

Family Voice Calderdale response to the Calderdale Council Post 16 Transport Policy 2022-2023 Consultation.

Executive Summary

Family Voice Calderdale is a project of Unique Ways, a small local charity that supports families with disabled children across Calderdale. Family Voice Calderdale is the Parent Carer Forum for Calderdale. Parent Carer Forums are groups of parents and carers of children & young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and there is one in every Local Authority in England. Our aim is to ensure that services in Calderdale meet the needs of disabled children and their families.

We also belong to the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF).

- Family Voice Calderdale aims to ensure that Parent Carers have a voice in shaping services for children & young people with additional needs in Calderdale.
- Family Voice Calderdale aims to seek and represent the views of the collective voice of Parent Carers in Calderdale.
- Family Voice Calderdale aims to make sure that Parent Carers and their families in Calderdale receive the support they need when they need it.

Family Voice Calderdale first became aware of the consultation on the 30th November 2021, when this was raised by a Parent Carer to us. Family Voice Calderdale felt that given the significant changes to the Post 16 Transport Policy, we should ensure that the collective voice of Parent Carers across Calderdale were given the opportunity to be heard.

On 17th December 2021, Shona Walsh, Chief Executive Officer of Unique Ways emailed some initial feedback to Shirley Pearson. The main topics of this feedback were:

a) Timescales/Content:

Parent Carers regularly feedback to us that 'Consultations' usually have deadlines that are just too tight or impossible for them to meet at all. Furthermore, the window to provide feedback is often just

a week or two and taking place over Easter or Christmas will always result in reduced numbers of Parent Carers being able to participate in Consultations.

b) Transparency and User-Friendly Processes

Parent Carers find that the documents they need to consult (for any Consultation) are in different places on the LA's website (which is difficult enough to navigate at the best of times and the Local Offer platform not being fit for purpose). Consultations appear to be so low key or under the radar that Parent Carers feel they are purposely inconspicuous in order to ensure the majority of Parent Carers are indeed unaware of them taking place.

c) Impact of proposed changes, especially financial changes

For some Parent Carers any change to their financial situation can be of major significance i.e. ability to care for their child/young person. The impact of poverty on families with disabled children/additional needs and the wider impact on society is well documented.

Parent Carers need as much prior notice as possible to plan for any proposed short-fall and to know possible avenues of support.

Also, there is an impact on families due to unworkable home to school transport arrangements.

Family Voice Calderdale undertook a consultation on behalf of the membership of Unique Ways in the form of a simple 5 question survey.

Methodology

Family Voice Calderdale undertook a consultation on behalf of the membership of Unique Ways in the form of a simple 5 question survey.

The questions we asked were:

1. Does your child or young person currently receive home to school transport?
2. Which Post 16 Provision (Education Setting) does your child or young person attend, or is going to attend, from September 2022?
3. Prior to this communication, were you aware of the consultation and changes to the Post 16 Policy Statement from September 2022?
4. What effect will these changes have on you and your family?
5. Any Other Comments?

The survey was emailed to our membership of c. 900 contacts as well as posted across our Social Media platforms.

The survey was open between Friday 17th December 2021 and Tuesday 11th January 2022.

We received a total of 85 responses to our survey during this time.

Upon analysis of the responses, it was discovered that due to the 'public' nature of social media, some of the responses were made by respondents not in Calderdale. In order that we represent the voice of Calderdale families, we have disregarded these responses, although it is to be noted that the responses to questions 4 and 5 were in keeping with the themes of families within Calderdale.

Of the 85 responses, we broke them down into the three categories:

Calderdale – 33 Responses - *These responses were identified as Calderdale using the answers from 'Which Post 16 Provision (Education Setting) does your child or young person attend, or is going to attend, from September 2022?'*

Not Calderdale - 36 Responses - *These responses were identified as Not Calderdale using the answers from 'Which Post 16 Provision (Education Setting) does your child or young person attend, or is going to attend, from September 2022?'*

Not Specified – 16 Responses - *These responses were identified as Not Specified as the answers from the questions meant we were unable to identify whether these responses were from within or outside Calderdale.*

Responses

Does your child or young person currently receive home to school transport?

	No.	Percent
Yes	31	93.94%
No	2	6.06%

Which Post 16 Provision (Education Setting) does your child or young person attend, or is going to attend, from September 2022?

Of the 33 responses, 20 responded with Ravenscliffe Skircoat or Spring Hall, 3 responded with Calderdale College, 2 responded with Highbury School, and the remainder responded with mainstream or out of area provisions.

Prior to this communication, were you aware of the consultation and changes to the Post 16 Policy Statement from September 2022?

	No.	Percent
Yes	3	9.09%
No	30	90.91%

What effect will these changes have on you and your family?

This question was a free entry response box. The key themes of the responses were:

- **Financial** – This additional cost, in addition to other rising costs, will have a significant impact on the lives of families with disabled children. The State of Caring report from Carers UK already reports that one in five unpaid carers are worried they may not cope financially over the next 12 months and one in four carers (23%) may not have enough money to cover their monthly expenses.
- **Employment** - The Parent Carers ability to continue with employment – If a young person is allocated transport, but they are unable to finance the monthly charge, the alternative will be for Parent Carers to take them to school themselves. This will have a severe impact on the Parent Carers ability to remain employed.
- **Education** - The Young Person's ability to continue in education - If a young person is allocated transport, but they are unable to finance the monthly charge, there is the realistic possibility that the young person will no longer be able to continue in their education.

- **Mental and Emotional Wellbeing** – Many respondents remarked on the anxiety, stress and overall mental health of their young person taking public transport to school if they are refused transport, or, the method of transport allocated is not 'suitable' for their young person, as well as the emotional and social benefits of catching a bus with their peers.
- **Green Policy**– many respondents remarked on the inconsistency between Calderdale Council's Green Policy and the impact of more car journeys been undertaken across the Borough.

Any Other Comments?

This question was a free entry response box. We felt the direct responses clearly demonstrate the concerns of Parent Carers across Calderdale about these proposed changes.

1. The LA are not enabling children to meet their potential by withdrawing transport support. There's already a crisis in SEND and this will make it worse. Children will be unable to access their education, this should be unlawful.
2. Why is there going to be a charge? Does this mean the money for EHC plans is reduced then because isn't transport costs included in this as an amount each student gets? So, if I have to pay £35.00 monthly then this would be reduced wouldn't it? Also, what choices would you have to pay if the changes go ahead? If payment choices are limited, then how can you make the right choice of payment for your family?
3. This service is valuable as it gives the children the support they need to travel to school independently.
4. Will Ravenscliffe be able to cope with more parents dropping off and picking up if they don't qualify for free transport?
5. There appeared to be little recognition of our child's special needs, or that there was no direct bus route to school, with suggestions that he be placed on a bus, to make multiple confusing journeys, or else a carer would have to take eight bus journeys per day.
6. It would feel like progress if we didn't have to fight for transport every year, as the special needs school she goes to is 6-7 miles from where we live, getting to Halifax is 16 miles away and she can never catch public transport, I would never see her again. It just seems crazy to me, where is the safeguarding/duty of care for our children?
7. Our young person is unable to access education without this transport. This is effectively a tax on her attending school or college.
8. If Calderdale had a school suitable, I wouldn't need to request transport to take them a 3 hour round trip, but Calderdale admits it can't meet their needs therefore until it can, it should be responsible for transportation. Also, the so called "consultation" link put out by the LA just takes you to the policy with no option for feedback. The whole process is an absolute shambles and yet again another battle for parents who are worn out. For out of area children, transport is cheaper than residential. As for "statutory" we all know that's the equivalent of bare minimum and not a standard they should be measuring themselves by.

9. Loss of transport will mean, loss of social interaction with other children and loss of a skill to use public transport.
10. Why haven't they contacted us to tell us of the consultation? We wouldn't know about this if you hadn't emailed us
11. As the parent of a child with complex medical needs who doesn't sleep longer than 4 hours per night, the thought of driving her to school worries me on a morning after being up at night with her, I have no night time carers, Also, is this a fixed rate, if she's not in school do we still have to pay full?
12. My child has a free bus pass so if they want us to be in line with metro prices, can she just use her free bus pass?
13. My child is unable to travel independently like any other 17yr old and so yet again, is penalised for her disability.
14. It's essential for families to have this in place, I'm effectively working to be able to pay for her to attend school.
15. Our child has a free disabled bus pass, why would she pay fares?
16. Unfortunately, just yet another area of our council where cuts will be made yet council tax goes up and my wage as an employee of Calderdale council has stayed the same.
17. This is not great timing as disabled pupils in education are no longer able to claim Universal credit from this week.
18. This will put unnecessary stress on students and parents whereby students do not have the skills to travel independently. Seeing as education is still compulsory post 16, then transportation should be provided free of charge.
19. How does this fit with the climate emergency plan? It would seem to suggest a lot more individual double car journeys each day and half empty buses. How has this been factored into the local plan for climate change cost?
20. Will the erosion of the school day implemented to accommodate transport now be reversed? e.g. 10 minutes per day from Spring Hall reduction in teaching to accommodate transports inflexibility.
21. I'm shocked that we are now being charged a monthly rate for transport.
22. This policy will disproportionately impact on parents of SEN children and, frankly, makes an already difficult situation even more difficult.
23. Why haven't they told us? Surely they've got existing post-16 users on a database?
24. Transport do a fab job, the drivers and assistants are amazing, they offer a brilliant service and it's a service that should it have to be paid for then so be it.
25. XXXXX has been on the transport since he was 5 years old (10 years).
26. Young person is 18, why should parent carer be responsible for paying their transport invoices?

Parental Contribution

The proposed transport policy for 2022-23 states that *'parental contribution will be £35 per month, being equal to the cost of a subsidised fare ticket, which is available from Metro.'*

Given that school transport operates for 39 weeks per year, it would be an imbalance to charge Parent Carers for the full 52 weeks per year. The majority of students that will have transport assistance provided would also be eligible for the 'Disabled Persons Pass' from Metro which provides free transport between 9.30 and 23.00.

Taking this into consideration, if a young disabled person wasn't incapacitated enough to require transport assistance to access Post 16 education, and travelled on public transport, then the maximum capped fare, which is dependent on distance travelled, for that young person would be a maximum of £1.80 per day, or £351 for the 39 term time weeks, the equivalent of £29.25 per month. If the young person was ineligible for a disabled person pass and travelled on a weekly pass for the 39 weeks, then the cost of a weekly M card for 39 weeks would be £351 for the 39 weeks, the equivalent of £29.25 per month.

It should also be noted that those young people who are registered blind would be eligible for a free disabled person pass that would enable free all day travel.

Given the nature of some of those young people who require transport i.e. some have complex health conditions, as well as general illness, it is a given that some children and young people may not attend their post 16 as regular as other students. What will the charging strategy be for those students? Will students be charged on an attendance basis?

What is in place for low income families who are unable to work due to their caring responsibilities for their child or young person and they can't afford the monthly contribution payments?

Local Authorities are expected to target any support on those young people and their families who need it most, particularly those with a low income and ensure that any contribution is affordable for learners and their parents.

The governments statutory guidance to Local Authorities for Post 16 transport and travel support to education and training states that *'To aid transparency, it is good practice for Local Authorities to set out the average cost per young person of post-16 transport in their area before any subsidies are deducted. Clearly setting out average costs will enable learners and parents to understand the extent of the Local Authority subsidy.'*

The governments statutory guidance to Local Authorities for Post 16 transport and travel support to education and training also states that, under the specific consideration of learners with special educational needs and disabilities section, *'Local Authorities should be aware of the adult transport duty in carrying out their responsibilities for this group, and it would be good practice not to charge a contribution for transport for a young person assessed under the sixth form age duty if it likely that they will be eligible for free transport under the adult transport duty.'*

Sustainable Transport

Section 508A of the Education Act places a general duty on Local Authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport. The duty applies to young people of sixth form age who travel to receive education or training in a Local Authority's area. The duty relates to journeys to and from institutions where education or training is received.

The responses inform us that these changes will indeed increase the number of journeys to and from Post 16 provisions, which is not in keeping with Calderdale Council's pledge to tackle the climate emergency in Calderdale.

It also questions whether Post 16 provisions will be able to cope with more parents dropping off and picking up their child or young person.

Engagement Event 2nd December 2021

Family Voice Calderdale also held a Transport drop in event on Thursday 2nd December from 10-2pm at the Orange Box in response to increased calls from Parent Carers on Home to School transport issues including feeling like they were being forced into clearly unworkable home to school transport situations. One such case included a parent with multiple caring responsibilities having to take 8 buses per day for their young person to attend a Post 16 provision.

Parents also spoke in depth about the bureaucratically inefficient system and the impossible availability of Officers to resolve issues as well as overall poor communication. Parents value the service when provided, but some parents felt very badly treated.

Consultation

The governments statutory guidance to Local Authorities for Post 16 transport and travel support to education and training states that *'Local Authority must consult with the following stakeholders in developing the statement to ensure that it provides a full picture of the available transport and support:*

- *Persons who will be of sixth form age at the time of the transport policy and their parents. Local Authorities should set out in their transport policy statements how and when they propose to consult young people and their parents to inform the development of their transport policy statements in the following year.*
- Calderdale Council website also states that *"Schools and colleges will also be asked to let parents and learners know about it."* As far as we are aware, this has not taken place.

The responses to question 3 clearly demonstrate that Calderdale Council have not taken appropriate actions to consult with persons who will be of sixth form age at the time of the transport policy and their parents.

Summary

In summary, the proposed changes to the policy are not equitable and lack flexibility where situations are fluid. Calderdale Council should be able to facilitate a universal free home to school transport offer for those children with disabilities or additional needs, especially at a time of rising living costs as these will disproportionately impact upon those most in need.

Family Voice Calderdale and Unique Ways are viewed in the highest regard by Executives of the Local Authority and seen as a trusted partner, especially in terms of co-production. Indeed, the work of Family Voice Calderdale and Unique Ways was singled out for recognition within the Ofsted CQC Report following the joint SEND inspection of 2019.

Family Voice Calderdale and Unique Ways would welcome further discussion or opportunities to support consultations with families with disabled children across Calderdale on issues surrounding the School Transport Policy and arrangements.



Pete Ruse
Chair, Family Voice Calderdale



Shona Walsh
Chief Executive Officer, Unique Ways



14th January 2022