



Parent Carer Experience of Home to School Transport in 2022

Quantitative Survey Undertaken
by Family Voice Surrey

October - November 2022

Background & Rationale

At Family Voice Surrey 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 and 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.

Since late summer 2022, the stand out topic was Home to School Transport. We were inundated with calls and emails from parent carers who were having extreme difficulties with home to school transport. Parent carers were immensely distressed and were desperate for help to resolve the issues so their child or young person would be able to get to their education setting at the start of the Autumn term.

In October we raised an Action Card with Surrey County Council. (See Appendix 1)

We had recently introduced a new FVS Quarterly Quantitative Survey with the purpose of producing qualitative and quantitative data on 'hot topics'. Naturally, given the scale of feedback we were receiving on Home to School Transport, we chose this as the topic for our first survey.

We wanted to explore the different issues parent carers were having, and to get a deeper understanding of what had gone wrong. We wanted to get some rich quantitative data to build on our understanding of the issues that we were hearing directly from parents and be able to better understand the scale of the varying issues. Our aim was to use this information to share with the local authority so that they too could get a clear understanding of where things had gone wrong or got stuck. We also planned to make recommendations to improve the process and to share these with the local authority, and work in partnership with them to improve the home to school transport process for all involved parties, and to ultimately ensure that the experience of families this year is not repeated.

A large proportion of children and young people who are eligible for home to school transport often attend schools that are a significant distance away from their home. This already puts them at a disadvantage to the children local to them who are able to attend their local school.

The majority of parent carers that we represent would much prefer their child to go to school locally in their home community, but unfortunately due to a lack of specialist places this is often not possible. These children and young people have a range of complex needs. Parent carers are not able to be in two places at once when they have other children attending different schools, they also often don't have the flexibility at work to be able to make a 2 hour round trip to get their child to school.

There is so much work happening in Surrey CC around inclusion and ensuring children and young people with additional needs are not disadvantaged - we at Family Voice Surrey would really welcome the same ethos to be applied to home to school transport, and we hope that this report will help shape the future process to hopefully reflect this.

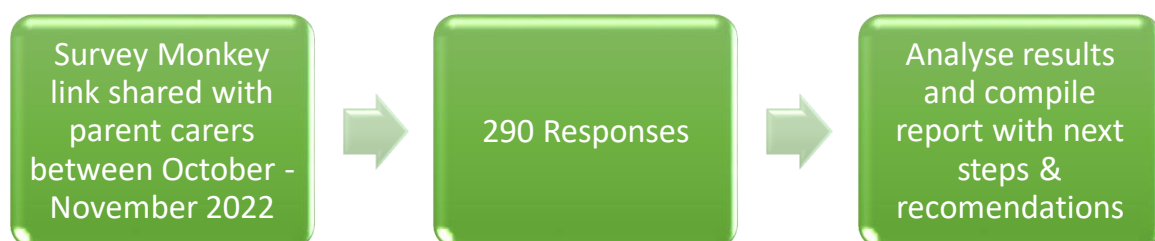
Our survey comprised of nine questions and was open from October to the 25th November 2022. **We received 290 responses.**

The following report is based on the input and feedback families gave us and we would like to thank them for their time and for giving us such rich and useful data.

Method

Family Voice Surrey designed the quantitative survey based on the key themes that we were hearing from families. We then shared this survey with our parent carer members via email, social media and our Facebook groups. Our District and Borough Coordinators shared it with their families and they also sent it out to schools. We also shared it with families at our annual event.

We purposely made the survey as concise as possible to ensure it was quick and easy to complete, and that it would offer us some rich quantitative data to compliment the qualitative information that we had and continued to gather from parent carers who contacted us about their transport issues.



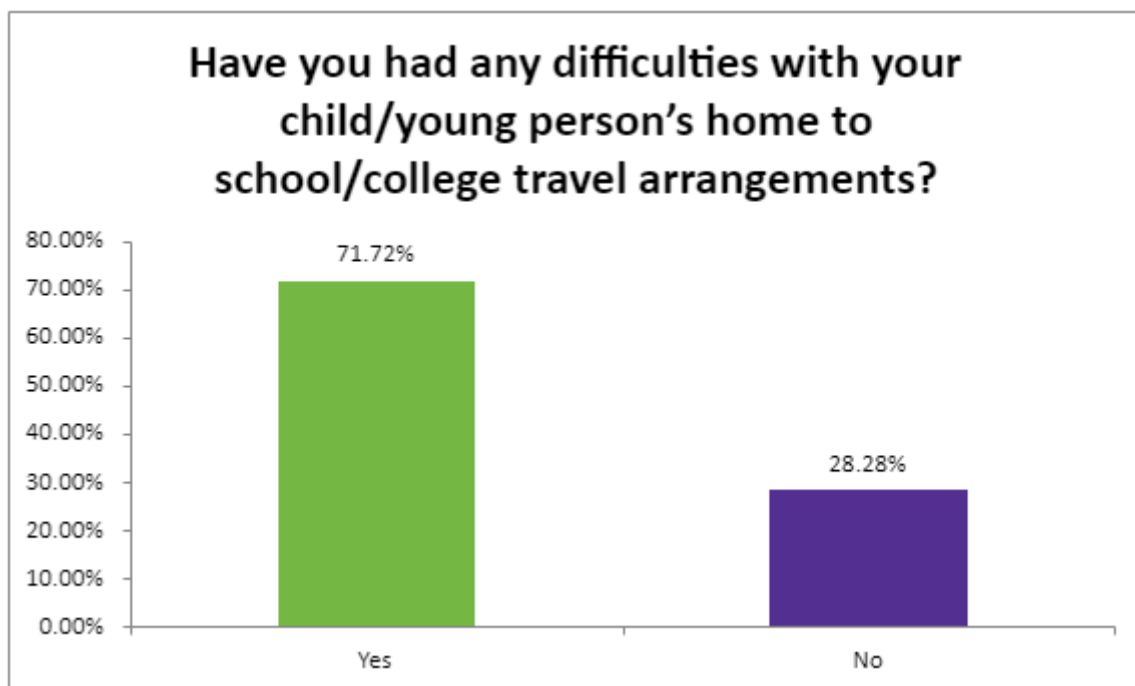
Once the survey had closed, we downloaded the data and began our analysis which we will now share with you in the next few sections.

Summary of Findings

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.
- **86.82%** of families suffered anxiety and/or an adverse impact on their mental health and wellbeing due to the 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.

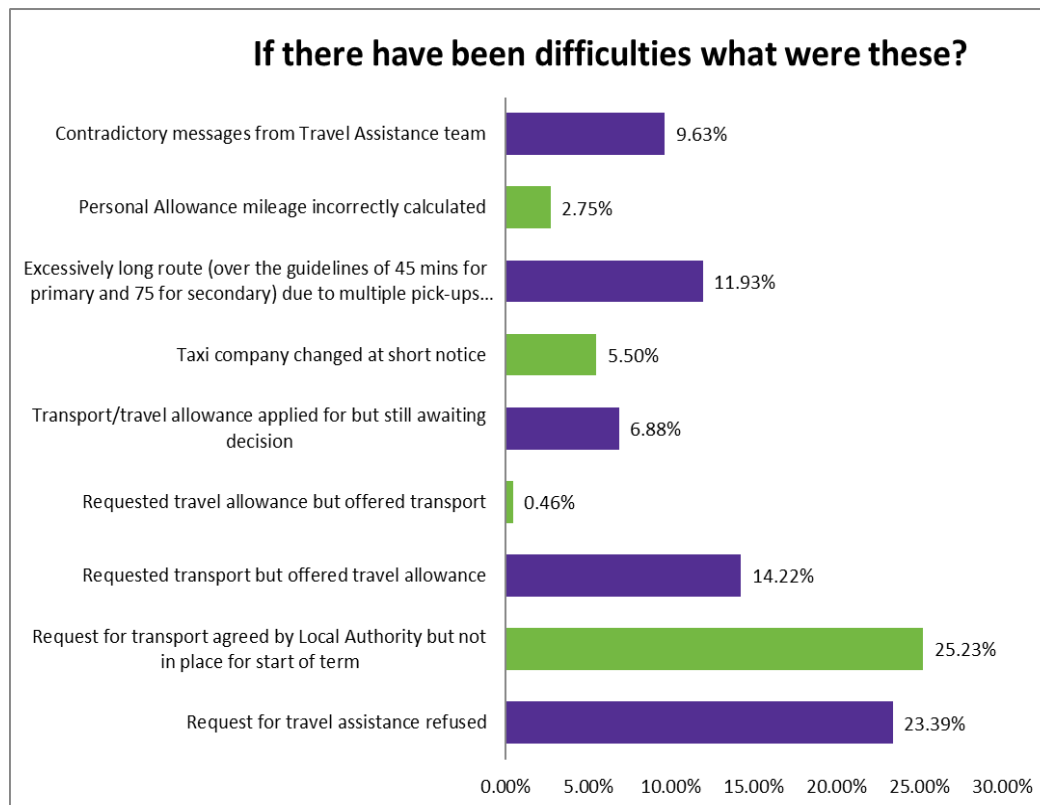
Incidence of Parent Carers Experiencing Challenges with Home to School Transport



As you can see from the chart **71.72%** of respondents said that they had experienced difficulties with their child or young person's travel arrangements.

This is very much in line with the call volume that we were experiencing from parent carers with transport difficulties.

The Difficulties Encountered



This graph explores the challenges encountered by parent carers, and as you will see there is a high proportion of families experiencing various difficulties. The column with the highest percentage was the second to last which is families who had transport agreed but the arrangements were not in place for the start of term. This was a worrying **25.23%**.

Independent Travel Allowance (ITA)

An area that we were hearing from parents about was that the transport team were contacting families less than 2 weeks before the start of term, to tell them they couldn't offer transport anymore due to no longer offering solo transport, and as there are no other children who can be added to the route they would be given an independent travel allowance (ITA) instead - this ITA would only pay for the time the CYP was in the vehicle. If parents responded saying they couldn't take their child to school they were told to appeal the decision. This is reflected in the results with **14.22%** of families reporting this. This caused a huge amount of distress, panic and anxiety which can be seen in the impact section of this report.

Many families simply couldn't take their child or young person to school for multiple reasons including:

- They don't drive.
- They can't afford the fuel (particularly as at the time only 2 journeys a day were being offered).
- They can't get the child or young person's siblings to school as their schools are at opposite ends of the county.
- They would be late for work if they had to take them as some children and young people attend settings up to 50 miles away from the family home.

"I have just had a call to say that under the new policy they are no longer offering solo transport and as there are no other children nearby to travel in a taxi with my daughter, they will offer us a bursary instead of 2 journeys a day. They said I can appeal if I disagree - it is 1 week before school goes back - I can't take her because her school is a 50 minute drive away and I have to get her siblings to school at the same time. My daughter is autistic and doesn't cope at all well with change, I honestly don't know what to do!"

Despite communicating these reasons families were told to appeal and submit details of extenuating circumstances.

Communication

As you can see **9.63%** of families reported contradictory messages from the transport team, and **6.88%** had applied but hadn't received a decision.

Throughout our conversations with parents, poor communication was a key theme that emerged. Families struggled to get a response from the transport team, and this added to the stress and anxiety they were already experiencing.

25.23% of families whose transport eligibility had been confirmed were waiting for the transport arrangements to be communicated with them - this did not happen by the start of term.

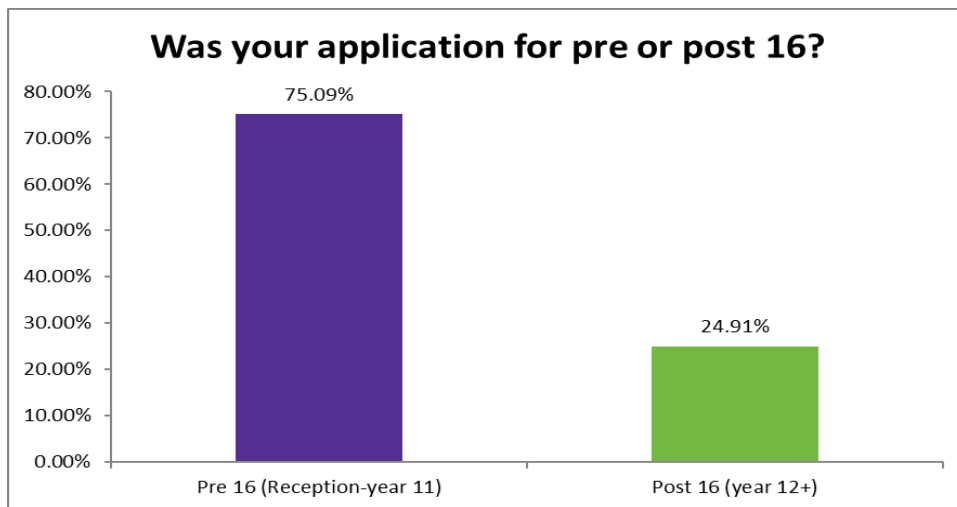
Historically every summer at Family Voice Surrey we hear from stressed parent carers in the last week of August/first week of September who are still waiting to find out who will be taking their child or young person to school - this is something we have continually raised as a concern.

"I had no idea that I had to reapply! Why did they not tell us this when we received the updated plan?"

Journey times

Worryingly and in line with what we were hearing - **11.93%** reported an excessively long route going over the recommended maximum journey times due to multiple pickups - this is concerning particularly as this aspect of the policy (to go over the maximum recommended journey times) was not agreed and therefore should not be happening. Parents were reporting on occasions up to a 3 hour journey for a route that should take no longer than 30 minutes.

Post 16



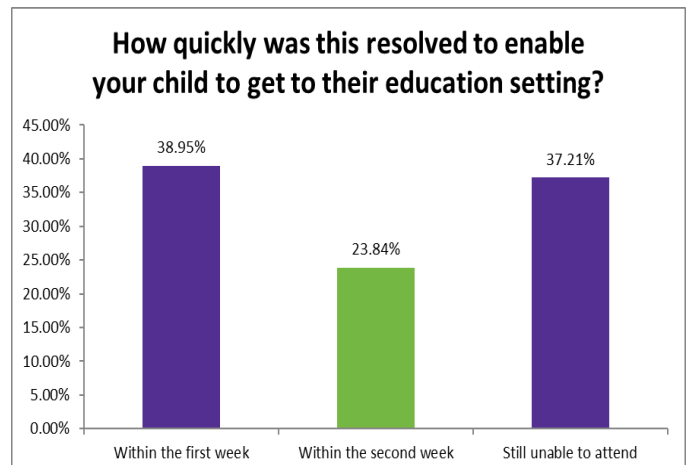
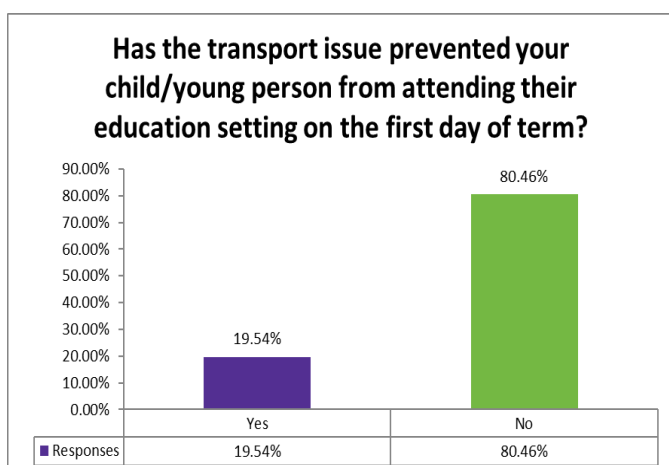
As you can see from the chart **75.09%** of respondents were of statutory school age and **24.91%** were post 16.

Many of our calls that we received around transport were in relation to post 16 transport. The change in policy meant that many young people were suddenly not considered eligible or were offered a bursary instead of transport.

At Family Voice Surrey we were disappointed that a gradual roll out of the new policy particularly for post 16 was not considered, to allow the families and young person the opportunity to explore options of services such as the independent travel training. Additionally, for those in an active college course who had already had transport in place for the first year we were surprised to learn that the transport arrangements were not being honoured for the duration of the course.

ATLAS which is a group of young people with additional needs have raised an action card asking for more public transport routes to enable them to access their specialist provision independently.

Effects on Attendance



As you can see **19.54%** of respondents reported that their child or young person was unable to attend their school or college on the first day of term due to the transport issue they had.

Worryingly of those **37.21%** reported that their child or young person was still unable to attend at the time of completing the survey.

Late Applications

The term ‘**late applications**’ become a real area of conflict this year.

Family Voice Surrey were told that the reasons for the home to school transport challenges were due to:

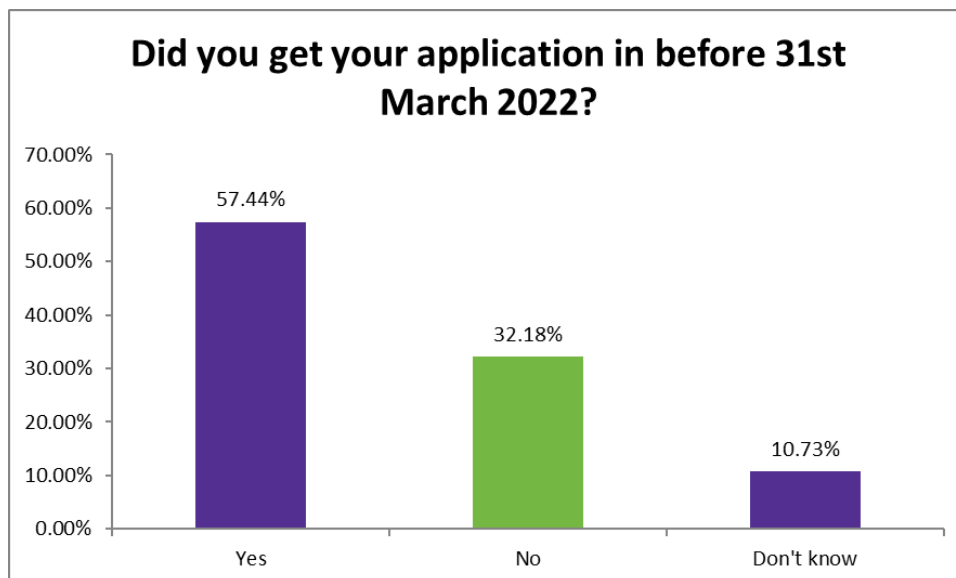
- **Late Applications**
- **Lack of drivers**

Late applications are given as a reason for delays each year but delays are never to the scale of this year. It transpired that parent carers were being told as part of the formal complaints process that the reasons for the challenges were:

- **Due to the review of 9000 children to over 700 settings.**
- **This was said to have been a huge logistical task to be undertaken over the summer period.**

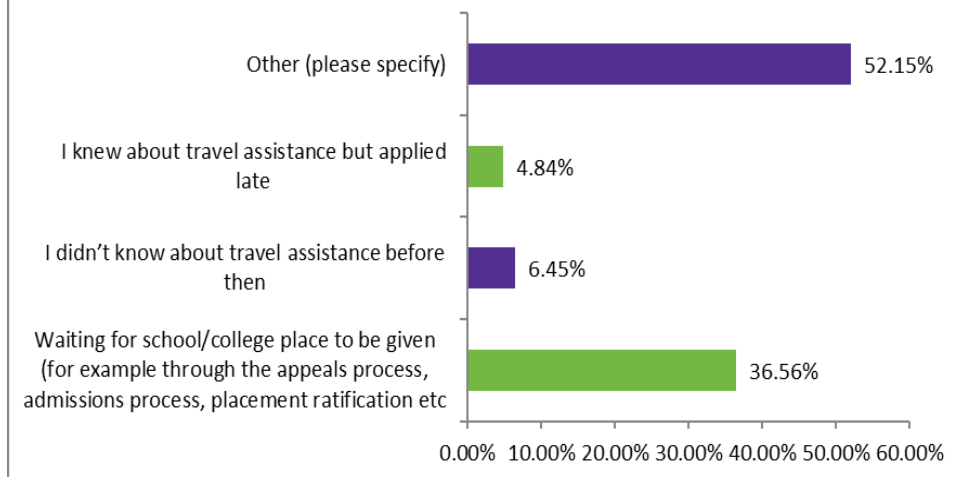
Family Voice Surrey raised the question of why the decision to reassess all children against the new policy had been done, given that it was only published in May 2022.

Family Voice Surrey had been assured at the consultation that the new policy would be rolled out gradually to allow for a transitional period - however it had not been communicated that this was no longer the case.

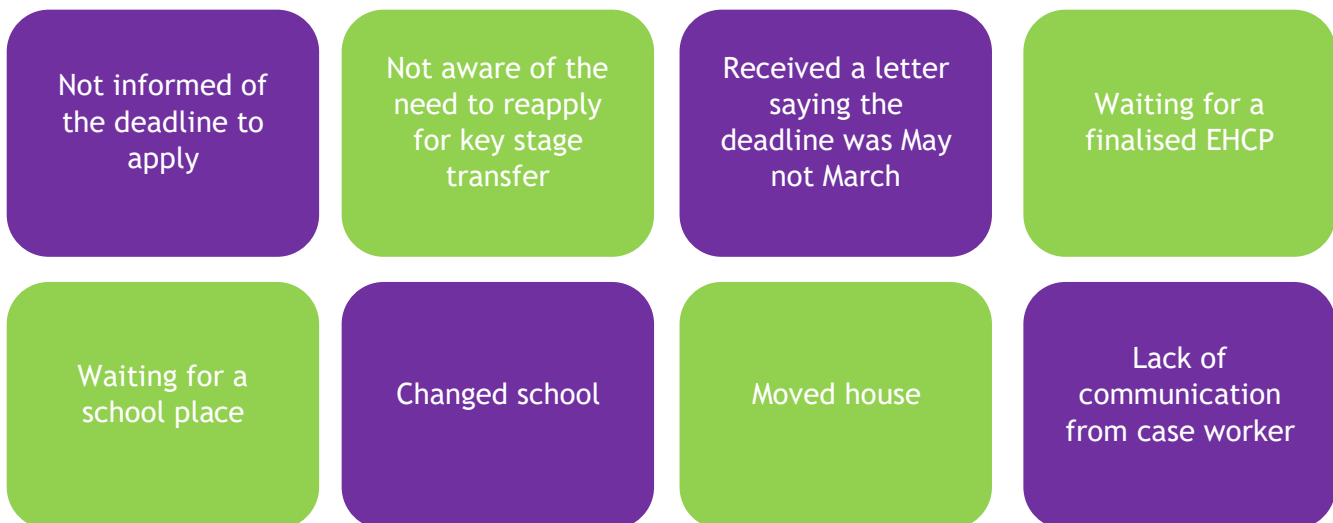


As you can see from the graph **32.18%** applied after the March deadline - to investigate this further we asked a following question which you can see in the chart below.

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



- **36.56%** applied late due to not having a school or college place confirmed by the deadline.
- **52.15%** applied after the deadline for reasons other than those stated - to explore this in more detail respondents were asked to state the reasons the main ones are described below.



Family Voice Surrey were particularly interested in the reasons behind late applications for 2 reasons:

1) Family Voice Surrey had been told that late applications were the reason for the delays and

2) Families who applied after the deadline were being told (mostly just a few days before the start of term) that because they applied late, transport would not be offered for the first term and an ITA would be awarded instead.

Family Voice Surrey had grave concerns about this new blanket rule, particularly because the majority of parents we were hearing from had applied late through no fault of their own, largely due to not having a confirmed school place or a final plan by the deadline.

As can be seen above, the reasons stated show that communication was a huge reason for late applications:

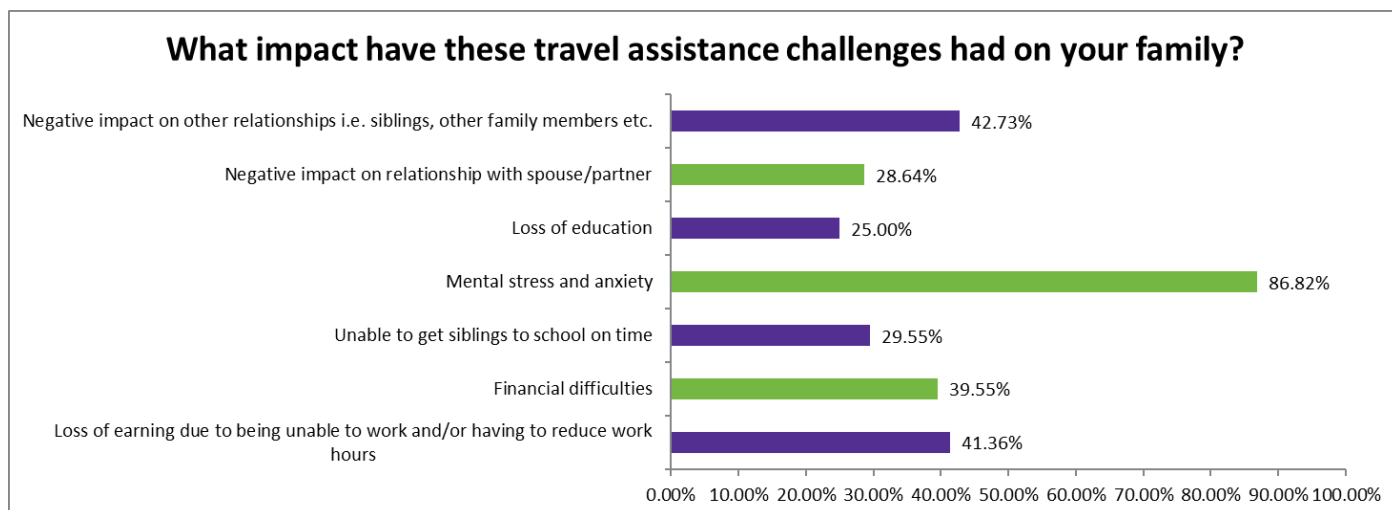
- Multiple families reported receiving a letter saying the deadline was May not March.
- Families reporting that they were not aware of the deadline or the need to reapply for Key Stage Transfer. Then there were families waiting for a school place and/or final EHCP so couldn't possibly apply until after the deadline.

"I was called 1 week before the start of term and told that we would not be getting transport and a bursary would be given to us instead. They said it was because I applied late - I only applied late because we didn't have a school named in the plan. I am distraught that my child will not be able to attend his first day at his new school. His anxiety is through the roof."

"The deadline on the letter that I received about applying was the 16th May not the 31st March!"

Impact

The challenges families experienced with home to school transport have had a huge impact on the entire family. The following graph highlights some of the areas the impact has been greatest.



- **86.82%** of parent carers reported a negative impact on their mental health and anxiety as a result of the transport issues.

- 39.55% reported financial difficulties with 41.36% reporting loss of earnings.
- 42.73% reported a negative effect on other relationships within the family.
- 25% reported a loss of education.
- 29.55% were unable to get siblings to school on time.

These results really highlight the urgent need to review the processes to ensure this is not repeated.

Families told us that they were having to use food banks due to the cost of driving their children to and back from school as there were delays on transport payments and they were struggling to pay for the fuel.

"I was called 1 week before the start of term and told that we would not be getting transport and a bursary would be given to us instead. They said it was because I applied late - I only applied late because we didn't have a school named in the plan. I am distraught that my child will not be able to attend his first day at his new school. His anxiety is through the roof."

"I applied for transport on time but I heard nothing about the transport arrangements. My child is now so anxious as they don't know who is taking them to school that they won't leave their bedroom. I phoned Surrey this morning at 9.10 am and am currently still on hold, it's now 10.45 am..."

"My child is unable to attend school until transport is organised. I do not drive as I have a neurological condition and Surrey expect me to transport them to and from school but will only pay for 2 journeys a day! I am a single parent and simply cannot afford to pay for him to get to school on that small amount. This means I cannot work so will lose my earnings as well. How is this allowed to happen I just don't know what to do!"

Key Findings and lessons learned

19.54% of children or young people were unable to attend their first day of school/college because they didn't have transport in place.

37.21% of those who were unable to attend on the first day of term due to transport were still unable to attend at the time of completing the survey.

25.23% had transport agreed but not in place for the start of term.

86.82% of respondents reported that they had experience negative mental health & anxiety due to the transport challenges.

Reports of not being informed of the need to reapply for Key Stage Transfer.

Reports of receiving the incorrect deadline date which resulted in a 'late' application.

41.36% of respondents reported financial difficulties

Many families applied after the deadline due to not having a finalised EHCP or named school.

14.22% requested transport but were told they would have travel allowance instead.

These are the key findings that have emerged from the survey - these findings have been grouped into two categories:

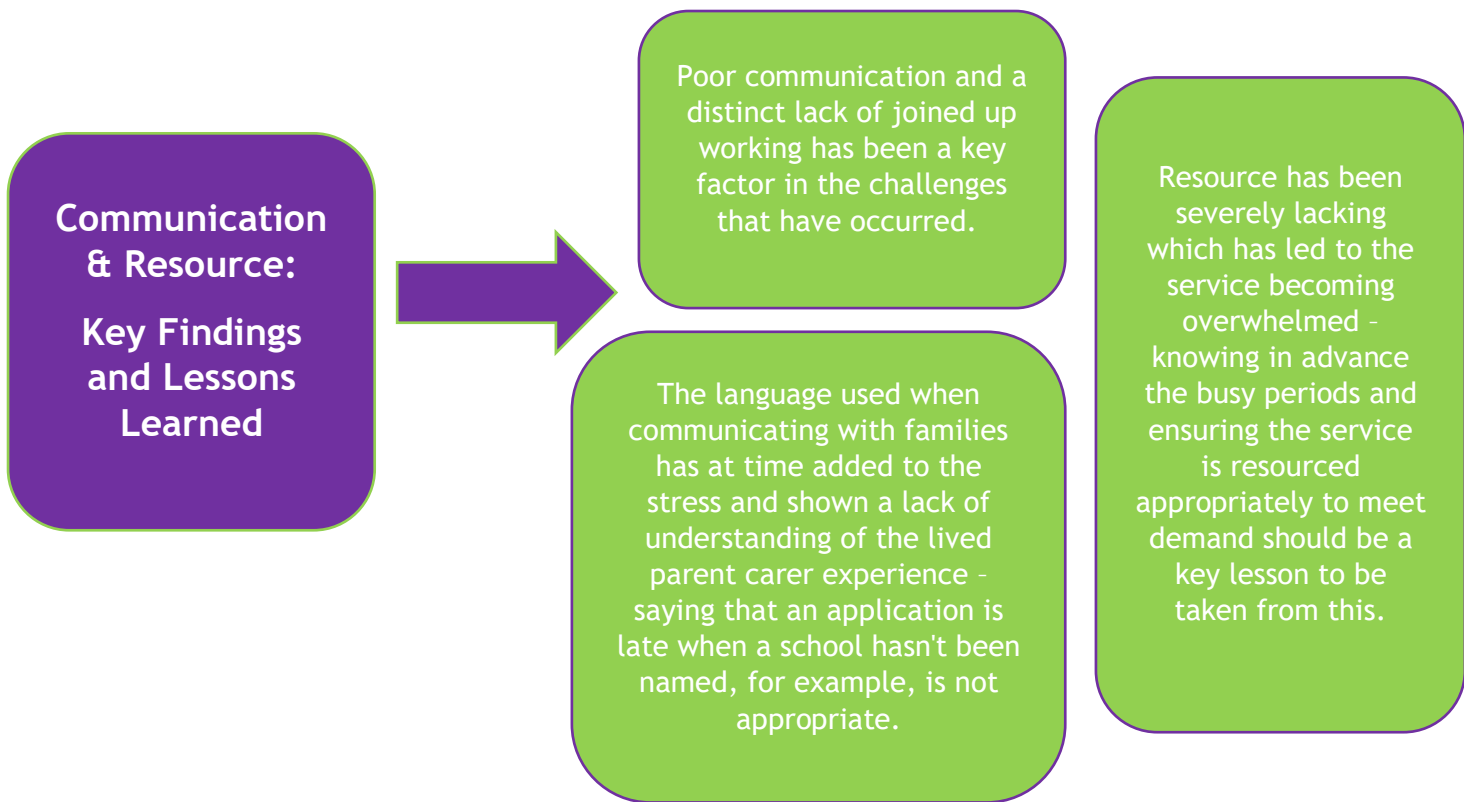
- **The negative impact on families.**
- **Lack of resource and poor communication, along with a distinct lack of joined up collaborative working between the transport team, parent carers, the SEND and admissions teams.**

Impact on Families: Key Findings and Lessons Learned

Families should not be suffering financially in order to get their child to school, this has happened to too many families and urgent action needs to be taken to ensure this isn't repeated.

Parent carers should not be put in a situation where their mental health and wellbeing is compromised. Children and young people should not have to suffer anxiety because transport arrangements are not communicated well in advance.

The damage this has done in breaking the trust between the local authority and families is huge, and acknowledgement of this breakdown along with action to show the commitment to begin to repair this trust is imperative.



Conclusion

The results of the survey and the communication that Family Voice Surrey have had with families since the late summer has highlighted the negative impact the roll out of certain aspects of the new policy have had on families. We have learned that there has been a lack of collaboration and joined up working between services, and communication with families has been scarce and at times conflicting.

Family Voice Surrey welcomed the news that there was to be a lesson learned review and we were pleased to hear that the upsetting experience families had was being taken seriously, and there is a clear desire to improve the service and the overall experience for families.

At Family Voice Surrey we hope that the key lessons that have emerged from both this survey and Surrey CC's own lesson learned review, along with the recommendations we have given will be taken into consideration. We would like to see a robust roadmap containing key actions and steps that are being taken to ensure families do not experience what they have this year again. We would like to see this shared with families with regular reviews of progress.

The detrimental impact that the challenges have had on families mental health and wellbeing and finances must not get lost and must serve as a key reminder of why the process needs to be different moving forwards. Families should not have to be financially disadvantaged to get their children to and from school, nor should they have the stress and uncertainty that occurred and in fact occurs every year. We would also like to see an inclusive approach adopted to consider the impact decisions may have on a child or young person and their family. We would particularly like to see a more joined up and collaborative approach with the SEND and admissions team.

Family Voice Surrey appreciate the hard work of the transport team who we know worked tirelessly to sort transport out for families. Family Voice hopes that resource will be taken into consideration, and steps taken to ensure that the team are appropriately resourced to avoid

becoming overwhelmed, which will ensure that families are able to communicate effectively with the team when needed.

Family Voice Surrey completely understand the challenge of keeping home to school transport as cost effective as possible, and we would support ways to do this - however it is imperative that families are not left financially disadvantaged, and all children and young people are able to get to their education setting safely and are able to arrive ready to learn.

Recommendations

Based on the data gathered from the survey, along with the contact we have had with individual parent carers who shared their experiences, we have made 12 recommendations. These recommendations are to remedy any outstanding unresolved issues, to improve the service and experience for families, and to ensure that the events of this year are not repeated.

Recommendation 1:

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 and will have transport provided.

Recommendation 2:

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.

Recommendation 3:

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

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.

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.

Recommendation 6:

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

Recommendation 7:

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.

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 know the arrangements well ahead of the start of term so that they can prepare their child or young person.

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 a joined up and seamless journey.

Recommendation 10:

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.

Recommendation 11:

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.

Recommendation 12:

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.

Next Steps

Based on our findings and the recommendations listed above we have suggested some next steps that should be taken to ensure there is a clear plan to move forward with timescales.

Present the findings to the Select Committee on the 15th December 2022



Feedback findings to Family Voice Surrey parent carer members in January 2023



Meet with Liz Mills, Gerry Hughes and Rebecca Threlfall to discuss survey results by the end of Jan 2023



Publish the survey results and share with Surrey County Council and the third sector by the end of Jan 2023



Meet with the transport team to discuss lessons learnt and agree actions by the end of January 2023



Agree action card resolution with the transport team - by the end of January 2023



Re run the survey in October 2023 to compare the parent carer experience.

For Further Information - Please Contact:

Leanne Henderson - *Participation Manager Family Voice Surrey*

Leanne.h@familyvoicesurrey.org

Appendix 1

Family Voice Action Card raised in October 2022 on Home to School Transport

As a	Group of families with children with additional needs who are eligible for home to school transport
Project	SEND Transport
We want	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) To have clarity on the new policy on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Independent Travel Allowance 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. <i>"Examples of other bodies or persons making travel arrangements might include: a parent consenting to use their car in return for a mileage allowance... On condition that the relevant parental consent has been obtained (annually or, if a child moves school, at that point too) by the local authority, a number of alternative arrangements might be considered to meet the local authority duty relating to travel arrangements. Examples include: A mileage allowance paid to a parent driving their eligible child to school in lieu of the local authority making arrangements for a taxi to transport the child."</i> DFE Statutory Home to school Guidance 2014 - Assurance that a parent who cannot accept an ITA in lieu of transport will not be asked to appeal the decision. - 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 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. 2) To have clarity on the new arrangements for post 16 transport and an understanding of how extenuating circumstances are taken into consideration. 3) 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

	<p>assurance that these times won't be exceeded by adding too many children to a route.</p> <p>4) To have clear guidance on applying with clear timescales and key dates.</p> <p>5) To have clear guidance on late applications particularly when they are late as a result of a school being named in a plan after the deadline.</p> <p>6) 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:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 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. - That families are able to contact the transport team and get a timely response.
So that	<p>Children and young people with additional needs can attend the setting named in their EHC plan and be prepared well in advance.</p> <p>So that they are transported to their setting in a safe and timely manner and arrive ready to learn. " <i>For arrangements to be suitable, they must also be safe and reasonably stress free, to enable the child to arrive at school ready for a day of study.</i>" DFE Statutory Home to school Guidance 2014</p> <p>For families to feel confident in the transport arrangements and feel informed and in control of the process.</p>
Allocated to	Leanne Henderson
Accepted by	Gerry Hughes
Outcome measure	SCC will provide their plans to improve the experience for families and how they will go about this. SCC will provide clarity on the above points and detail how it is in line with the national statutory guidance.
Date Received	October 2022 – this has come about after an unprecedented amount of parents contacted us between August and now.
Dates of updates	Please provide an initial response by the end of October 2022 and then quarterly updates
Date Closed	
Publishable response	