
Report To:	Education & Communities Committee	Date:	2 September 2025
Report By:	Ruth Binks Corporate Director Education, Communities and Organisational Development	Report No:	EDUCOM/45/25/TM/NM
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Subject:	Review of Transport for Pupils with Additional Support Needs		

1.0 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 ☒ For Decision ☐ For Information/Noting
- 1.2 The purpose of this report is to update the Education and Communities Committee on the work that has been undertaken in relation to the review of home to school transport for pupils with additional support needs (ASN).
- 1.3 The review forms part of the Council's change programme and is seeking to reduce the significant overspend in relation to ASN transport. A working group was established with the primary purpose of exploring whether ASN transport would be more cost effective if it was provided through the Council's internal transport service. This report sets out proposals for a pilot programme to extend the internal provision of ASN transport.

2.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 It is recommended that the Education and Communities Committee:
- notes the outcome of the review of ASN transport; and
 - agrees to the proposals for the service to work with Environment and Regeneration to extend internal transport provision by four buses and drivers as part of a pilot project.

Ruth Binks
Corporate Director
Education, Communities and Organisational Development

3.0 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 3.1 As part of the Council's change management programme and in response to a significant budget pressure, a review of school transport is being undertaken for pupils with additional support needs.
- 3.2 Currently, free transport is provided to all pupils with additional support needs who attend Craigmarloch School. In addition, transport is also provided to pupils with ASN who have been assessed as requiring it in settings such as Hillend Children's Centre, Lomond View Academy, in one of our communication and language bases or within mainstream settings. It has been custom and practice for many years for transport to be provided to these settings, regardless of pupil need. The service also provides free transport for children and young people who require transport to meet a short-term need. All of which is funded from the ASN transport budget.
- 3.3 Transport is currently provided through a number of means such as bus or taxi, by a number of private and 3rd sector providers and our own internal transports service. All contracts, except internal transport, are arranged through our partnership with Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT).
- 3.4 ASN transport is largely demand-led and costed on where pupils live in relation to their placement which makes it very difficult to accurately project costs from year to year. While the number of pupils with additional support needs requiring transport has remained fairly static over the past few years, the number of settings has also increased. However, the main cause of the increased budget pressure has arisen from the increased cost of providing the transport. Although there has been a slight reduction in costs in 2024/25, this is offset by a significant increase projected in 2025/26. The table below shows the increased costs over the past several years and projected cost for 2025/26:

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26 Projection
Total expenditure	735,543	886,491	1,083,379	1,323,566	1,292,878	1,611,470

- 3.5 A cross service working group of senior officers from educational resources, finance, and environment and regeneration was established to take a closer look at the feasibility of internal transport replacing the current arrangements. The working group looked more closely at the following:
- The lead in time, cost, and procurement of additional adapted vehicles;
 - The recruitment and retention of drivers;
 - The additional costs associated with the management and maintenance of a large fleet; and
 - The utilisation of drivers between pick-up and drop-off times.

4.0 PROPOSALS

- 4.1 The Corporate Management Team agreed that proposals should now be developed to undertake a pilot project to extend the current number of ASN transport contracts which are provided internally. This would allow the Council to establish whether cost reductions and better cost certainty could be achieved.

4.2 A pilot scheme based would present an initial estimated saving of **£13,760** by bringing 4 routes in-house, commencing in August 2026. This is based on costings for 16/17 seat mini-bus provision. This saving is the minimum expected cost saving (*vs current provision*) on the basis that it does not assume vehicles and drivers will be utilised outwith pick-up and drop-off times. Should the pilot be approved for development, it would be intended that the project group continues to manage governance and identify activities for drivers and vehicle utilisation to maximise utilisation of resource outwith pick-up/drop-off times by the go-live stage of the project in August 2026. While it is not possible to specify those use cases to occupy drivers and vehicles out with their primary function at present, areas of exploration are likely to include HSCP utilisation, other 'daytime' education needs and scoping across the Council to identify other uses. Once use cases for residual driver/vehicle resources have been developed it is anticipated that the cost saving identified may increase and other project benefits will materialise. Further updates on this will be provided to the Education and Communities Committee as the pilot develops.

4.3 Some additional known considerations are set out as follows, encompassing current perceived benefits, risks or areas for development:

- In respect of the suggestion of change to the start and finish times of schools to allow for double runs for school transport, officers are not aware of any other council having considered this. It should be recognised prior to development of the detail of a pilot scheme that the very early start for some pupils (pick up being approximately 7 a.m.) and the later start for others starting at 10 a.m. would be highly unlikely to be popular with parents. It would also exclude any possibility for inclusion in mainstream in secondary schools and cause additional issues with staffing, contracts and childcare provision (potentially including where siblings are involved);
- This model, with a year lead for procurement, will create capacity to test recruitment assumptions related to availability of drivers in the marketplace, feasibility of term-time/part-time contracts and whether there are existing staff that are suitable for the roles or activities that drivers could undertake beyond education and HSCP functions. It should remain the assumed position that part-time drivers will be harder to progress given marketplace for drivers is limited;
- It should be noted that although there was some contingency in place in cost baseline, staff (driver) absence remains a risk insofar as if there were a number of drivers off at the same time, there is a risk that additional agency costs could be incurred, which would be passed on to education services;
- In terms of potential for damage to fleet vehicles, bodywork damage up the value of £2,500 and any vehicle downtime that required a hire vehicle being brought in, these are additional potential service costs, which would be passed to education services; and
- A booking system approach to utilisation of vehicles and drivers outwith pick-up/drop-off times, has been considered, but unlikely to be operable. The project working group concluded that pre-programmed driver/vehicle activities would work best, and this will be further explored in developing use cases. This was likely more suitable to Consortium travel where it could be planned on a term-to-term basis; with Transport assisting in the programming into the driver's day; and
- In almost all cases, all forms of transport require the presence of one or two pupil support assistants (PSAs) on escort duties, which is not contained within the ASN transport budget and is not included in the costs detailed.

4.4 On this basis, it is recommended that the Education and Communities Committee supports the recommendations in this paper, which will entail commencing procurement activity for 4 x ASN vehicles and continuation of the working group to fully develop remaining components of the business case for the pilot as referenced in this report. While it is not possible to specify the precise operating arrangements for a pilot ASN transport scheme for 4 vehicles, it is competent to proceed to develop the pilot on the basis it will allow exploration of strategic challenges

associated with in-house provision, and the estimated worst case financial position would equate to a saving of c.£13k.

5.0 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The table below shows whether risks and implications apply if the recommendation(s) is(are) agreed:

SUBJECT	YES	NO
Financial	X	
Legal/Risk	X	
Human Resources	X	
Strategic (Partnership Plan/Council Plan)	X	
Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People's Rights & Wellbeing	X	
Environmental & Sustainability	X	
Data Protection		X

5.2 Finance

One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Years	Proposed Spend this Report	Virement From	Other Comments
N/A					

Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (If Applicable)	Other Comments
Vehicle Maint.	Employee Costs	Aug 2026	£95k	Education ASN	Overall a net saving of £14k. Virement from ASN Transport to cover loans chgs £34k, employee costs of £95k and vehicle running costs of £20k.
	Fuel/Materials		£20k		
Miscellaneous	Loans Chgs		£34k		
Education	ASN Transport		(£163k)		

5.3 Legal/Risk

Under Section 42 of the Education (Scotland) Act, the authority must provide free transport or make such other arrangements for all pupils up to age 8 who live more than 2 miles from their local catchment area school and to all pupils over age 8 who live more than 3 miles from their local catchment area school. The Act also makes provision for a number of exceptional circumstances and special conditions under which the authority may also provide free transport.

5.4 Human Resources

The deployment and contracts of drivers will be considered by the working group in order to ensure efficiencies.

5.5 Strategic

In order to mitigate the impact of poverty, the local authority has amongst the most generous transport policies in the country.

5.6 Equalities, Fairer Scotland Duty & Children/Young People

(a) Equalities

This report has been considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) process with the following outcome:

x	YES – Assessed as relevant and an EqIA is required, a copy of which will be made available on the Council's website: https://www.inverclyde.gov.uk/council-and-government/equality-impact-assessments
	NO – This report does not introduce a new policy, function or strategy or recommend a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy. Therefore, assessed as not relevant and no EqIA is required. Provide any other relevant reasons why an EqIA is not necessary/screening statement.

(b) Fairer Scotland Duty

If this report affects or proposes any major strategic decision:-

Has there been active consideration of how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome?

x	YES – A written statement showing how this report's recommendations reduce inequalities of outcome caused by socio-economic disadvantage has been completed.
	NO – Assessed as not relevant under the Fairer Scotland Duty for the following reasons: Provide reasons why the report has been assessed as not relevant.

(c) Children and Young People

Has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment been carried out?

x	YES – Assessed as relevant and a CRWIA is required.
	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve a new policy, function or strategy or recommends a substantive change to an existing policy, function or strategy which will have an impact on children's rights.

5.7 Environmental/Sustainability

Summarise any environmental / climate change impacts which relate to this report.

Has a Strategic Environmental Assessment been carried out?

	YES – assessed as relevant and a Strategic Environmental Assessment is required.
x	NO – This report does not propose or seek approval for a plan, policy, programme, strategy or document which is like to have significant environmental effects, if implemented.

5.8 Data Protection

Has a Data Protection Impact Assessment been carried out?

	YES – This report involves data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.
x	NO – Assessed as not relevant as this report does not involve data processing which may result in a high risk to the rights and freedoms of individuals.

6.0 CONSULTATION

6.1 N/A

7.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

7.1 N/A