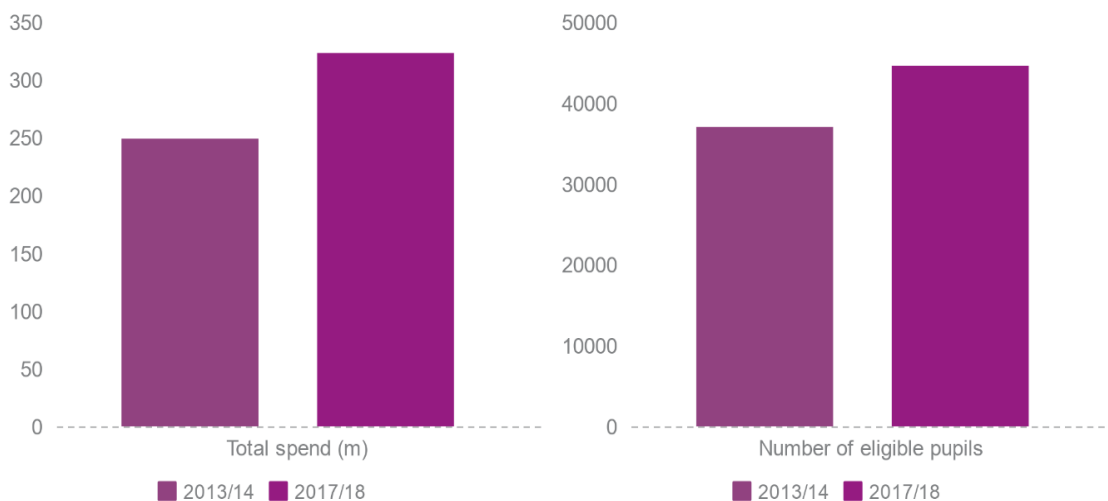


Briefing

Special Educational Needs – Home to School Transport

This short publication is the culmination of research carried by the County Councils Network of its member authorities on home to school transport for special educational needs (SEN) pupils. The research has found that counties are spending significantly more on special educational needs home to school transport compared to four years ago, largely fuelled by an increase in demand for the service.

SEN home to school transport: rise in demand and expenditure



Summary of findings:

- The 36 CCN member councils collectively spent £323.3m on special educational needs (SEN) home to school transport in 2017/18, compared to £249.3m in 2013-14 – a 30% (£74m) rise.** Every council bar two has increased their expenditure on the service over the last four years. Kent County Council spent the most last year, £24.9m, a 45% increase on 2013/14. Surrey spent £23m, a 32% increase, whilst Hampshire spent £19m, a 36% increase on four years ago. In percentage terms, Cornwall Council recorded the highest increase of 151% (2.6m to £5.5m). These figures include both pre-16 and post-16 SEN expenditure.
- This is driven by an increase in the number of eligible pupils for home to school transport services. In total, counties are transporting 7,592 more special educational needs pupils in 2018 compared to 2014.** These figures are based on responses from 27 county authorities, which shows that those councils transported 36,997 pupils in 2013/14; this increased to 44,589 in 2017/18.

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- **The ‘vast majority’ of this expenditure goes on taxis, minibuses, and private hire vehicles due to the circumstances and needs of special educational needs pupils who are eligible for free transport to their nearest suitable school.** Data from 23 of CCN members shows that those counties collectively spent £166.3m on private hire, taxis, and minibuses in 2017/18, up from £127.9m in 2013/14, due to a rise in pupils. Kent County Council has the highest expenditure in this area, spending £22.7m in 2017/18; Staffordshire County Council recorded the second biggest of £10.3m, and Derbyshire County Council the third highest; £8m.
- **Population increases, legislation changes, and improvements in medical science are all cited as reasons for the increase in demand for SEN home to school transport.** Legislative changes in the Children and Families Act, which introduced Educational, Care, and Health Plans, and raised the eligibility age from 18 and 25 for certain SEN pupils, has increased demand. However, it must be noted that only a relatively small proportion of children with such plans have needs or circumstances that mean they receive free transport to their nearest school. Other drivers of demand cited were population increases in high-growth areas, and improvements in medical science all contribute to an increase in demand.
- **CCN member councils also said that the added complexity of needs and circumstances have increased costs for individual pupils.** For example, Leicestershire County Council said that the annual average cost of SEN home to school transport has increased from £4,125 per year in 2014 to £5,661 in 2017. Councils also report that the increased costs associated with rurality – such as driving longer distances – is also driving expenditure, as does school place shortages meaning that pupils have to be transported further afield to suitable schools that have a place, rather than a closest school.
- **This added expenditure has come at a time when upper-tier councils are under significant financial pressures.** Councils have a legal obligation to provide SEN home to school transport depending on a pupils’ circumstances – so with demand rising year-on-year this presents a significant budget challenge for these authorities. CCN’s previous research has outlined that counties face funding pressures of £3.2bn by 2020 – though a proportion of this funding gap will be filled by the recent announcements in the Chancellor’s Budget. At the same time, counties have less funding for public services such as SEN home to school transport, receiving £182 per head, far lower than London councils, who receive £482 per head, or metropolitan boroughs, who receive £351 per head.

Methodology:

For the SEN yearly expenditure costs, CCN received 30 responses from its 36 councils. The remaining councils’ figures were taken from government S251 Outturn Data, which you can download [here](#).

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For the taxi, private hire, and minibus data, CCN received 23 responses from its 36 councils. Four of these authorities said that the 'vast majority' of SEN home to school transport was on these vehicles. In that instance, we have calculated their taxi, minibus, and private hire costs are 80% of their yearly cost.

CCN media reaction



Cllr Carl Les, CCN children's services and education spokesman, and leader of North Yorkshire County Council:

"Demand for special educational needs funded school transport has increased exponentially over the last four years, but our funding for these lifeline services has remained static. These new unfunded burdens have come at a time when local authority budgets are being stretched due to the unprecedented financial pressures we all face.

"As a result, many of us are exceeding our budgets every year on school transport – my own council is currently dealing with financial pressures on SEN transport of £2.3m on transport for special educational needs last year, as our expenditure has significantly increased compared to four years ago when the SEN reforms were introduced. With demand and costs only projected to rise, these present a major budget risk for many of us which will become unsustainable in the long run without additional funding.

"These services are a lifeline for our young people particularly in rural areas, and the fact that these pupils with learning disabilities and special needs are living longer is something to be celebrated, but these services must be adequately funded. Regrettably, we are having to scale back the services we aren't legally obliged to deliver or re-route funding from other services because the current funding for school transport is not keeping up with demand. We would encourage government to address this in the Spending and fairer funding reviews."

Coverage includes:

theguardian

LGC
local government chronicle

tes

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CCN View

Home to school transport for pupils with special educational needs is a lifeline for many young people and their families, and our councils pride themselves on offering these life-changing services to residents alongside a range of other services that they provide to people with special needs and those who support them.

However this school transport function is another example of a service area where councils are struggling with the impact of costs outside their control – and CCN has previously warned that county authorities are particularly vulnerable to these kinds of costs.

These ‘outside costs’ have added almost one-third to CCN member councils’ total expenditure in 2018 compared to 2014; with these 36 councils now spending £75m a year more compared to four years ago.

Those local authorities said that changes to legislation in the Children and Families Act – in particular raising the age of eligibility from 17 to 25 – coupled with population increases and young people with disabilities thankfully living longer have all contributed to an ‘exponential’ rise in demand – with 28 councils’ figures showing that they are transporting over 7,500 more pupils in 2018 compared to 2014.

However funding has remained static despite demand. As it is a legal requirement to offer free transport to the nearest school for pupils with particular circumstances and needs, many are increasingly overspending on their special educational needs budgets as a consequence, and having to make cuts elsewhere to make up the shortfall.

CCN believes that additional funding for these types of service pressures outside of councils’ control should be made available for local authorities in next year’s Spending Review. At the same time, a fairer distribution of resources, as a result of the fairer funding review, is necessary to allow CCN member councils to adequately address these pressures. Currently, counties receive far less per head for public services, compared to London councils, and other parts of the country.

CCN’s ‘fairer future for counties’ campaign aims to secure both additional funding for local government, and a fairer distribution of resources for underfunded counties.

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2017-18 total SEN home to school expenditure by CCN local authority:

Authority	2017/18 expenditure	% Change on 2014
Buckinghamshire County Council*	£10.4m	+36%
Cambridgeshire County Council	£8.5m	+26%
Central Bedfordshire Council	£5.4m	+54%
Cheshire East Council*	£3.4m	-16%
Cornwall Council	£6.4m	+74%
Cumbria County Council	£6.5m	+39%
Derbyshire County Council	£8.6m	+37%
Devon County Council	£10.7m	+28%
Dorset County Council	£6.8m	+29%
Durham County Council	£6.6m	+24%
East Riding of Yorkshire Council	£4.3m	-5%
East Sussex County Council	£7.8m	+6%
Essex County Council	£11.2m	+25%
Gloucestershire County Council	£5.7m	+2%
Hampshire County Council	£19m	+36%
Herefordshire Council	£1.2m	+36%
Hertfordshire County Council	£14.3m	+18%
Kent County Council	£24.9m	+45%
Lancashire County Council*	£10.3m	+22%
Leicestershire County Council	£9.4m	+33%
Lincolnshire County Council	£8.7m	+5%
Norfolk County Council	£13.1m	+32%
North Yorkshire County Council	£9.7m	+78%
Northamptonshire County Council	£6.7m	+27%

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Northumberland County Council*	£3.8m	+40%
Nottinghamshire County Council	£7.4m	+37%
Oxfordshire County Council	£8.1m	+28%
Shropshire Council*	£4m	+68%
Somerset County Council	£4.6m	-4%
Staffordshire County Council	£11m	+25%
Suffolk County Council	£7.5m	+30%
Surrey County Council	£23m	+32%
Warwickshire County Council	£8.9m	+21%
West Sussex County Council	£10.8m	+31%
Wiltshire Council	£5.9m	+59%
Worcestershire County Council*	£6.3m	+58%

** Based on [S251 Outturn data](#) as published by the Department for Education.