

Consultation with ESPaCC

East Sussex Parent and Carers' Council (ESPaCC) is a group which represents carers and families of children or young people aged 0-25 with any additional need, in order to influence services affecting and relevant to the children and young people.

Children's Services contacted ESPACC as soon as the decision was taken to run the consultation. There has been a two way conversation which resulted in additional issues being added to the Frequently Asked Questions document which was published with the consultation paperwork, and the wording for the post-16 SEND transport policy being altered regarding the use of Motability vehicles.

ESPaCC promoted involvement in the consultation via their website from June to September.

Feedback from Parents' Event

ESPaCC organised a parents' event at which an Assistant Director and the Project Manager gave a presentation, answered questions and noted concerns. The event was attended by 9 parents, and 5 ESPaCC representatives (3 of whom were also parents of children or young people with SEND).

The group asked that Lead Member specifically consider the following issue common to many families with a child with SEND:

Parents and carers of a child or young person with SEND often have numerous additional costs for equipment, necessary trips and therapy, etc, which are not covered by the provision of Disability Living or Carer's Allowance. Usually one parent is unable to work due to the additional commitments. Often families are not 'low income' but have very little disposable income after essentials.

Other concerns or suggestions which were noted at the meeting with ESCC responses are detailed below.

Concern or suggestion	Response
1. The Council may impose similar reductions in support for statutory (school-aged) children as a result of continuing and further cuts to budgets.	The group were reassured that this was not the case; ESCC are obliged to provide free transport as appropriate for eligible statutory aged children.

Concern or suggestion	Response
2. The expectation that a family will use a Motability vehicle if they have one for their child is unfair.	The group were informed that the wording in the draft policy has been altered to remove this specific expectation.
3. It will be very difficult for the Council to assess whether a parent is available to help with transporting a young person to post-16 provision, as there are so many reasons why this may be the case (not just employment), and the parent or carer may give a false answer.	This was acknowledged to be true, and the reasons understood. All the Council can do is explain why the most deserving families are being prioritised for support and rely on given answers (although professionals working with the family may also be asked for a summary of the family circumstances if closely involved).
4. One parent wanted the Council to provide an annual statement for each family giving the costs of their placement and transport.	This would require admin time is unlikely to be of value to every family. However, it was agreed that it was worth exploring as a new IT management system is launched later this year, and it may be that cost information could in future be included in EHCPs and available as part of annual reviews.
5. Improved provision of suitable SEN placements closer to home would improve the transport situation	ESCC has conducted a Capacity Review with all special schools in East Sussex, and are now analysing the findings to establish where it would be possible to increase placement numbers to meet demand. Longer term initiatives in this area include the new College Liaison Officer's work with colleges in association with Adult Social Care to explore the extent of the college offer to YP with SEND. In addition the LA is considering the potential of Free Schools, particularly focussing on provision for YP with autism, to respond to need in specific areas.
6. Suggestion that the Council own their own taxi company to save on costs, as the prices seemed very high.	The CET Transport Team has investigated this as part of the transport hub implementation and contracted transport is by far the most cost effective. It is not the price we pay for transport which is the issue but instead the demand for specialist arrangements, managing parental expectations, the mileage travelled, etc. If the Council managed our own transport, it would need to increase the team to manage drivers, assistants and the fleet and procure vehicles at a time when budgets are reducing. In the case of school transport, the vehicles would only be used for 2 – 3 hrs a day (and unused for the remaining time) and few staff would be willing to accept these hours.