



Home to School Transport Survey

November 2023

Why did we do a follow up
survey on home to
school transport?

At Family Voice our core purpose is ensuring the lived experience of families, children & young people with additional needs is known to those making decisions which impact their daily lives.

In our Family Voice groups, sessions and social media presence we gather stories & experiences from families. Hearing lived experience is invaluable but, as Surrey's Parent Carer forum we aim to do three things:

1. Evidence the nature and scale of the any given issue.
2. Evidence the impact of the issues on families.
3. Make key recommendations for change to improve the lives of families.

Last summer (August 2022) we received an unprecedented amount of calls and emails from parent carers experiencing challenges with their child or young persons home to school transport. A lot of the calls were in relation to the new policy and how that was being applied.

We decided to run our quantitative data survey on this to get a deeper understanding of the issues and the scale. Following the survey we analysed the data and made 12 recommendations.

We presented the findings to the Select Committee who endorsed our recommendations and requested that we re run the survey the following year to assess progress.

Our survey this year comprised of 18 questions and was open from October to November 2023. **We received 289 responses.**

The following report is based on your input and feedback you have given us

We would like to thank all the families who completed the survey.

Background Information:

Survey Monkey link shared with parent carers

Page 70

Last year's survey had
290 Responses and
was open from
October 2022 -
November 2022

This year's survey had
289 Responses and
was open from
October 2023 -
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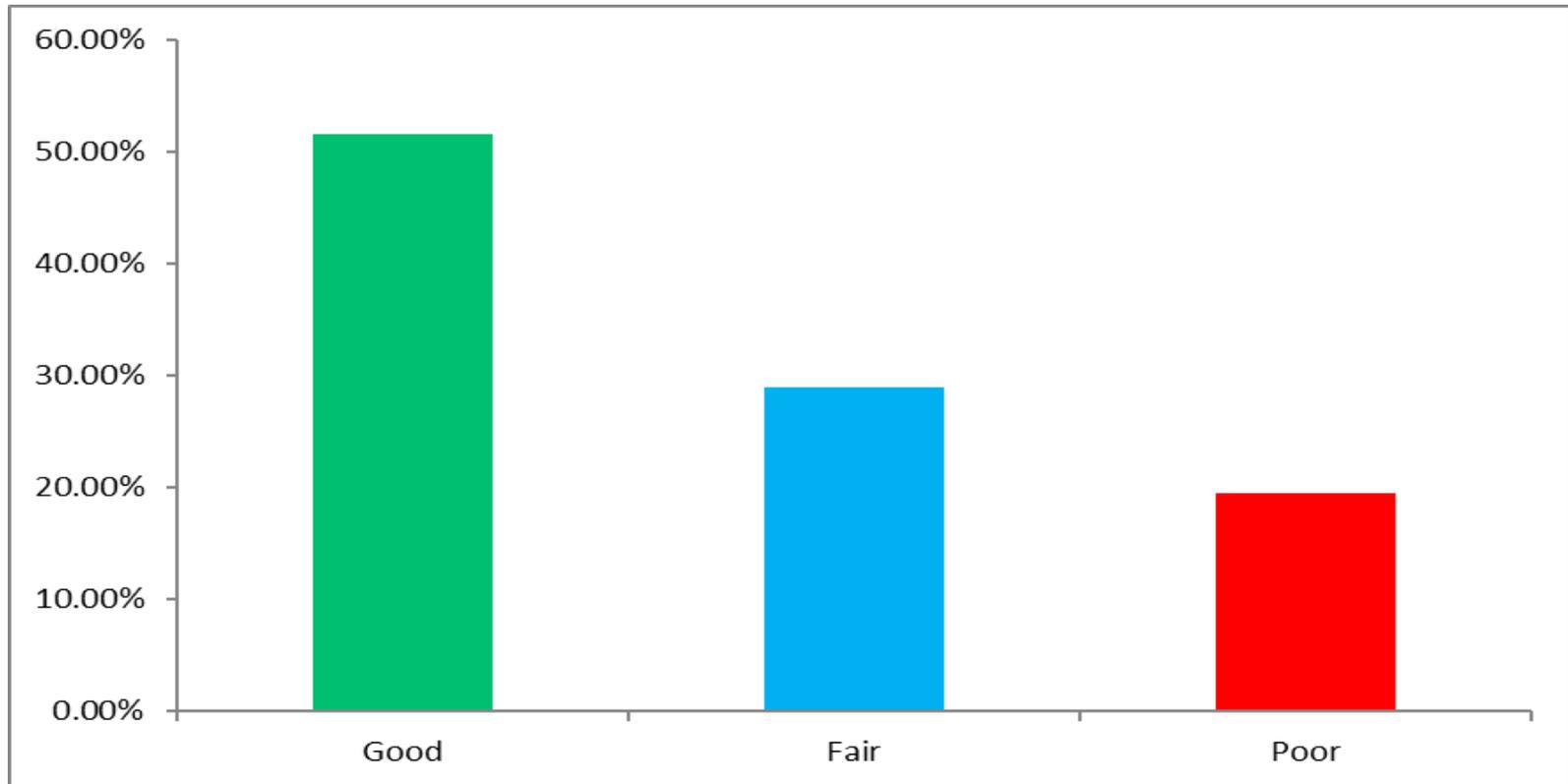
Last Year our Summary of findings looked like this...

- Of the **290** responses **71.72%** had experienced challenges with home to school transport this term.
- **25.23%** responded saying that although transport had been agreed, the arrangements had not been put in place for the start of term.
- Adverse impacts on the mental health, anxiety and wellbeing of **86.82%** of families affected by these transport issues
- **39.55%** reported financial difficulties due to the transport issues.
- There were huge variations reported around late applications with multiple responders stating they had received a letter with a May deadline not March.
- **19.54%** of children and young people were unable to attend school/college on the first day of term and of those **37.21%** were still unable to attend at the time of completing the survey.

This year our Summary of findings showed...

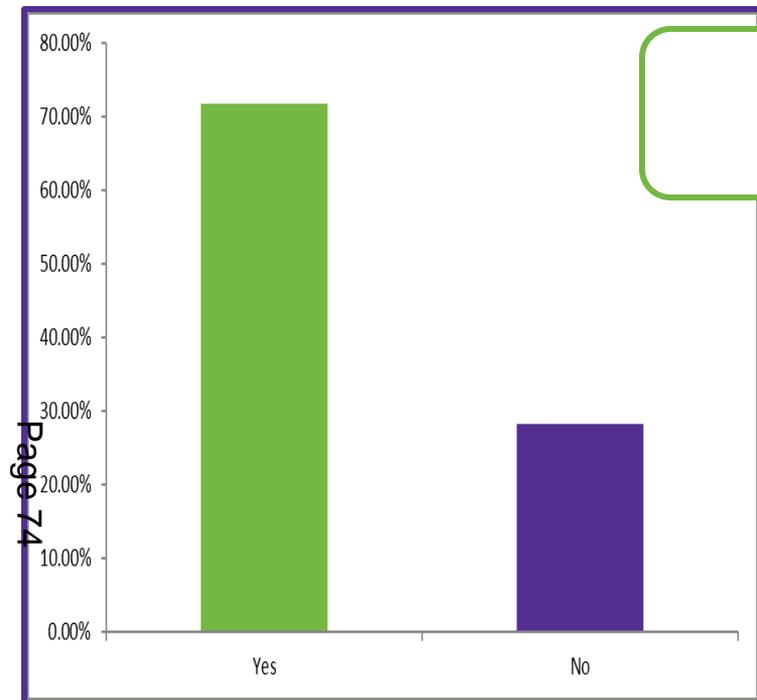
- Of the **289** responses **51.57%** had rated their overall experience with Home to School Transport as good.
- **48.78%** had experienced challenges with home to school transport this term.
- **24.83%** responded saying that although transport had been agreed, the arrangements had not been put in place for the start of term.
- Adverse impacts on the mental health, anxiety and wellbeing of **40.91%** of families affected by these transport issues
- **34.27%** reported financial difficulties and loss of earnings due to the transport issues.

How would you rate your overall experience with home to school transport this year?

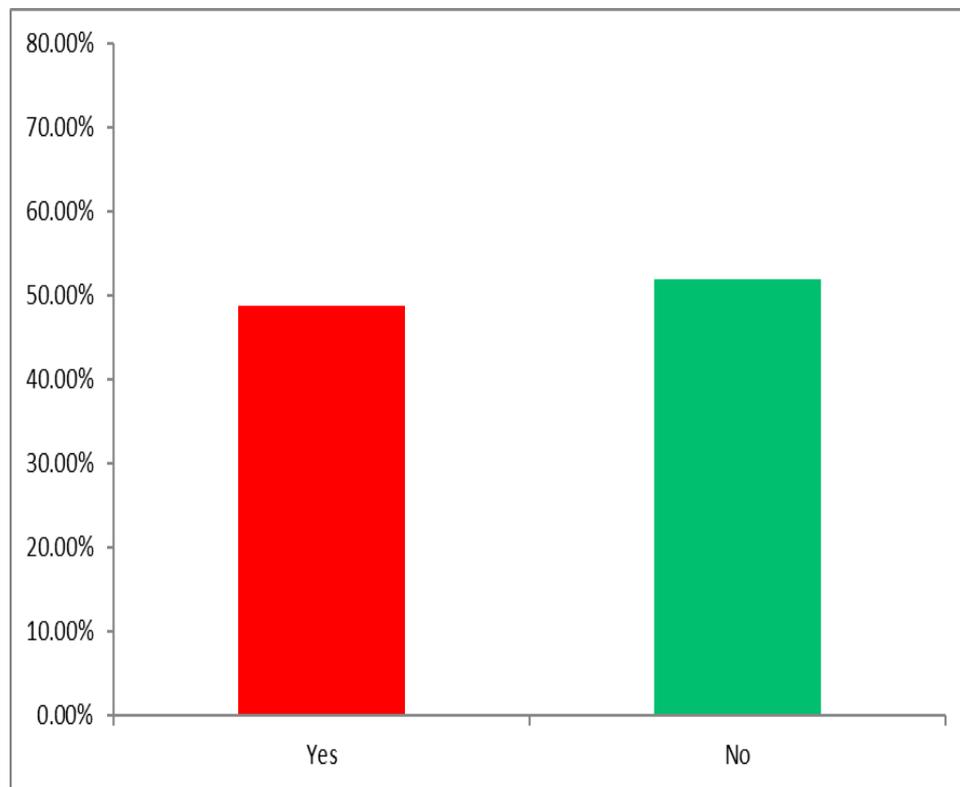


Have you had any difficulties with your Child/young person's home to school travel arrangements?

Last Year
November 2022



This Year
November 2023



What were the challenges?

Page 75

COMMUNICATION OF
TRANSPORT
ARRANGEMENTS

REQUEST FOR HOME TO
SCHOOL TRANSPORT
REFUSED

TAXI TURNING UP LATE
OR NOT AT ALL

MULTIPLE CHANGES TO
DRIVERS WITH NO
NOTICE

JOURNEY TIMES
EXCEEDED DUE TO
MULTIPLE DROP OFFS
AND PICK UPS

REPORTS OF CHILDREN
DISPLAYING DISTRESSED
BEHAVIOUR WHICH WAS
IMPACTING THE OTHER
CHILDREN & DRIVER

UNABLE TO CONTACT
THE TRANSPORT TEAM

LACK OF
UNDERSTANDING OF
CHILD'S NEEDS

TRAVEL ALLOWANCE
PAYMENTS DELAYED

DELAYS DUE TO SEND
TEAM COMMUNICATION

CONCERNS OVER THE
CONDUCT OF THE
DRIVERS

Application Process...

Respondents reported inconsistent experiences with the application process and highlighted the need for clearer guidance of the overall process.

I applied for mileage funding online and the application was very straightforward and clear, I was approached by one of the taxi survey team whilst collecting my son from school and they told me I could apply to Surrey CC for personal allowance.

The online application form saved time but it was a little convoluted/not clear in some areas which may affect the success of some applications.

Smoother application process, but communication from Transport team still poor

No one has ever explained or sent what should happen to us. Because of tribunal we applied as soon as we heard the results. But beyond applying via a website, no one has supplied any information about how long it lasts, reapplication or how long it lasts for. I had naively assumed that it would last until he left the school but I can see from the questions in this survey that it doesn't. Supplying parents this information should be automatic! I will now go and try and find documentation of what the process should be once you have it in place, so I don't miss a deadline I didn't know existed.

Journey Times...

Respondents reported journey times exceeding the guidelines. This was largely due to multiple children on the route which increased the journey time.

Page 77

My son is constantly late for school because his taxi takes 4 children. I have reported this Surrey CC has done nothing but ignore my concerns

Route has my son collected 75mins before school - he is 4 and the school is only 20 mins away.

The 60-90min twice a day my child spends in a taxi has a HUGE impact on not only his ability to learn, but his overall emotional state, his mood, how he relates to others, how he walks through the door at home has a massive impact on how the evening as a family we have it's a massive knock on effect that is not given any consideration.

Changes to Driver...

Respondents reported frequent changes to the driver and/or PA, how this was communicated and the impact it had on the child or young person.

The taxi company are quite difficult to deal with. Drivers were changing a lot and so was the personal assistant. I was not being informed of these changes and this was increasing my child's level of anxiety. My child has ASD and one of the important features is the stability and sameness of routine. Changing drivers without warning parents prior so that the child can be prepped in advance.

Negative impact on child. Our son's anxiety and behavior was and is adversely and negatively affected by the lack of consistent driver, firm and passenger assistance.

The taxi driver and/or company changed at short notice. 5 different drivers and 3 different taxi firms since September start!

Lots of driver & escort changes on the bus. My child sat next to a child constantly grabbing her and causing her great difficulty & anxiety getting on & off the bus.

Safeguarding & Safety...

Respondents reported various concerns regarding safeguarding and safety incidents and how these complaints were dealt with.

The complaints or reporting issues process is also ridiculous. I have had no contact from anyone in the 3 weeks since making a very serious report of a dangerous child in my sons taxi. Rest assured if ANYTHING happens to my son I will be seeking legal action against SCC

Both years you have left my child with only part transport. At the last minute!!!! You have also unbeknown to me at the time left my child unattended 1 hour too early at school.

Reports of driver being aggressive and shouty, incidents of road rage

Poor driving skills considering passengers. indicates last minute. swerves in and out of lanes. two kids in back weren't wearing seatbelts

Surrey didn't provide our transport company with any information regarding our daughter's needs. We did so for the sake of safety as she is epileptic!

I didn't receive any comms from Surrey about what I thought was a random cab company calling me out of the blue telling me that they couldn't make the times I had applied for and that they had no info about my child's car seat needs etc. I wish someone had told me that the driver was from a company that was specifically set up to transport children to and from this school. It would have saved a lot of stress. I even went as far as looking at buttonhole cameras to ensure the safety of my vulnerable child in a perceived random taxi. More info on company, vetting etc from Surrey well in advance of September would have put my mind at rest. In fact, any info from Surrey would have been useful.

My son is attacked, hit, slapped and screamed at on a daily basis by another child in the taxi, reports have been filed a month ago by ourselves and the taxi company as the child also grabs the steering wheel, gearstick and opens doors, nothing has been done ! Neither of us have had any communication from SCC let alone resolved this very serious issue. I have emailed and called SCC many times to be told this issue has been "escalated" someone will call me back and one lady actually parent shamed me and said "but you still sent your son to school didn't you"

Surrey failed to provide car seat on time. If I didn't chase it I don't think my 4 year old would have one for the 75mins journey (school is 20mins away).

Independent Travel Allowance...

Respondents reported financial hardship when they accepted an ITA.

Over 100 other local authorities reimburse a higher mileage rate than the HMRC recommended 45ppm. Newcastle rates for SEN children's travel is £0.70ppm.

This difference may encourage more parents to consider an ITA arrangement in the future and reduce the need for taxi transportation where the LAs costs associated are increasingly higher and taxi services are more scarcely available. Many parents who WFH can earn an average of 2-3X the ITA amount by working those hours instead of driving children who would otherwise qualify for transport via taxi. It is something I have considered myself recently.

I believe the system could be greatly improved for parents taking their own children to school. Given the rising cost of fuel and cost of living, an increase in the amount issue would be a great benefit to struggling families. The increase to paying 4 journeys instead of 2 only increased my payment by £4 a month. The does not cover the fuel and vehicle costs. I can see why so many people opt for a taxi instead which in turn costs the council even more.

The allowance offered in replacement of transport does not go anywhere near towards the actual cost of taxi which leaves no alternative but parents transporting the student, which takes 4 hours out of every day, 4 hours of work time, which leads to severe hardship when both parents are self employed. Living in a rural area where there is no accessible public transport we also have no alternative than to rely on a car, whether it be driven by taxi or parent.

The change in payments - 10 months to 11 months is good.

Alternative Provision...

Respondents reported that children who were accessing alternative provision or EOTAS were unable to get transport and as a result were missing receiving any education as they are unable to get to the placement.

Some children within A2E have not had education this academic year due to taxis not been in place. I have seen first hand the impact this is having on the children and their families.

SEND Team Communication Alignment...

Throughout the survey and through our conversations with the transport team the challenges within the SEND team have a huge adverse effect on transport and there is a need for better communication between the teams and a more joined up approach.

SEN need to communicate with transport in depth so that they're aware of what schools exist.

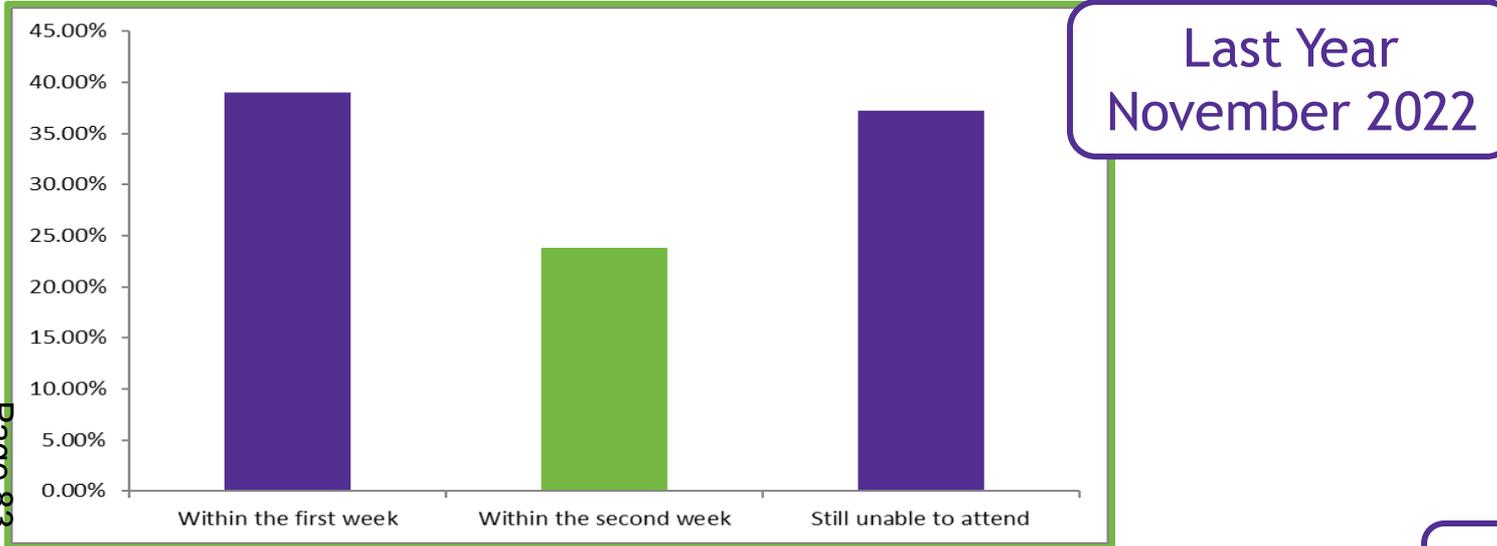
Surrey cc have a complete lack of joined up thinking.

SEN Team issues/failings caused late application which is unfair on the transport team.

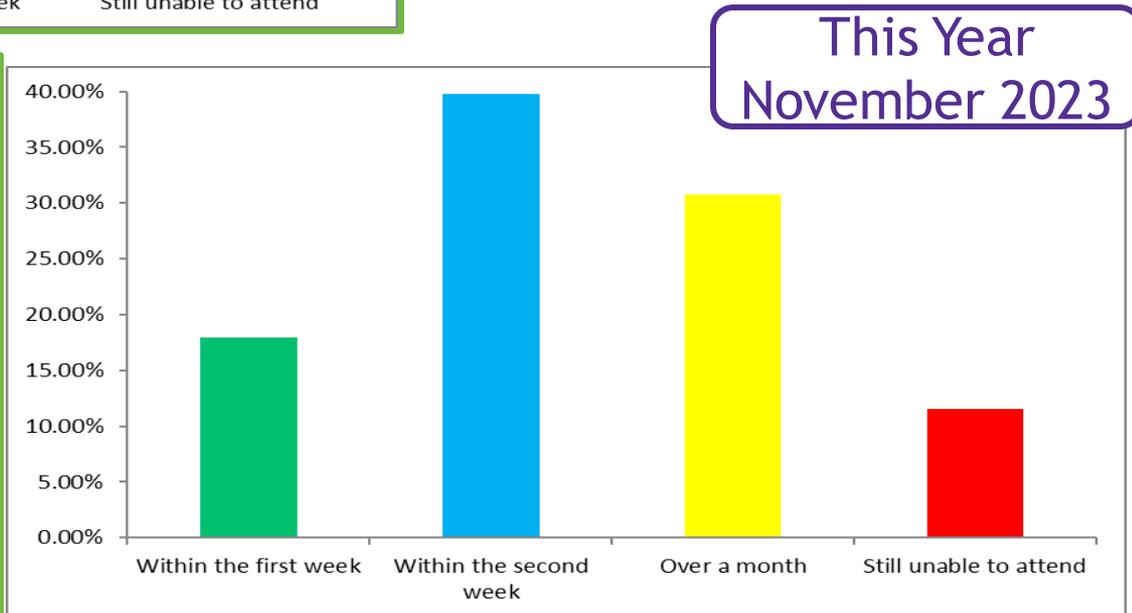
This service was the only thing from Surrey CC that was on time. Actually before the expected timeframe. Impressed with the work done, well done transport team. Extremely efficient after dealing with EHCP procedures for more then. 1 year.

How quickly were the challenges encountered resolved to enable your child to get to their education setting?

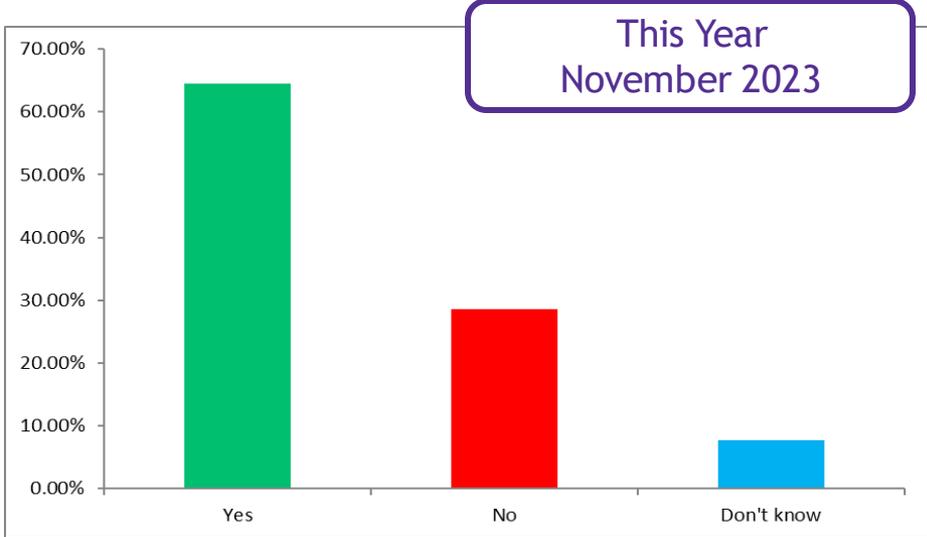
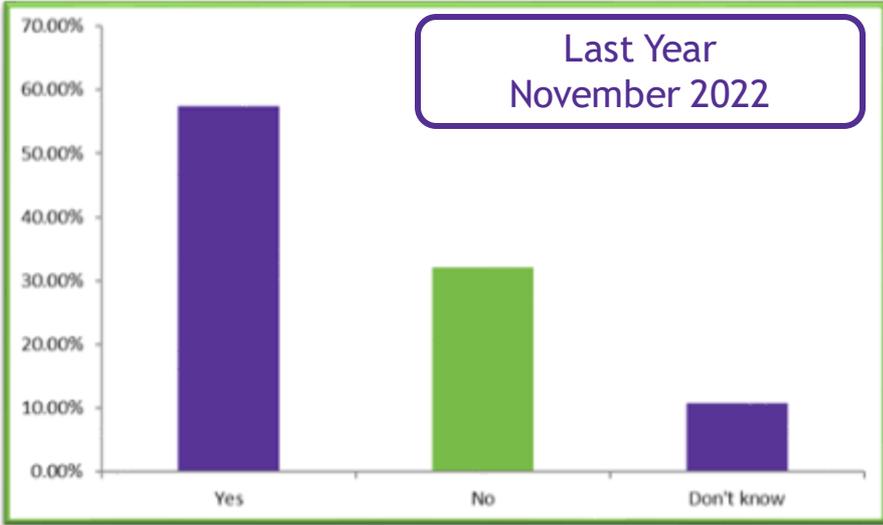
Page 83



It is important to note that the survey did not identify whether the respondents for this question were for post 16 or when they submitted their application. The final column 'still unable to attend' is likely to include both post 16 CYP and those whose applications went in during August.

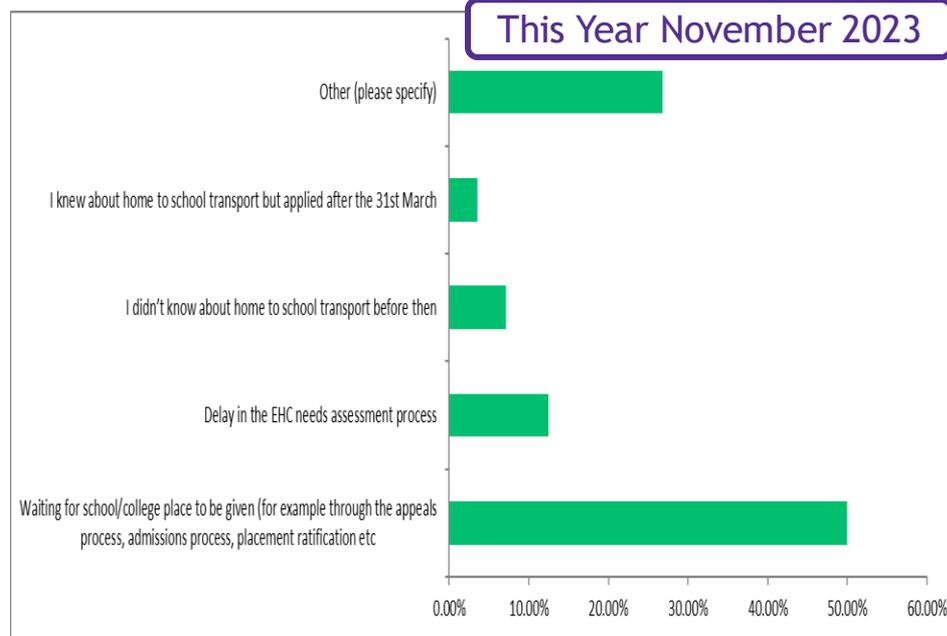
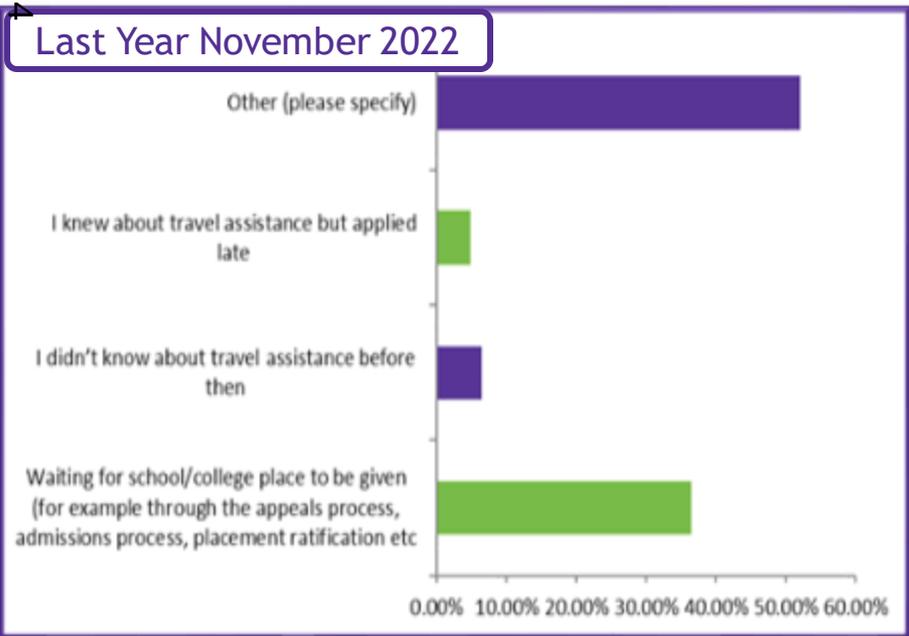


Did you get your application in before 31st March 2022?



Page 84

If your application went in after 31st March 2022 what was the reason?



Appeals

Last year we heard from a number of families that they were being told to appeal if they couldn't accept an ITA.

Following our recommendation this is no longer being reported.

This year **82.39%** of respondent's said that they didn't need to appeal.

Those that did the majority indicated that their appeal was successful.

IMPACT

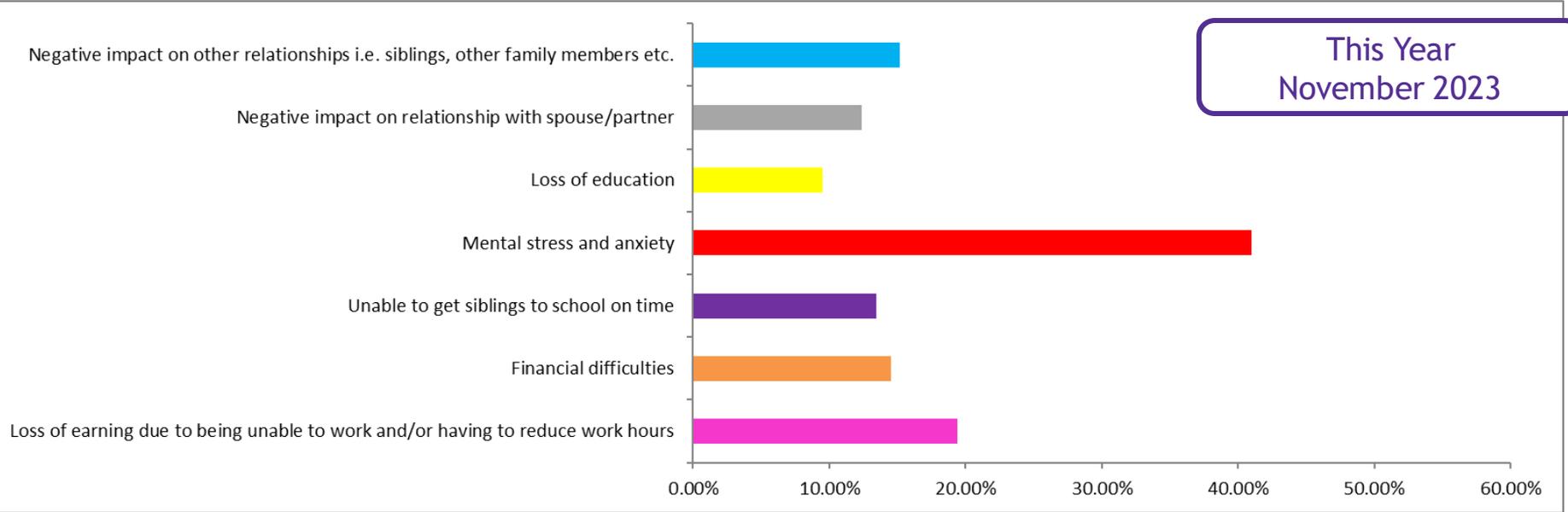
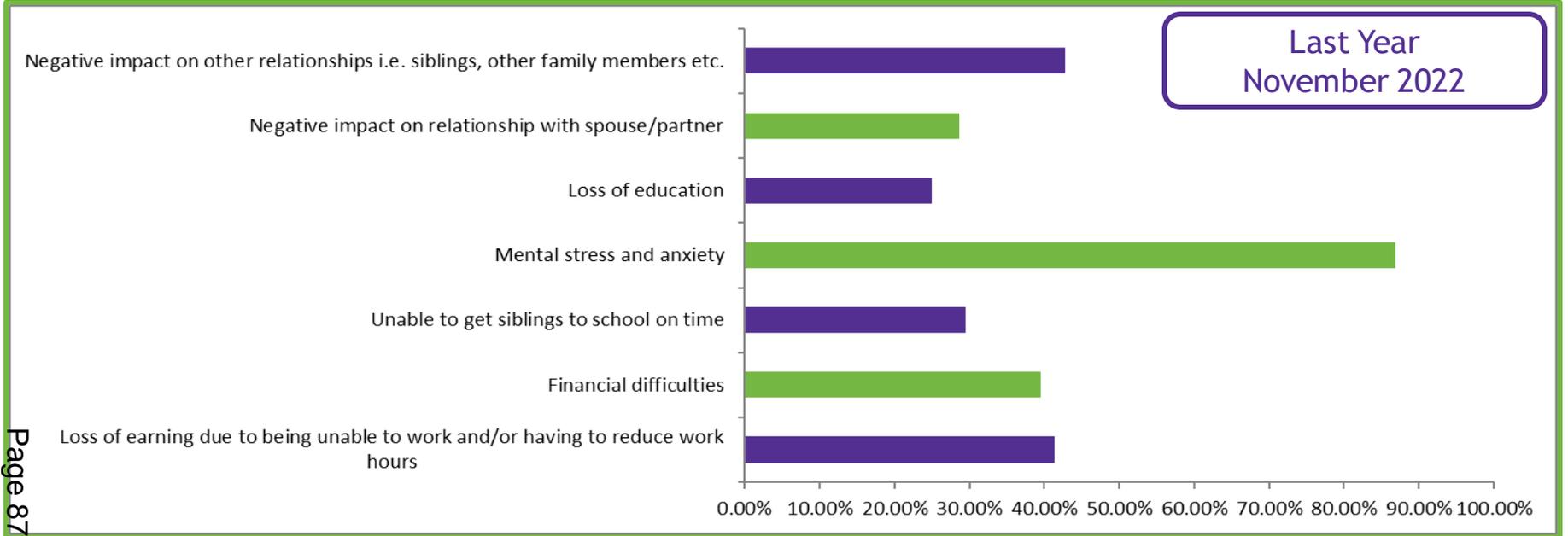
One of the key areas the survey highlighted was the impact that these transport issues had, on not only the child or young person but, their parent carers and the family as a whole.

This has had a huge impact on families:

- **Finances**
- **Mental health**
- **Relationships**
- **Loss of education**
- **Unable to work**

This is almost identical to last years findings.

What impact have these travel assistance challenges had on your family?



Very distressing for my autistic daughter who really thrives when she knows what is planned and really struggles when everything is unpredictable.

Big issues with my full time job and spending a lot of time on the school run when I should have been at the office. I had to work evenings to make up the time

Child started to self harm due to more anxiety caused.

Communication of Arrangements

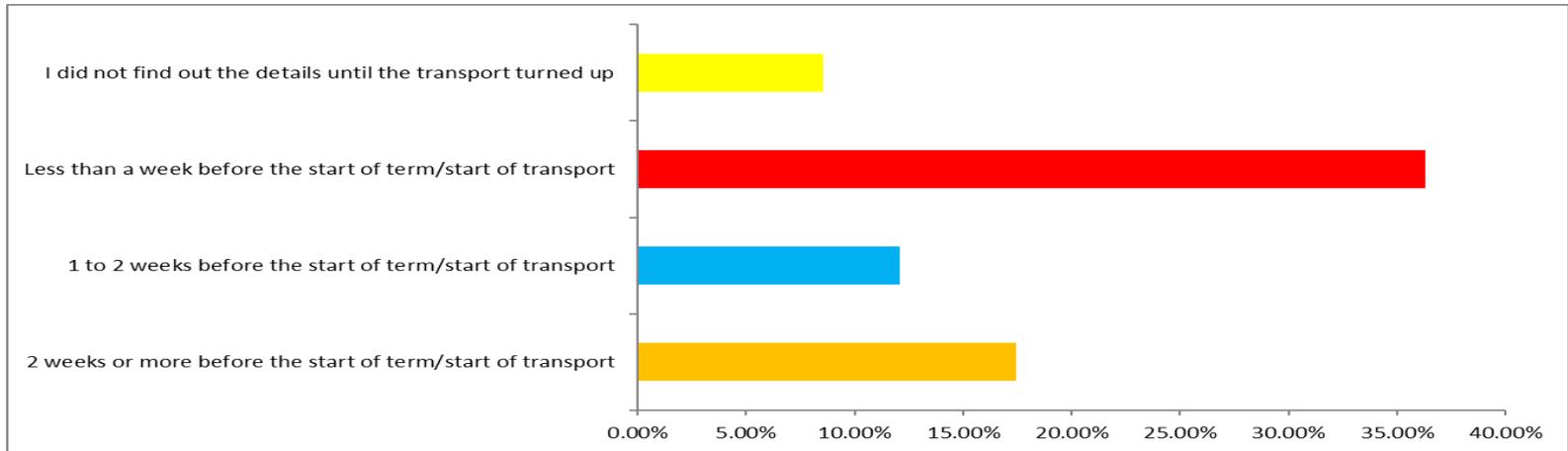
One of the key areas identified was the inconsistency and late communication of the specific transport arrangements for the start of term.

This was also reflective of the amount of contact we were receiving from families during August.

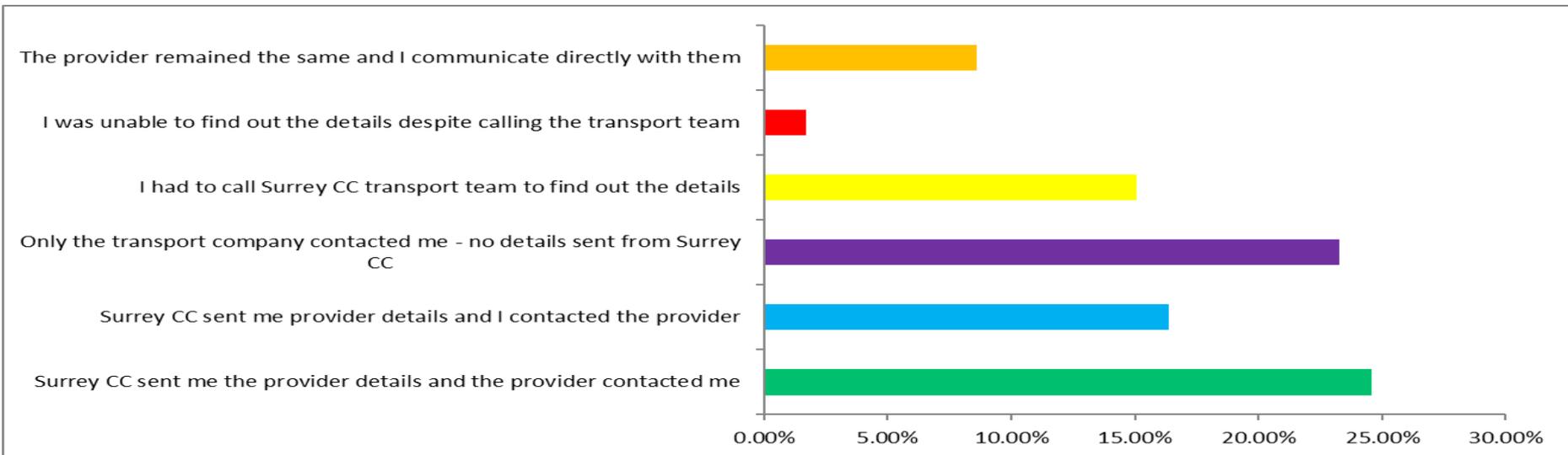
Many families still didn't know how their child was getting to school at the start of term, this caused huge anxiety and stress.

It is vital that parents are made aware of the arrangements in good time so that they are able to arrange a meet and greet with the driver and fully prepare their child or young person.

If your child/young person has contract home to school transport i.e. a taxi/minibus - when did you receive details of the arrangements such as transport provider, driver name, vehicle registration etc.



How did you find out the details for the arrangements of your child/young persons home to school transport?



Communication...

When you email the transport team it can take a month for them to reply if they even bother, trying to claim travel allowance back is very difficult

First time around process was very stressful as had to appeal, second time more routine and this year SCC contacted us to say transport (taxi) was automatically agreed & no need to reapply. This was a massive relief and a very pleasant surprise.

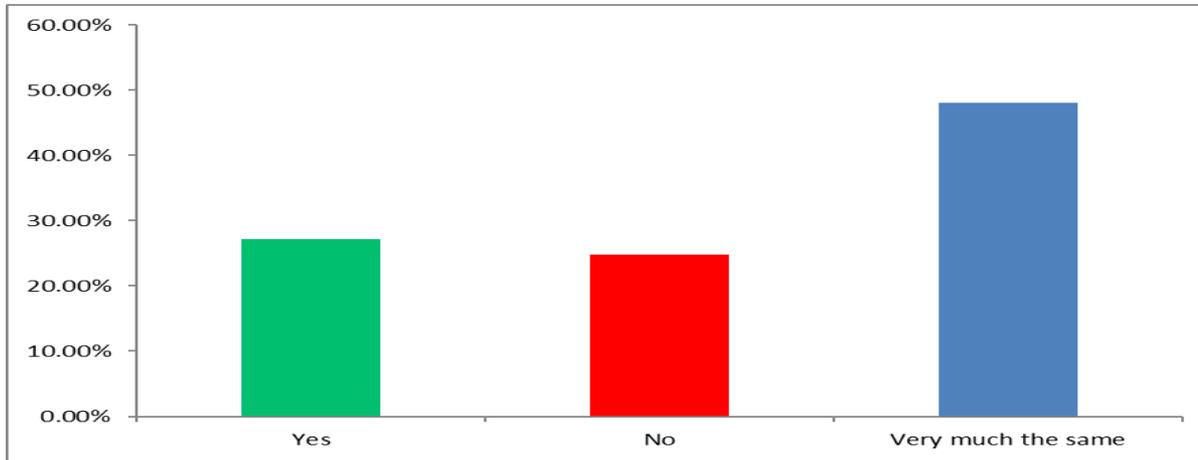
It was stressful waiting to hear about transport arrangements in September as I had to chase and only found out the details a few days before the start of term.

The travel team never replied our email. The telephone hotline was picked up by a call centre who could only read out information on the system, but had no idea about why things were delayed, which stage the process was at, etc. The staff at the call centre tried to be helpful but they couldn't except for making apologies. This is a very mean arrangement and it puts parents and the child in an uninformed and very helpless situation.

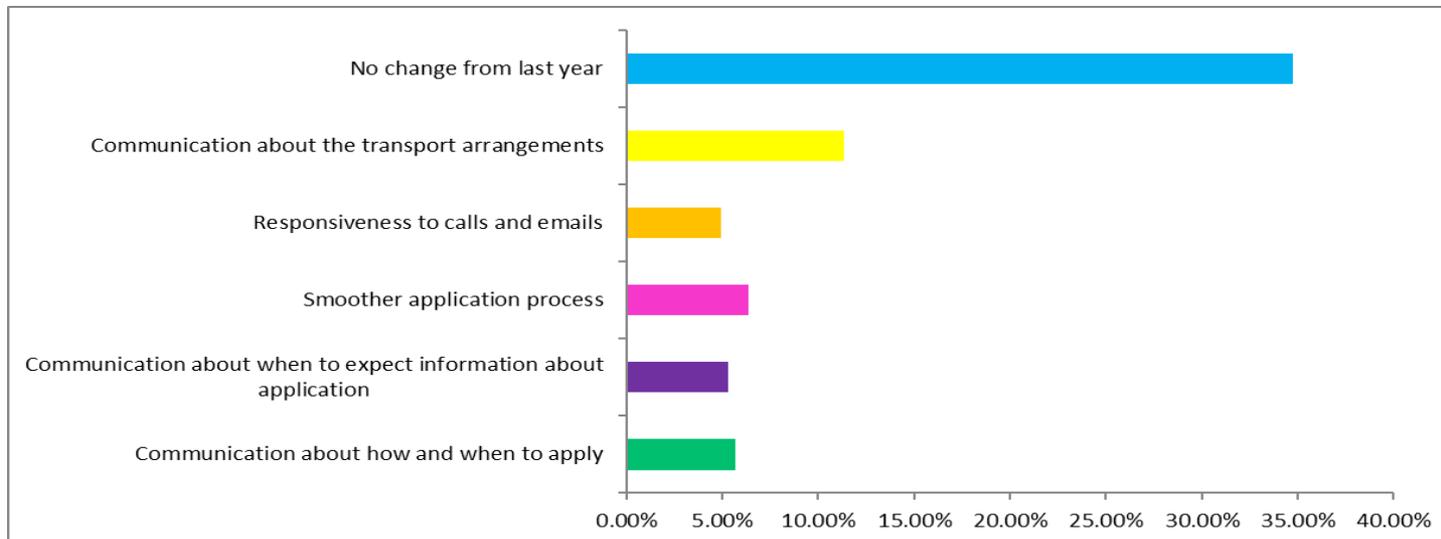
Took 2 escalations and once I was called by the resolution officer, she was fantastic & the taxi was in place within a week. My Son only lost 8 days.

More communication needed we had 1 day notice... Taxi companies barely found out before. The whole process should start much earlier.

Has your experience of home to school transport been better this year in comparison with last year



What would you say has improved most since last year?



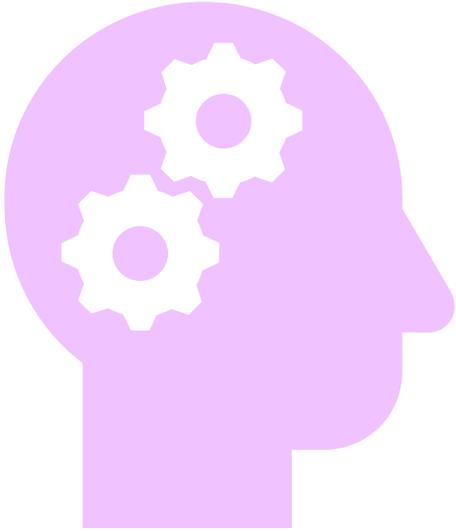
What good looks like...

The team have been responsive to my emails. The application and appeals process are easy and straight forward. I am very happy with the service.

Not having to fight the transport department this year for transport has really meant a lot especially for our mental health.

The whole process was great. I had liked the info a bit sooner than I did but I had all the contacts info I needed and was very happy with that. My son loves the transport and I'm so glad that he was offered it as he enjoys going to school now

One of the key areas that we have seen a huge improvement in since last year was the commitment from the transport team to meet with us on a weekly basis over August, to update on progress, inform us of challenges and to look into specific cases or areas that we have been hearing about from families. This is a massive change to previous years and although the end of August through to early September was particularly challenging it was extremely helpful to be able to have this regular time to raise these issues and ensure the parent carer experience was being heard.



Review of the Recommendations made in 2022

**Recommendation 1:
November 2022**

To have clarity on the policy on Independent Travel Allowance (ITA) and assurance that the process is in line with statutory guidance - specifically:
- That unless a parent agrees to transport their child, the LA has to provide appropriate transport.
- Assurance that a parent who cannot accept an ITA in lieu of transport will not be asked to appeal the decision.

UPDATE: November 2023

We are pleased to report that this has now been actioned and we have not heard from any families in this situation.

COMPLETE

**Recommendation 2:
November 2022**

For ALL families who accept an ITA to be paid for the 4 trips they make a day to transport their child or young person (CYP) to their setting NOT just when the CYP is in the vehicle. This ensures that they are not at a financial disadvantage to those who are transported in a LA funded vehicle.

Families who have been in receipt of an ITA since September have their allowance recalculated to reflect 4 journeys a day instead of 2 and are reimbursed the deficit based on the current calculation.

UPDATE: November 2023

We are delighted that this has been actioned - families have been reimbursed and the 4 journeys is now reflected in all communication that goes out to families.

COMPLETE

**Recommendation 3:
November 2022**

To have clarity on the new arrangements for post 16 transport and an understanding of how extenuating circumstances are taken into consideration.

UPDATE: November 2023

Family Voice Surrey have been working on a parent guide with the home to school transport team and a separate post 16 parent guide which outlines this. The post 16 guide is not yet finalised and the under 16 guide is currently being amended to reflect how this summer period went.

ONGOING

**Recommendation 4:
November 2022**

To have preparation for adulthood in mind for all young people and ensure families are aware of the independent travel training offer and can consider this for their young person where appropriate. To look at existing public transport routes and commission more routes to enable young people to travel independently if they are able to.

UPDATE: November 2023

We feel this is an area that still needs development. We are delighted that the LA is keen to raise more awareness of travel training but capacity issues of the current provider mean it is not always an option. We will be adding this to our new recommendations.

ONGOING

**Recommendation 5:
November 2022**

To have clear guidance on how you intend to adhere to the recommended statutory timescales (max journey of 45 mins for primary and max 75 mins for secondary) whenever possible, and assurance that these times won't be exceeded by adding too many children to a route.

UPDATE: November 2023

We have heard from families through the survey that routes are still exceeding recommended journey times due to the amount of children on the routes. Therefore, this is an area that still needs work to find ways to ensure the recommended journey times are not exceeded. This also needs to link to the work within SEND as placement decisions need to factor in journey times and transport. This will be added to our new recommendations

ONGOING

**Recommendation 6:
November 2022**

To have clear guidance for parent carers on when they should be applying for transport with clear timescales and key dates.

UPDATE: November 2023

This has improved - there is now clearer and more consistent communication to families including the key stage transfer letters. The parent guide outlines key dates in the process. The survey has revealed that there is still work to do in this area but we are pleased with the progress so far.

ONGOING

**Recommendation 7:
November 2022**

To ensure parent carers are not penalised by not being given transport for the first term because they apply past the deadline through no fault of their own - when they don't have a named school or a finalised plan.

UPDATE: November 2023
We are pleased to report that on the whole this has been actioned. The impact of the delays in communication from the SEND team and the EHC needs assessment delays do have a significant impact on how the transport team are able to process applications, but the transport team have had a real shift away from the term late application

COMPLETE

**Recommendation 8:
November 2022**

Page 97

To have a clear and robust roadmap of how the current application/assessment and delivery processes are going to be significantly changed to ensure that families are not: - Left without transport at the start of term - That families are given a fair and timely decision - That families know the arrangements well ahead of the start of term so that they can prepare their child or young person.

UPDATE: November 2023
Unfortunately this didn't happen in all cases and we had a significant amount of families who didn't have the details of their child's transport by the last week of the summer holidays and in some cases not by the start of the term. This caused great distress to families and should be a priority focus to prevent it happening next year. This will form one of our new recommendations.

ONGOING

**Recommendation 9:
November 2022**

To develop a robust process where SEND, Admissions and transport work together and communicate effectively to ensure the experience for the family is joined up and seamless journey.

UPDATE: November 2023
This is still a huge challenge and there is huge inconsistency in communication between SEND, SEND admissions and transport. This coupled with the current delays in the EHC needs assessment makes it very challenging for the transport team to plan effectively which impacts on parent carers experiences. This also impacts on journey times and more consideration from a SEND perspective needs to feed into this. This will form part of our new recommendations

ONGOING

**Recommendation 10:
November 2022**

The transport team will ensure any changes in policy or practice are done in collaboration with Family Voice Surrey, the third sector and other key partners prior to implementation.

UPDATE: November 2023

Family Voice Surrey have been working closely with the H2ST team, particularly on the parent guide. We welcomed regular meetings in the summer to get updates and resolve cases. We are pleased to say there is a really good collaborative feel to our work together.

COMPLETE

**Recommendation 11:
November 2022**

That all outstanding travel allowance payments are issued to parent carers, and all cases that are still waiting for travel assistance are resolved by the end of 2022.

UPDATE: November 2023

We are delighted to say that overall this has happened.

COMPLETE

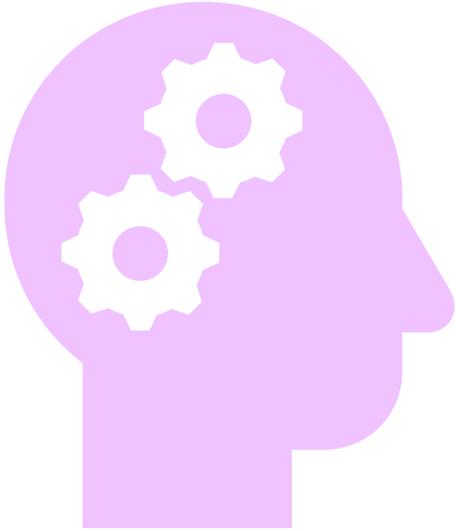
**Recommendation 12:
November 2022**

The payment schedule for ITA is changed to September - June rather than October - July to ensure families who accept an ITA are not financially disadvantaged throughout September and October whilst waiting for the first payment to come through.

UPDATE: November 2023

We are delighted that following the last Select Committee meeting this was re looked at and as a result there are now payments over 11 months instead of 10 which is a really welcome change.

COMPLETE



Recommendations: November 2023

Recommendation 1: Timely Communication

(This includes previous recommendation 8)

To have a clear and robust roadmap of how the current application/assessment and delivery processes are going to be significantly changed to ensure that families are not:

- Left without transport at the start of term
- That families are given a fair and timely decision
- That families have regular communication and updates throughout the process at different stages of the year.
- That families are given clear and consistent information about the specific transport arrangements **at least 7 days before the start of term** so that they can prepare their child or young person.

To have a robust communication process which should include a central one point of contact email address and telephone number that parents can contact the transport team on. There should be clear timescales of when parents will receive a response. (e.g. 48 hours for a call back and 5 working days for an email) This information should be on the automated email response, displayed on the website and be on all communication sent out to parents. There should also be a clear escalation route included in this information should a response not be received within the specified timescales. There should also be a separate safeguarding contact method that can be used in situations where an urgent response is required. (More details on this are in recommendation 3)

Recommendation 2: Safeguarding & Safety

To have a clear and transparent information available to families about the training and safeguarding checks drivers receive prior to driving children. This should also detail refresher training and checks

A clear and transparent process of how to report concerns about drivers or PA's or incidents with other children and the process that follows this. This should include clear timescales and how to escalate if this is not followed.

Clear steps and guidance on measures to keep children safe to include;

- Car seats
- Drivers use of mobile phones
- Seatbelts
- Information about a child passed to the driver

To implement a safeguarding contact line that parent carers and schools can report urgent safeguarding concerns about transport (driver or other occupants) These concerns should be responded to within 24 hours and dealt within 5 working days depending on the level of risk. Guidance should be put together to demonstrate how parents and carers and schools will be kept up to date and the process they will follow.

Recommendation 3: Collaboration and C ommunication

(Previous recommendation 9)
To develop a robust process where SEND, Admissions and transport work together and communicate effectively to ensure the experience for the family is joined up and seamless journey. This should include journey times being factored in to placement decisions and communicated with the transport team at the earliest opportunity

Recommendation 4: Journey Times

Page 102

(Previous recommendation 5)
To have clear guidance on how you intend to adhere to the recommended statutory timescales (max journey of 45 mins for primary and max 75 mins for secondary) whenever possible, and assurance that these times won't be exceeded by adding too many children to a route.

This should include journey times being factored into placement decisions and communicated with the transport team at the earliest opportunity.

Recommendation 5: Consistency

Information should be readily available to families about what to do in the instance that the child's driver changes suddenly or frequently.

This should include:

- what should happen if there are changes
- How should changes be communicated to families (by who and within what timescales)
- What to do if there are frequent changes
- How to escalate concerns or request a change

**Recommendation 6:
Alternative
Provision and EOTAS**

Initiate a working party to ensure that children accessing alternative provision or EOTAS have transport in place this will ensure children who are receiving this type of provision are able to attend their education setting and receive the education they are entitled to without unnecessary delays. (Explore ITA's, SEND team budget, who is responsible)

**Recommendation 7:
Independent Travel
Allowance**

Complete a benchmarking exercise to look at other LA's and how much they reimburse families.

This could be an opportunity to increase the take up of an ITA, reduce financial hardship, build trust, reduce transport costs, reduce safeguarding concerns and support alternative provision

**Recommendation 8:
Preparation for
Adulthood**

(Previous recommendation 4)

To have preparation for adulthood in mind for all young people and ensure families are aware of the independent travel training offer and can consider this for their young person where appropriate. To look at existing public transport routes and commission more routes to enable young people to travel independently if they are able to.

Next Steps

Share the findings and recommendations with the Home to School Transport Senior Team on the 20th November 2023



Present the findings to the Select Committee on the 6th December 2023



Feedback findings to Family Voice Parent Carer members in January 2024



Meet with the transport team to discuss agreed recommendations and plan next steps by the end of January 2024



Re run the survey in October 2024 to compare the parent carer experience.

Questions?

