

# FEBRUARY BRIEFING PAPER

*Information for parents  
and carers on home  
to school transport*



Dear Families,

This is the first briefing paper for Home to School Transport to keep families informed of the changes and developments taking place to improve the service we provide.

The authority recognises the difficulties families are experiencing and apologise for the impact this has had on getting your child to school.

Over the last few months we have been working to improve the services we deliver. This briefing has been prepared to share some of the things taking place to improve the way we do things, and are part of a wide-range of changes we are making to support children, young people and their families with special educational needs.

**Nichola Jones**



**Assistant Director Inclusion and SEND  
Education and Skills Directorate**

## Improving our application service to families

We know our application process is not easy to navigate, so we are currently reviewing this to ensure a more user-friendly experience. We have brought in help to simplify the process through a broader piece of work that we are looking at in relation to our Inclusion and SEND service.

A key part of the work has been conducting an online survey covering the Home to School application and appeals process and the SEN Education Health Care Plan Process. The survey included interviews, with over 160 parents and carers responding. This means that the solutions will be firmly based on the needs of parents and carers as improvements to the application and appeals process are being made. We are really looking forward introducing new technology soon to make it a much simpler process.

We are also looking at the format of the Local Offer website to make it easier for parents and carers to find information on the support available for their children, young people and families, including Home to School Transport. We will be launching the new Local Offer Website in March 2020.



## Improving the referrals process

We have recently introduced a new referrals process with meetings now taking place weekly.

This means when a decision is made for placement a discussion now takes place at the weekly panel made up of a specialist team of SEND professionals alongside home to school team members.

Our new approach ensures that transport and placement decisions are made together.

This way of working will ensure we deal with all our new referrals within 20 working days. In effect, this has meant our referrals waiting to be processed has reduced from 211 in November to 19 in January.

We have also set up a weekly appeals panels to deal with the historic backlog. Through this process we have reduced significantly our stage one appeals, from over 200 in September 2019 to 34 in January and for stage two appeals from over 40 in September 2019 to 10 appeals waiting to be heard at the end of January 2020.

We know we still have some way to go and the teams are working hard to ensure decisions are made in as timely a manner as possible.

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## Guides

We know we still have work to do to ensure we have cover when our travel guides are not available. To resolve the issue, we have brought in extra capacity to specifically improve upon the instances where routes have been cancelled, as we know this just isn't good enough.

In our next briefing we will provide you with further information about what we are doing to improve our services – we will be reporting on what we are doing to ensure that our routes don't get cancelled as a result of travel guide sickness.

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## Changes to Transport Providers

The National Express Accessible Transport (NEAT) is continuing to make improvements by re-training all their drivers and implementing their ongoing fleet upgrade programme to ensure all vehicles are roadworthy, safe and fit for purpose. All drivers have id badges, first aid and safeguarding training. We are pleased to report that since November there have been no route cancellations from all our transport providers.

We have recently tendered all other Home to School transport, to ensure we continue to raise the standards consistently and have phased the start dates for the newly appointed suppliers with the final phase taking place in February.

We know this has meant some disruption for you while we have moved to the improved way of working and we thank you for your patience. We are pleased to report this will all be completed by February half-term.

In the coming months, we are going to be specifically reviewing the lateness of our home to school transport and the length of time children are travelling to and from their home. We will be using these briefings to inform you of our findings and how we can improve our services further.

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## Improving how you contact us

We recognised the difficulties families were experiencing getting in touch with our department. We have brought in more help (an additional support worker) to ensure we follow up on all our missed calls and we have created an additional helpline, so we can be contacted by our travel assistants.

We are currently reviewing our telephone calls systems so we can also improve how people get in touch with us.

We know we still have some way to go in getting our service to a standard where we become one of the best services nationally. To do this we really want to hear from you. In our February briefing we will be sharing details about how you can get in touch to help us with our improvements.