

How Cornwall Parent Carer Council reversed changes to the Transport Policy

Last year Cornwall council informed parent carers about changes they were proposing to make to travel arrangements for children and young people with SEN. The Parent Carer Council for Cornwall was inundated with calls from families who didn't fully understand the changes as they were communicated using legal jargon. This meant that many families could not take part in the consultation.

Information about the proposed changes came at the end of the school year when children were breaking up which caused anxiety for parents of young people going to college in September. Suggestions that young people over 16 use public transport, were met with concern as parents felt their children would not cope with routes that dropped their children some distance from their colleges/schools. Some young people would be expected to walk for several miles alone or be left waiting for connections in remote places which would put them at risk of harm. Some parents decided that the lack of safe and suitable travel arrangements would mean their children could not take up their educational placement, or that they were too anxious to attend.

The forum met with the Council and pointed out that the wording was unclear and that the timeframes involved meant the consultation was not lawful. They discussed whether these concerns would need to be taken to cabinet / scrutiny committee and met with the councillor with the children's portfolio and held meetings with councillors to outline parents' concerns. Three leads from the Council attended a meeting with 47 forum members and other parents to hear their concerns. Other parents fed in their views via Facebook and email.

As a result, the Council agreed that the wording of the consultation was confusing and worked with parents to discuss options such as travel buddies or volunteers to support young people on their journeys. They agreed that none of these would work in Cornwall, the system of taxis, minibuses and paid Personal Assistant (PA) support to enable children and young people to attend schools and colleges at some distance from their homes was kept.

Being a large rural county, Cornwall Council has recruited 400 PAs to support young people with SEND this year. The forum is working with the Council on finalising the new Transport policy including training for PAs taxi service operators. They are working to ensure that EHC plans stipulate what support young people need while travelling, and what training is required to support each individual child effectively.

Kay Henry, Director of the Parent Carer Council for Cornwall, said *"The LA found it useful to hear about the practicalities of what was being suggested and the impact this would have on families. Transport is always going to be a tricky issue but the forum and LA are now working together on finding new solutions that will help more young people with SEN benefit from going to college."*