increased more than expected. The budget for 2024-25 was greater than this financial year's forecast outturn and it was hoped this would mitigate against an over-spend. Officers had allowed for an increase in need while also factoring in the impact of Local First Inclusion.
- A Committee Member asked what the maximum distance was that a student would be transported; The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy replied that this was based on the needs of the child. Children could potentially be transported out of county although this was rare. The Committee Member noted the impact of long travel times on children. The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy confirmed that residential education would be considered if available and based on the needs of the child. The Chairman noted that Local First Inclusion was working to increase the amount of specialist provision in Norfolk to reduce the number of children who would have to travel long distances to education.
- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care shared that TITAN relied on volunteers to support people and places acting as safe spaces for TITAN users.
- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care asked what Members could do to help schools to be more inclusive. The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy replied that schools could be less inclusive due to lack of resources or confidence and officers were looking at training and workforce development to support with this; he suggested that supporting local first inclusion through governors and schools would help them to access training and funding. Members could speak with The Director for Sufficiency

Planning and Education Strategy if they had any queries. It was also noted that schools could struggle to access health services and so encouraging these links would support.

- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care noted that budget setting required assumptions to be made and in a demand lead service, there was an obligation to provide a service.
- Page 12 of the report showed a shortfall, and it was queried where this would be addressed. It was confirmed that in 2024-25 the budget would increase to mitigate this which would impact on the wider council budget.
- Officers confirmed that it was more costly for the Council to provide home to school transport, rather than through third party providers, due to the impact of providing staff pay and terms and conditions and other related costs.
- A Committee Member asked how many young people were physically or emotionally unable to use transport on their own. The Assistant Director Education Infrastructure & Partnerships **agreed** to provide a written reply to this question.
- A committee asked if there had been any co production with families; the Assistant Director Education Infrastructure & Partnerships replied that this took place alongside the Local First Inclusion which was co-produced with families.
- The Vice Chair was concerned that there was a limited supply of transport in some areas which could drive up prices. The Director for Sufficiency Planning and Education Strategy replied that all transport was commissioned through a tendering process and there was no evidence of price fixing.
- The Chair noted this was a challenging subject and understood the interest in TITAN. He **asked** that a report be brought back to a future meeting on TITAN training. This piece of work is linked to Local First Inclusion, and he thanked everyone for the discussion

### 7.3 The Select Committee:

1. Noted the content of the report on Norfolk's Home to School Travel (HTST)
2. Provided feedback and commented on the HTST programme of transformation and improvement.
3. Identify any areas for further scrutiny or investigation:
  - a report to a future meeting on TITAN (Travel Independence Training Across Norfolk).

## 8. Fostering Transformation Update

- 8.1.1 The Committee received the report giving a summary of the transformation work, including the work to date, to improve the recruitment and retention of foster carers for children in Norfolk who come into care, and in line with Children's Services aim that all children should experience family-based care.
- 8.1.2 The Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting, introduced the report to the Select Committee:
  - As part of this piece of work, a system called mockingbird was being put in place. This consisted of a hub carer who would provide sleepovers, support for other carers and a support network for carers and young people. Norfolk County Council would support this mockingbird network.
  - Work was being carried out to encourage foster carers to foster children with disabilities and teenagers.

- Respite would be referred to as sleepovers following feedback from young people that they preferred this terminology.
- Best practice across the region was being developed and training was being shared with all agencies.
- A foster carer refer-a-friend scheme was being developed.
- Links were being developed with housing providers and with a range of organisations in Norfolk to promote foster care.
- Interviews were held with foster carers who were thinking of leaving the service to find out the reasons why they wanted to leave and foster carers had fed back that they felt heard.

## 8.2

- The following points were discussed and noted:  
The average cost for an in-house foster placement was lower than a private foster placement and residential placement costs were much higher. It was **requested** that all Members be provided with information that could be passed on about foster care so that they could promote the service. It was also suggested that Councillors could share information with businesses to help them support workers who were foster carers.
- Officers were asked how many long term and experienced foster carers were registered in Norfolk. The Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting, **agreed** to provide a written response.
- 17 applications to become a foster career were received between January 2024 to mid-February 2024.
- A Committee Member asked if attachment training was involved in the training for foster carers. The Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting, replied that fostering skills was provided for foster carers, and trauma and attachment training was being developed. Work was being developed to work with foster carers who had been part of a foster breakdown to understand why this had occurred.
- There was an aspiration to increase the number of foster carers by 30 over 3 years through recruitment and retention. At the time of the meeting there were 259 foster carers.
- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care asked if people who were not ready to foster when they first enquired were re-engaged with at a later time. The Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting, confirmed that officers encouraged people who had shown an interest in becoming foster carers to get in touch with other foster carers and although they may not be ready to become foster carers at this time there were follow up calls by officers to discuss their situation.
- The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care suggested that it would be helpful for businesses to accommodate their staff to undertake the role, in a similar way to how they did for retained firefighters.
- The cost-of-living crisis was queried as an impacting factor of foster carers. The Assistant Director, Corporate Parenting, acknowledged that this was the case, and the fees were due to be reviewed alongside foster carers.
- Cllr Ed Connolly acknowledged the work of the Norfolk Independent Foster Panels and their work supporting officers, who were made up of experienced and dedicated people.
- The Chair echoed these sentiments. The Chair had experience of being a foster carer which he had found to be a positive experience. He felt that the mockingbird scheme was positive as it would provide a good support network for new foster carers and that shared training would be beneficial.

8.3 The Select Committee:

1. Noted the current work that Norfolk County Council is undertaking with regards to improving the offer to our foster carers and increase the net numbers of those who want to foster, and stay fostering, for our in-house service, Norfolk Fostering Service (NFS).
2. Noted the vital role members could play in promoting and supporting the drive to increase the pool of in-house foster carers. A briefing will be provided for Councillors to share at Annual Meetings of Parish and Town Councils.

**10. Forward Work Programme**

10.1 The Select Committee received and reviewed the forward work programme.

10.2 The following points were suggested for addition to the forward plan:

- a report on TITAN training as requested in paragraph 7.2, bullet point 6.
- Home Education
- an update on Education Health and Care Plans including messaging around these to parents and young people

Cllr Brenda Jones suggested that the oral health report could include exploration around a Norfolk County Council programme of encouraging teeth brushing.

10.3 The Chair proposed that the meeting scheduled for the 17 May 2024 be cancelled as there was no business to discuss.

10.4 The Select Committee:

- **Agreed** the forward plan with the addition of the following items, dates TBC:
  - A report on TITAN training as requested in paragraph 7.2, bullet point 6.
  - A report on home education
  - an update on Education Health and Care Plans including messaging around these to parents and young people.
- **Agreed** to cancel the meeting due to be held on 17 May 2024.

The Meeting Closed at 11:52

**Cllr Fran Whymark, Chairman,  
People and Communities Select Committee**



**If you need this document in large print, audio, Braille, alternative format or in a different language please contact 0344 800 8020 or 0344 800 8011 (textphone) and we will do our best to help.**

## **People and Communities Select Committee**

**15 March 2024**

### **Item 5; public questions**

#### **Question from Mark Knight:**

Can the Committee explain why the Short Breaks service and Home to School Transport system for children with SEND has been targeted for costs savings in the 2020/4/5 budget with minimal co-production with the vulnerable families impacted?

#### **Response from the Chairman:**

There is no planned saving from the Short Breaks budget in the current Medium Term Financial Strategy. There is a new strategy and model that was presented at the previous committee meeting. That report included specific information about the engagement and co-production which took place prior to finalisation of the new model and all families accessing the Short Breaks service are involved in planning packages for their children.

The cost savings for Home to School Transport are primarily linked to the transformational plans that are increasing the range of specialist provision for children with SEND in Norfolk. This is a positive move that will improve services for children and young people, significantly reducing their travel times and in turn reducing costs. Other elements of our Home to School Transport work is aimed at increasing independence travel training for young people, with associated benefits for them as they move to the next stage of their education. The next stage of our work is to make sure we build on this benefit with secondary age young people by rolling out similar approaches with primary age children. Both of these elements, reduced travel time and increased independence, are not only positive for children, young people and their families but reflect feedback we have had as part of our ongoing SEND strategic improvement work and, for example, through our annual SEND Survey. We believe, therefore, that they do reflect engagement with families and young people and this will be enhanced through discussions with individual families regarding their own children and the relevant point of transition.