



Coventry City Council – SEN Transport

Executive summary

The case for change is clear

There are approximately two million children and adults in England who are identified as having special educational needs (SEN). Compared to most other children, these individuals have more difficulty in learning or accessing education.

One of the main barriers preventing children from fulfilling their potential is their inability to travel independently. As demands and expectations rise, SEN transport is an area of increasing concern, with many local authorities seeking the most cost-effective means of delivering appropriate travel support. Engagement between parents and local authorities may be emotionally charged and adversarial, with parents feeling they have to 'fight' for the services they receive.

The Travel Assistance Programme set out to radically change Coventry's approach to SEN home-to-school (HTS) transport and the relationships with parents and carers. The programme sought to understand the parent cohort better, communicate with them more effectively, re-emphasise their responsibilities and incentivise them to become more involved in HTS travel. The ultimate aims are to reduce transport demand and related costs for the council and to improve the quality of life for the children and parents involved. An initial SEN transport review by iMPOWER identified significant opportunities for savings and service transformation.

iMPOWER's approach has resulted in expected savings for the council of 12% from an annual budget of £4.45 million.

Project and approach

The Coventry challenge

Coventry City Council has been exploring efficiency opportunities whilst as far as possible preserving services, and attempting to reshape its relationship with citizens. Within SEN transport in Coventry there is a history of overspending, with high levels of service provision and very little co-production with parents (in 10/11 the overspend was £782k against a budget of £4.45m). In order to get 'better for less', demand for traditional transport provision needed to be managed more effectively, and this was to be approached by (1) completely changing the way the council and its partners engage with parents about transport (2) introducing personal transport budgets; allowing parents more flexibility to transport their own children (3) help





children to become more independent by building their confidence through travel training.

iMPOWER's approach was based on the introduction of the 'Value Modes' behavioural model that segmented parents into different attitudinal groups. Each of these groups were anticipated to have different levels of willingness to try new ideas for the transport of their children. The aim was to enable parents to choose more cost-effective, alternative travel options resulting in savings and greater service satisfaction. This is not a prescriptive approach but is based on the insight that, if available, different types of people would make alternative choices. Through the application of behavioural techniques to regulatory service areas, the results were incredibly powerful and provided a fresh approach to understanding the motivations of children and their families.

In order to articulate the real challenges and practical issues and to communicate how they were experienced by the people involved, iMPOWER's work with Coventry is told by its key stakeholders.

Firstly, Marion the Head of SEN on the problem she faced:

We didn't have any challenge in our old system...the minute we'd assessed somebody, we really did the processes for them...we just provided transport automatically and informed them after the event rather than involving parents in those processes and giving parents any kind of degree of choice or control.

Scott, the SEN Review Officer had a slightly different take on the issue:

Our problem was that there was all of this money transporting children when parents weren't even asked whether or not they could help out or do it better.

Colin – Children's Services Director took a more strategic view:

We'd done quite a lot on cost reduction, but we were interested in somebody who was saying "well actually you could manage demand differently".

iMPOWER's proposal to use a demand management approach resonated with the leadership team. Here is Marion on beginning work with iMPOWER:

We'd had the initial pilot phase that had really identified the fact that we needed to do some work around the demand [side] of transport arrangements. There were some things that were quite alien... really in terms of the way we'd worked before, like value modes... [a] new area of work really about not having the one-size-fits-all model and actually understanding the different nature of the client group and breaking that down. It was really interesting actually... seeing what had been





described as a theoretical model, actually seeing it in terms of real life parents starting to appreciate the differences really. It makes sense that people are different but... breaking it down into three categories was very different.

So Marion was happy with the overall approach, but would it work in practice? Let's hear from Scott the SEN Review officer who faced the challenge of getting all the stakeholders on board – particularly the parents.

In all honesty, there didn't seem to be any onslaught of ideas from our own travel department about how to solve the problem, they were just very much facilitating the travel, so it was nice to have some people come in and have some fresh ideas and to work through, and I think you guys did a really good kind of root and branch review as to what were the issues, how this happened and especially the work you did about who needs to – you know, which point of contacts do we need to influence . I thought it was very good how you got the schools involved, got them on board, went out and talked to them.

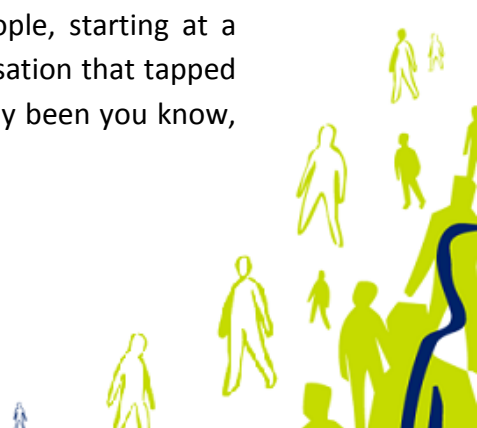
The structured contact made speaking to the parents so much easier, I think for us it gave us comfort really to know that this was what you guys had come up with and it was obviously we could see it working so it gave us a little bit more faith in the whole project really.

Of course once the idea had been worked through it needed to be adopted willingly by those who had day to day involvement with the families. This is Steven, a Head Teacher:

I think looking at the parents and the nature of students ...and targeting those that are probably the quick wins first was the right thing to do. It's been a far more successful approach and it's just something we wouldn't have had the time to do. It's enabling us to target families in a more constructive way.

The early positive results and lessons learnt are beginning to change the way the council operate and engage with local people. Here is Colin the Children's Services Director:

I was a bit sceptical about whether you could actually industrialise it to the kind of numbers that you've got now, I thought that we might be able to increase the number a little bit. I didn't think that we'd actually get to where you've got at the moment. This is about having a different conversation with people, starting at a different point, a different offer...help us to have the right conversation that tapped into people's motivations early on rather than what had previously been you know, "This is the way we do it, take it or leave it".





And there was real appreciation for the ‘team’ approach and iMPOWER’s ability to get to the heart of the matter, here is Colin the Children’s Services Director:

Ensuring that all the stakeholders work together and shared in a common sense purpose...I think particularly the work between...iMPOWER, the SEN team, the decision makers, the transport team, the strategic leadership...there really was a proper team approach and everybody was engaged and committed to it. You were visible as well and I think that’s quite important.

iMPOWER’s depth of understanding of the real issues was also highly valued. This is what Andy; Assistant Director of Children’s Services had to say:

I think that the credibility of consultants...for example one of you having a background as an Assistant Director in a similar authority doing it actually does hold a lot of weight.





Outcomes

Measurable improvements / benefits: programme outputs to date and projected savings going forward

But what about the numbers? Did the programme deliver significant financial benefits?

The table below demonstrates that, personal transport budgets have been extremely successful to date. Independent travel training (ITT) has gained momentum after an initial period of slow activity, improved ITT performance is now expected and this performance will be carefully monitored to ensure this is the case. The SEN Team has embedded changes to their processes and have worked positively with the programme team to ensure that the new Travel Assistance offers are properly explained to parents, appropriately targeted, delivered effectively and well-articulated to other stakeholders within the council.

Activity	Independent travel training (ITT)	Personal transport budget (PTB)	Programme
Total transferred from transport onto alternative to date	25 (20 remaining on transport)	114 (100 new)	129
Target total for remainder of 2011/12	23	24	47
Projected total for 2012/13 (additional)	54	28	82
Projected total for 2013/14 (additional)	54	28	82
Projected In-year saving (2011/12)*	£46,221	£50,880	£97,101
Projected saving 2012/13*	£202,866	£167,842	£370,708
Projected saving 2013/14*	£368,828	£223,686	£592,514
Total projected savings by activity	£617,914	£433,721	£1,051,636

* Based on latest financial projections/ assumptions and assuming 2 years of saving per case

Figures are one thing but the council were also determined to improve the level of service provided – to make a real impact on the lives of parents and children. Here is Dawn a travel trainer:

When asked what the best bit about travelling independently is, a student replies “you can just get to school on your own without any hassle”. With independent travel training, every student benefits from it, they come back from their travel





training with a big grin on their faces feeling successful, feeling that they've achieved, their self-esteem's really high, what more can you ask for?

Steven the Head Teacher agrees:

We can be seen to be responding to things far more effectively as well. And it brings those things to our attention that perhaps wouldn't have necessarily been brought to our attention before.

As with all change programmes the most important questions are: 'Is the change sustainable? Will the programme make a long term difference to the council and to the families involved?' The members of the team are all confident in the sustainability of the programme.

First here is Marion:

What was important [about this] project [was] a clear rationale of embedding the processes so that by the time the actual programme finished and iMPOWER left, that we'd got those systems embedded sufficiently so that we carried the work forward. It's improved communication and led to a greater understanding really about how those processes impact on systems.

And Steven is equally positive: Most parents were very much behind it, keen to have it because obviously it's another step towards independence of the child. We never used to have the number of students that come in by City Council Transport...that sort of face-to-face opportunity with parents and the more parents that are coming in with children at the moment has given us that opportunity. It's impacted in so many different ways...within the school and I think that's one of the strengths of it really. To see students' going out to do their own training is really good, they look really motivated, really proud that they're achieving.

Colin is already thinking of the next generation of staff and users and knows that there is always more to do:

iMPOWER actually came with the offer of a different approach to how we were approaching solving...the challenge that we had around children's transport. You're actually talking really of something that perhaps you need to look at in five years' time. I think we will continue to have some nurturing and need to have visibility at a senior level so that we do see this through and maximise the benefits and that if there are any key changes in personnel in some of the critical teams, that this is one of the things that gets well handed over into the successor responsibilities.





In conclusion, the project has involved working really effectively with a complex range of people and organisations. Not only has the project delivered demonstrable cashable savings for Coventry City Council, but a different relationship has been created with citizens. There is now a large and growing number of engaged parents and children with positive experience of working with the council. This approach to managing relationships will ensure that Coventry manage demand more effectively whilst acknowledging the future financial challenges over the short, medium and long-term.

We leave the last words to the client (Colin Green):

“iMPOWER brought a new approach to an old problem. They quickly got to grips with the challenges we had in Coventry, and by working with parents as well as the SEN Transport service they identified a number of savings opportunities in how we might manage demand which we would not otherwise have found. We are now planning the implementation. We are excited about testing these new approaches with our parents, and as a result changing their expectations and creating a stronger and more positive relationship with them”.

