



WOKINGHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

A Meeting of the **CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW
AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** will be held in
David Hicks 1 - Civic Offices, Shute End, Wokingham RG40
1B Non **TUESDAY 15 AUGUST 2023 AT 7.00 PM**

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Susan Parsonage', written in a cursive style.

Susan Parsonage
Chief Executive
Published on 7 August 2023

The role of Overview and Scrutiny is to provide independent “critical friend” challenge and to work with the Council’s Executive and other public service providers for the benefit of the public. The Committee considers submissions from a range of sources and reaches conclusions based on the weight of evidence – not on party political grounds.

Note: Non-Committee Members and members of the public are welcome to attend the meeting or participate in the meeting virtually, in line with the Council’s Constitution. If you wish to participate either in person or virtually via Microsoft Teams, please contact Democratic Services. The meeting can also be watched live using the following link:

<https://youtube.com/live/1G2bch0r-ss?feature=share>

Please note that other people may film, record, tweet or blog from this meeting. The use of these images or recordings is not under the Council’s control.

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| Our Vision |
| <i>A great place to live, learn, work and grow and a great place to do business</i> |
| Enriching Lives |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Champion excellent education and enable our children and young people to achieve their full potential, regardless of their background. • Support our residents to lead happy, healthy lives and provide access to good leisure facilities to enable healthy choices for everyone. • Engage and empower our communities through arts and culture and create a sense of identity for the Borough which people feel part of. • Support growth in our local economy and help to build business. |
| Providing Safe and Strong Communities |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Protect and safeguard our children, young and vulnerable people. • Offer quality care and support, at the right time, to reduce the need for long term care. • Nurture our communities: enabling them to thrive and families to flourish. • Ensure our Borough and communities remain safe for all. |
| Enjoying a Clean and Green Borough |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Play as full a role as possible to achieve a carbon neutral Borough, sustainable for the future. • Protect our Borough, keep it clean and enhance our green areas for people to enjoy. • Reduce our waste, promote re-use, increase recycling and improve biodiversity. • Connect our parks and open spaces with green cycleways. |
| Delivering the Right Homes in the Right Places |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer quality, affordable, sustainable homes fit for the future. • Ensure the right infrastructure is in place, early, to support and enable our Borough to grow. • Protect our unique places and preserve our natural environment. • Help with your housing needs and support people, where it is needed most, to live independently in their own homes. |
| Keeping the Borough Moving |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain and improve our roads, footpaths and cycleways. • Tackle traffic congestion and minimise delays and disruptions. • Enable safe and sustainable travel around the Borough with good transport infrastructure. • Promote healthy alternative travel options and support our partners in offering affordable, accessible public transport with good transport links. |
| Changing the Way We Work for You |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be relentlessly customer focussed. • Work with our partners to provide efficient, effective, joined up services which are focussed around our customers. • Communicate better with customers, owning issues, updating on progress and responding appropriately as well as promoting what is happening in our Borough. • Drive innovative, digital ways of working that will connect our communities, businesses and customers to our services in a way that suits their needs. |
| Be the Best We Can Be |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be an organisation that values and invests in all our colleagues and is seen as an employer of choice. • Embed a culture that supports ambition, promotes empowerment and develops new ways of working. • Use our governance and scrutiny structures to support a learning and continuous improvement approach to the way we do business. • Be a commercial council that is innovative, whilst being inclusive, in its approach with a clear focus on being financially resilient. • Maximise opportunities to secure funding and investment for the Borough. • Establish a renewed vision for the Borough with clear aspirations. |

Appendix Acronyms

| | |
|------|-------------------------------------|
| CPD | Continuous Professional Development |
| EYFS | Early Years Foundations Stage |
| FGB | Full Governing Body |
| KS1 | Key Stage 1 |
| KS2 | Key Stage 2 |
| MAT | Multi Academy Trust |
| NLE | National Leader of Education |
| NLG | National Leader of Governance |
| RI | Requires Improvement |
| RSC | Regional Schools Commissioner |
| SDP | School Development Plan |
| SEF | Self Evaluation Form |
| SIB | School Improvement Board |
| SIO | School Improvement Officer |
| SLT | Senior Leadership Team |
| TSA | Teaching School Alliance |
| WLP | Wokingham Learning Partnership |

MEMBERSHIP OF THE CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Councillors

Andrew Mickleburgh (Chair)
Anne Chadwick
Andrew Gray

Jane Ainslie
Graham Howe

Ian Pittock (Vice-Chair)
Phil Cunnington

Substitutes

Pauline Helliard-Symons
Chris Johnson
Michael Firmager

Morag Malvern
Alison Swaddle

Rachelle Shepherd-DuBey
Tony Skuse

Parent Governor Representatives

Vacancy, Parent Governor Representative
Vacancy, Parent Governor Representative

Diocesan Representatives

Richard Lamey, Church of England Representative
Vacancy, Roman Catholic Representative

Community Representatives

Sarah Clarke, SEND Voices Wokingham

| ITEM NO. | WARD | SUBJECT | PAGE NO. |
|----------|------|---|----------|
| 20. | | APOLOGIES To receive any apologies for absence. | |
| 21. | | DECLARATION OF INTEREST To receive any declarations of interest. | |
| 22. | | PUBLIC QUESTION TIME To answer any public questions. A period of 30 minutes will be allowed for members of the public to ask questions submitted under notice. The Council welcomes questions from members of the public about the work of this committee. Subject to meeting certain timescales, questions can relate to general issues concerned with the work of the Committee or an item which is on the Agenda for this meeting. For full details of the procedure for submitting questions please contact the Democratic Services Section on the numbers given below or go to www.wokingham.gov.uk/publicquestions | |
| 23. | | MEMBER QUESTION TIME | |

To answer any member questions.

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|------------|--|---|------------------|
| 24. | None Specific | HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT - REVISED POLICY To receive and consider a report and related annexes in relation to the proposed revised Home to School Transport Policy. | 7 - 20 |
| | Annex 1 - Equality Impact Assessment | | 21 - 26 |
| | Annex 2 - Detailed Findings from HTST Consultation | | 27 - 74 |
| | Annex 3 - Home to School Travel Assistance Policy Statutory School Age | | 75 - 104 |
| | Annex 4 - Home to School Travel Assistance Post 16 including young people with SEND | | 105 - 130 |
| | Annex 5 - SEND Voices Wokingham report | | 131 - 142 |
| | Any other items which the Chairman decides are urgent | | |
| | A Supplementary Agenda will be issued by the Chief Executive if there are any other items to consider under this heading | | |

CONTACT OFFICER

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|-----------------------|---|
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Agenda Item 24.

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|-----------------------------|--|
| TITLE | Home to School Transport - Revised Policy |
| FOR CONSIDERATION BY | Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 15 August 2023 |
| WARD | None Specific |
| LEAD OFFICER | Director, Children's Services - Helen Watson |
| LEAD MEMBER | Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Children's Services - Prue Bray |

RECOMMENDATION

The O&S Committee are asked to consider the Executive report attached at Appendix A on **WBC Home to School Travel Assistance Policies Review** due to be considered by the Executive on 24th August 2023 and consider what recommendations and/or comments (if any) they wish to make for the Executive to consider.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Home to School Travel Assistance Policies (H2S TA) set out the way in which the Council discharges its statutory and discretionary powers and responsibilities in relation to school and college transport assistance available for pupils aged up to 25 years of age, both with and without additional needs.

The Council last undertook a policy review in 2020/2021 leading to some changes which were implemented from September 2022, but the number of children who require travel assistance and the associated costs of providing this support have risen. The Council will continue to work effectively and efficiently to secure appropriate transport where needed. However, the Council must now look to see what more can be done to sustain the support for those who need help the most. Ultimately, the Council must manage increasing costs and demand within the limited overall resources available.

The recommendations set out in this report will detail the options for children and young people who qualify for H2S TA. The Council will look to now focus support for children and young people on gaining the skills which allow them to travel more independently, as appropriate to the young person's age, abilities and needs. Our aim is to help prepare young people for adulthood and future employment. The Council is also committed to reducing emissions to improve the quality of life with cleaner air for all residents within the borough, we will therefore encourage walking, cycling, and the use of buses and trains wherever possible.

The Council's work in relation to H2S TA, is one of several areas of work which the Council is undertaking to improve educational provision and access to education within the borough for children and young people. The proposed policy changes, if approved, will come into effect from September 2024 and should be considered alongside the expansion of secondary school places, the opening of a new SEND School and the potential for two new SEND schools.

Within this document SEN support refers to the children that require additional support often provided by teachers and SENCo but the child does not have an Education, Health, and Care plan (EHCP).

EHCP within this document refers to a pupil who has an EHC plan or statement of SEN where a formal assessment has been made. For children with an EHCP, a document is in place that sets out the child's needs and the extra help they should receive.

H2S TA refers to Home to School Travel Assistance Policies

1. Rationale for the proposed changes

Home to School Transport costs have risen from £3m in 2018/19 to £5.8m in 2022/23, an increase of 93%, with the largest rise being for those children and learners with SEND. Demand for Travel Assistance for children and young people to access education has continued to rise, largely because of demographic changes, such as local population growth, a change in the educational landscape and pressure on school places, while per unit costs of school transport are also rising rapidly.

The proportion of children and young people in Wokingham Borough with Special Educational Needs and or Disabilities (SEND) has also grown significantly in the past three years and continues to grow more significantly than the overall rate of population growth.

These increases in the numbers of children and young people with SEND and in need of SEN support is reflected in the increase in demand for Travel Assistance and, as a result, expenditure on Travel Assistance. The historical lack of sufficient in-borough provision for children and young people with SEND, combined with growth in demand for SEND services and support, has driven increases in expenditure on Travel Assistance for children and young people with SEND travelling to out of borough educational placements.

Excluding the 2020/2021 financial year, and the impacts of COVID lockdowns, the H2S TA costs have increased consistently over the past few years and Wokingham Borough Council (WBC), like other transport commissioners nationally, is seeing additional financial pressures as the country moves out of a pandemic and straight into a cost-of-living crisis, as well as increasing demands for transport services.

The costs associated with mainstream travel have also been increasing, caused predominantly by pressures on school places, driven by a surge of inward migration into the Borough. The change in the Hong Kong National Visa Scheme, the war in Ukraine and the desirability of Wokingham as an excellent place to raise a family with outstanding schools, have all had a dramatic impact on the demand for school places, which has meant many families who move into the Borough are now unable to secure a place at a local school. The cost attributable to a shortage of school places in the Borough is nearly half a million pounds and is the largest contributing factor to the increased cost of mainstream travel.

Significantly increased resources have been made available to the HTST budget recognising those demand and inflationary pressures. This has been set against a programme of activities seeking to ensure value for money through such actions as smarter procurement and route optimisation. Net growth of £1.3m was provided for in the 2023/24 budget alone. Despite this, early indications are that spend will again outstrip the budgeted envelope, putting more pressure on wider Council resources. To project future demand, trends in numbers of individuals needing travel assistance have been reviewed against overall relevant population cohorts.

Mainstream

Currently 2% - 2.5% of WBC mainstream school pupils receive travel assistance. Should this level of need persist, the demand and pressure on HTST budgets will continue to grow due to the projected rise in pupil number in Wokingham through to 2027/28.

SEND

When setting those with travel assistance against overall number of pupils with an EHCP, this shows a general trend of around 27%-30%. If trend continues and set against projected number of EHCPs through to 2027/28, then demand and pressure on HTST budgets will continue to grow, with SEND numbers surpassing mainstream by 2027/28.

Post-16

In terms of Post-16 H2S TA, there is no automatic entitlement to free school or college transport once a student is over 16. Students can attend a college of choice and, if needed, apply to their college's student support for assistance. The Council currently offers, under its discretionary powers, a transport service that requires an annual parental contribution. The cost of providing this discretionary service in the 2022/2023 academic year was just under £400K, with a parental contribution of just under £40K. The Council has considered its resources and the travel to college opportunities for students.

Whilst the Council will continue to support those who need help most, we must manage increasing costs and demand, therefore we are proposing to:

- Enable more children and young people to develop the lifelong skills they need, as appropriate to their needs and abilities, to allow more children and young people to walk, cycle, use buses and trains as appropriate to for the journeys they need to make. Where needed the Council will support with Independent Travel Training (ITT) or Travel Buddies to help children and young people develop these skills.
- Continue to ensure all transport is commissioned efficiently and effectively to meet the needs of children and young people. In many cases this will mean continuing to expand the use of pick-up points which were introduced under the 2020/2021 review of the previous policy and to increase the occupancy of vehicles.
- Improve the clarity of the policy so that parents and carers are fully aware of the implications of their choices in relation to any travel assistance they may receive from the Council.

Whilst the Council acknowledges that some pupils with complex needs will require lifelong support, we also need to ensure that young people do not face a 'cliff edge' when they become adults. For young people with additional needs, for example, their eligibility for transport is linked to their Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and will expire at some point in the future. If they are not supported to travel independently, this can create isolation and reduce access to employment as well.

2. Proposed changes

To support the Council's ambition of empowering and supporting children and young people, to prepare them for adulthood and to secure the best value from our limited resources, several changes to the H2S TA policies are proposed. The proposed changes set out in the consultation that took place between 14th June and 21st July 2023 can be found in Annex 3 and 4. The outcome of the consultation is set out in Annex 2. A summary of the consultation responses is provided in section 5 onwards of this report below.

There are some non-material amendments where necessary to the wording and layout to ensure that it is clear and to make sure the wording adheres to statutory guidance.

One of the main changes is for low-income families. It is proposed that the extended eligibility criteria for travel assistance will continue to apply. However, where parents / carers choose educational settings which does not meet these criteria, the Council will no longer be able to offer the discretionary 50% discount on any fare payer transport. Following feedback from the consultation, the Council does however, propose to prioritise seats for low-income families on any council arranged fare payer transport.

Another key change is for Post-16 travel. It is proposed that offers of travel assistance will focus on independent travel options, including the use of public transport and will move away from the provision of private hire vehicles such as minibuses or taxis where appropriate, and towards the use of personal budgets which facilitate families to arrange their own travel in a way that best meets their needs, or Independent Travel Training for young people with SEND. These not only provide a more cost-effective way of supporting transport in post 16 but also have wider, strengths-based benefits of social inclusion, promoting independence as part of the Preparation for Adulthood agenda.

Where the Council assesses a young person aged 16 to 19 years as eligible for travel assistance under its policy, the assistance offered in the first instance will be in the form of a post-16 transport personal travel budget to support families and young people to make their own transport arrangements, unless this is not appropriate due to severity of need or a requirement for specialist transport means. The new policy would end our current practice of providing 'fare payer' travel assistance for pupils in post-16 education.

3. Outcomes from Public Consultation

The purpose of the public consultation was to enable Wokingham residents, professionals, families, and current service users, to read the proposed changes under any new Travel Assistance policy and give their views on any or all aspects of the proposal.

The consultation document set out several questions for respondents in a survey, which focused on:

- The most significant differences between the proposed new Travel Assistance policies and the current HTST policy
- Questions and prompts designed to help the Council understand public attitudes and perspectives on various elements of Travel Assistance provision

- Questions designed to help the Council understand public opinions around opportunities to improve its Travel Assistance offer, and improve the long-term sustainability and financial viability of the service

The full consultation report showing details of responses and comments from respondents is in Annex 2.

4. About the respondents to the public consultation

260 members of the public responded to the formal public consultation on the Council's website between 14th June and 21st July 2023.

Schools and current service users were notified of the consultation, given appropriate links to the consultation page, and notice of the closing dates. Officers also raised awareness of the consultation through e-newsletters and flagged the consultation in meetings with key stakeholders in the build-up to the consultation.

The consultation was promoted through the Council's social media platforms, professional networks including schools, the Parent Carer Forum (SEND Voices Wokingham) network, and the Children with Additional Needs (CAN) Network.

The Council directly contacted service users and sent reminder communications throughout the consultation period. Issues were reported on the final day of the consultation, but the online survey was tested and found to be working for WBC staff. However, in the light of concerns raised, a PDF of the survey was provided to SEND Voices (which had reported the potential issue) with the offer that, if any resident had been unable to complete the online survey, they could complete the PDF version and return it to the Council. Although these would have been after the official close of the consultation, it was made clear that they would be considered the same as other responses.

90% of response were from Wokingham residents and 65% of respondents were service users.

Nine organisations submitted responses. The organisations represented were:

1. Robert Piggott Infant School
2. LAMBS LANE PRIMARY SCHOOL
3. St Crispin's School
4. Robert Piggott Junior School
5. Wescott Infant School
6. Dingley's Promise
7. Addington School
8. Foundry College
9. SEND Voices Wokingham

5. Feedback from Consultation on options to change discretionary Travel Assistance

A summary of the key questions and responses relating to options to change discretionary Travel Assistance is set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Summary of key consultation questions and responses based on those in agreement, no opinion or disagree

The survey responses were categorised as follows:

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| Broad agreement with proposed change greater % than disagreement |
| Broad disagree to proposed greater then agreement but less than 50% |
| Broad disagreement with proposed change greater than 50% |

Summary:

Total number of responses received: 260

Total percentage broadly in support of the proposals: 46%

Total percentage neutral or without an opinion: 22%

Total percentage who broadly disagree: 32%

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| 1. Proposed changes to definitions (Section 2.2.3b) |
| Broadly agree: 35% |
| Neutral/ no opinion: 18% |
| Broadly disagree 46% |
| 2. Proposed changes to qualifying school and parental preference (Section 2.2.4) |
| Broadly agree: 33% |
| Neutral / no opinion:22% |
| Broadly disagree 45% |
| 3. Proposed change to travel assistance during the school day and accompaniment (Section 2.2.6b) |
| Broadly agree: 38% |
| Neutral / no opinion:32% |
| Broadly disagree 30% |
| 4. Proposed changes to timing of assessment of eligibility (Section 2.2.7) |
| Broadly agree: 41% |
| Neutral / no opinion:20% |
| Broadly disagree 39% |
| 5. Changes to provision for children aged 5 to 16 with Special Educational needs and/or disabilities (Section 3.1) |
| Broadly agree: 35% |
| Neutral / no opinion:22% |
| Broadly disagree 43% |

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| 6. Changes to transport provided on medical grounds (Section 3.2) | |
| Broadly agree: | 38% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 34% |
| Broadly disagree | 28% |

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| 7. Changes to types of travel assistance provided (Section 4) | |
| Broadly agree: | 37% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 29% |
| Broadly disagree | 34% |

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| 8. Changes to travel assistance for those not eligible for free home to school transport under this: children below statutory school age (Section 6.1) | |
| Broadly agree: | 36% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 30% |
| Broadly disagree | 35% |

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| 9. Changes to travel assistance for those not eligible for free home to school travel assistance under this policy: fare-paying options for non-eligible children (Section 6.2) | |
| Broadly agree: | 28% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 34% |
| Broadly disagree | 38% |

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| 10. Changes to exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance: a) change of address (Section 7) | |
| Broadly agree: | 58% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 18% |
| Broadly disagree | 24% |

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| 11. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance: b) Pupils living in temporary accommodations (Section 7) | |
| Broadly agree: | 40% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 29% |
| Broadly disagree | 31% |

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| 12. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance: d) changing schools (Section 7) | |
| Broadly agree: | 42% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 22% |
| Broadly disagree | 36% |

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| 13. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance: h) elective home education (EHE) and Education other than at school (EOTAS) (Section 7) | |
| Broadly agree: | 50% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 38% |
| Broadly disagree | 12% |

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| 14. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance *children in foster care and those in our care (Section 7) |
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| Broadly agree: 65% |
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| Neutral / no opinion: 24% |
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| Broadly disagree 8% |
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| 15. New policy: to limit the number of times a parent / carer can submit an application for travel assistance, when circumstances have not changed following a refusal |
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| Broadly agree: 60% |
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| Neutral / no opinion: 22% |
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| Broadly disagree 18% |
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| 16. New policy: New section to clarify circumstances that on their own will not make a child eligible for travel assistance |
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| Broadly agree: 46% |
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| Neutral / no opinion: 32% |
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| Broadly disagree 22% |
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| 17. End current practice of providing 'fare payer' travel assistance for pupils in post-16 education. |
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| Broadly agree: 14% |
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| Neutral / no opinion: 16% |
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| Broadly disagree 75% |
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Although it is noted that a significant percentage (70%) of responses oppose the proposal to end the current practice of providing fare payer travel assistance for post-16 students, WBC is facing significant financial pressures and must be more efficient in delivering much needed services. The proposed standard offer of transport assistance for students aged 16-19 is a Personal Transport Budget (PTB). Whilst it would replace council-organised transport (COT), which is often the most expensive travel option, the Council will continue to consider applications on a case-by-case basis, to establish if a more traditional form of travel assistance is necessary based on the assessment of needs and circumstances of the child and family.

Updates to the proposed Travel Assistance policy changes following formal consultation

Table 2 below provides an overview of the key proposed changes to the Travel Assistance Policies following the formal public consultation:

Table 2: Summary of feedback on consultation drafts of Travel Assistance Policies, and amendments made to the Policies in the light of this feedback

| Feedback on proposed Policies from consultation | Amendments and updates made to the Policies as a result |
|--|--|
| Changes to provision for children aged 5 to 16 with Special Educational needs and/or disabilities (Section 3.1) | The Council will work with local bus operators to introduce a reduced fare for concessionary passholders to enable young people with SEND to get to educational settings using local bus services (Reading Buses will be working with us on this). |
| The proposed standard offer of transport assistance for students aged 16-19 is a Personal Transport Budget (PTB) | The Council will continue to consider applications on a case-by-case basis, to establish if a more traditional form of travel assistance is necessary based on the assessment of needs and circumstances of the child and family |
| Changes to travel assistance for those not eligible for free home to school travel assistance under this policy: fare-paying options for non-eligible children (Section 6.2) | Under the new policy, the Council would continue to use low income as part of the main eligibility criteria for travel assistance. If a parent is struggling through financial hardship to get a child to school, then they should contact the Council for signposting to possible sources of additional help. |
| Supporting low-income families | The Council will prioritise seats for low-income families on any council arranged fare payer transport |

Timeline for implementation

The timeline for implementation of the proposed Travel Assistance Policies needs to reflect statutory requirements to have Home to School Transport/Travel Assistance Policies in place at least 6 weeks before the closing deadline for applications for School Places.

In light of this requirement, it is recommended that, subject to Member approval, the new Travel Assistance Policies apply to all applications for Travel Assistance taking effect from the start of the Academic Year September 2024, in order to ensure that Policies are in place to align with statutory timescales for school place applications, and to give parents and carers appropriate time to consider the terms of the new Travel Assistance Policies in the context of any applications for school places.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces unprecedented financial pressures as a result of; the longer term impact of the COVID-19 crisis, Brexit, the war in Ukraine and the general economic climate of rising prices and the increasing cost of debt. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are optimised and are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities. Expenditure on Home to School Transport / Travel Assistance

Table 3 shows the opening net budgets for Home to School Transport/Travel Assistance from FY20-21 to FY23/24:

Table 3: Opening net budgets FY20-21 to FY22-23 for HST/Travel Assistance

| | Primary (£'000) | Secondary (£'000) | SEND (£'000) | Foundry College (£'000) | Social Care Client Transport (£'000) | Total (£'000) |
|----------------------------|-----------------|-------------------|---|-------------------------|--------------------------------------|---------------|
| Opening net budget FY20-21 | 397 | 719 | 2,144 including post 16 (corrected was £2,381,800) | 109 | 91 | £3,460 |
| Opening net budget FY21-22 | 410 | 724 | 2,681 including post-16 | 109 | 91 | 4,015 |
| Opening net budget FY22-23 | 438 | 704 | 3,351 including post-16 (SEN IB 1,211 SEN OOB 2,140) | 90 | 91 | 4,674 |
| Opening net budget FY23-24 | 484 | 759 | 4,553 including post-16 (SEN IB 1,335 SEN OOB 3,218) | 90 | 91 | 5,977 |

Although comparisons of Opening Net Budgets for previous Financial Years show that the budget provision has continued to increase, it is important to note that most recent analysis estimates a cost pressure of approximately £1.5m in relation to Home to School Transport in FY23-24. This is on the basis of forecast increases in demand above that previously anticipated (driven mainly by forecast increases in children and young people with SEND requiring Travel Assistance) with total spend in FY23-24 forecast at approximately £7.5m. *Note that route optimisation continues through the summer and throughout September 2023 which means that there is a level of fluidity in the figures provided.

The profile of current utilisation of the service, which shows service users at Primary and Secondary stages, and children and young people with SEND, is set out in Table 5 below.

Table 4 shows that the largest customer group is SEND, followed by secondary mainstream. It is relevant to note that although children and young people with SEND account for just under 40% of HST/Travel Assistance customers, this utilisation accounts for approximately 70% of the total budget for HST/Travel Assistance. It is also relevant to note that in terms of any modelled/forecast budget pressures, the potential for increased demand relating to SEND Travel Assistance is by far the most significant driver.

Table 4: FY22-23 profile of HST/Travel Assistance service users

| | Primary | Secondary | SEND | Total |
|----------------------|----------------|------------------|-------------|--------------|
| Pupil Numbers | 167 | 414 | 443 | 1,024 |

The new Policies for Travel Assistance make an important contribution to ensuring the Council can continue to deliver an efficient and cost-effective transport service for those pupils who need it the most. The estimated reduction of spend from implementation of the Policies in the 2024 financial year are circa £190K, with additional spend reductions being felt in the years following.

Efficiencies arising directly from the proposed new Policies will relate to:

- More effective adherence to Policy eligibility criteria, terms and conditions
- Scaling back H2S TA offers to statutory requirements only

| Other Financial Information |
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| There will be continued over spend of the existing budget |

| Legal Implications arising from the Recommendation(s) |
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| The Council’s Legal Services has provided expert advice and guidance throughout the development of the proposals and the consultation. Dedicated programme resource has also ensured risks are considered and mitigated where possible. Further advice in relation to the robustness of the legal position on the policy changes proposed has been provided. |

| Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation |
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| A full stakeholder consultation was carried out between 14 th June and 21 st July 2023 |

| Public Sector Equality Duty |
|--|
| A full Equality Impact Assessment has been developed in parallel with the Travel Assistance Policy for children aged 5-16, and Travel Assistance Policy for young people aged 16+ with SEND. This work has been done to ensure that the Policies have been developed with appropriate regard to the public sector Equality Duty throughout the policy development process. An initial Equality Impact Assessment was carried out on the consultation draft versions of the new policies; outcomes from this Assessment also helped to inform the consultation document and questions put to the general public, in order to better understand the likely impact on equality and diversity issues that may arise if the policies were to be taken forward into implementation. The Full Equality Impact Assessment is attached as Annex 1 of this report. |

| Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030 |
|--|
| Please state clearly what the impact of the decision being made would be on the Council’s carbon neutral objective. |

| Reasons for considering the report in Closed Session |
|---|
| N/A |

| |
|----------------------------------|
| List of Background Papers |
|----------------------------------|

- | |
|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Annex 1: Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) on proposed new Travel Assistance Policies• Annex 2: Report on outcomes from formal public consultation• Annex 3: Home to School Travel Assistance Policy for children and young people 16 years old and under, including young people with SEND• Annex 4: Transport Assistance Policy for young people resident in Wokingham post-16, including young people with SEND |
|--|

| | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| Contact Ming Zhang | Service Education and SEND |
| Email: ming.zhang@wokingham.gov.uk | |

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Annex 1: Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) form: the full impact assessment

1. Process and guidance

The purpose of an EqIA is to make sure that the council is meeting the needs of all our residents by ensuring we consider how different groups of people may be affected by or experience a proposal in different ways. EqIAs help us to meet our [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) and where applicable the [Armed Forces Duty](#)

The council has a two stage EqIA process:

- Stage 1 - the initial impact assessment
- Stage 2 - the full impact assessment.

This form is for use at Stage 2 of the process. If an officer is undertaking a project, policy change, or service change and a negative impact has been identified at Stage 1 on a protected equality group then a full impact assessment must be completed. Guidance and tools for council officers can be accessed on the council's Tackling Inequality Together intranet pages.

| | |
|--|------------------------------------|
| Date started: | 12/07/2023 |
| Completed by: | Zoe Storey / Ngozi Fakeye |
| Service: | Children's Services |
| Project or policy EqIA relates to: | Review of Home to School Transport |
| Date EqIA discussed at service team meeting: | 18/07/23 |
| Equality Improvement Plan approved: | 18/07/23 |
| Signed off by (AD): | Ming Zhang |
| Sign off date: | 18/07/23 |

2. Consultation

During the initial impact review, it was found that some protected equality groups might be negatively impacted by the proposal. To further understand the potential impacts and decide what actions might be needed, the relevant equality groups should be consulted.

Please complete the table below for the relevant characteristics.

| Equality group | Date of consultation | Potential negative impacts identified | Changes or actions based on feedback from consultation |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------|---|---|
| Age | 14/06 – 21/07 2023 | Children under 5 and those in post-16 education will be disproportionately affected | <p>Promote independent travel training and in exceptional case-by case circumstances, consider personal budget.</p> <p>In line with its current policy, the Council will continue to consider applications on a case by case basis to establish if travel assistance is necessary based on the assessment of needs and circumstances of the child and family.</p> <p>Where appropriate, work with schools and families during the summer term to develop and enable independent travel opportunities.</p> |
| Disability | 14/06 – 21/07 2023 | Children and young people with special needs capacity to access education without travel assistance | <p>The eligibility criteria ensures that the majority of children and young people with demonstrable need are supported. The Council will continue to consider applications on a case-by-case basis, to</p> |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|---|---|
| | | | establish if a more traditional form of travel assistance is necessary based on the assessment of needs and circumstances of the child and family |
| Gender reassignment | | | |
| Marriage and Civil Partnership | | | |
| Pregnancy/Maternity | | | |
| Religious belief | | | |
| Race | | | |
| Sex | | | |
| Sexual Orientation | | | |
| Socio-economic disadvantage | 14/06 – 21/07 2023 | Financial pressure is increased on families and carers from socio-economic disadvantage | Under the new policy, we would continue to use low income as part of the main eligibility criteria for travel assistance. In line with its current policy, the Council will continue to consider applications on a case by case basis to establish if travel assistance is necessary based on the assessment of needs and circumstances of the child and family. |
| Armed Forces Communities | | | |

3. Equality improvement plan

The project owner must complete an Equality Improvement Plan. This improvement plan sets out the actions to minimise or remove negative impacts. It should also be used to action any opportunities to promote equality and understanding between communities that have been identified throughout the assessment.

The improvement plan should be a ‘live document’ and be updated and reviewed throughout the delivery of the proposal.

The improvement plan comprises:

- A. an assessment table
- B. an implementation table

Please complete Table A now and keep Table B up to date throughout delivery of the proposal.

Table A: Assessment table

| Equality group | Actions required | Expected outcome from actions | Responsible owner | How will the delivery of your actions be monitored | Review date (s) |
|-----------------------|---|--|--------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Age | Communicate changes and provide clear information on what the changes mean. | Awareness and understanding of what policy changes mean. | Ming Zhang | Data from nonattendance following policy implementation. | 31/01/24 |



| | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--|--|------------|--|----------|
| Disability | <p>Engage and communicate with families before the end of the Spring term to inform them of the changes to policy and the likely impact.</p> <p>Work with schools and families to identify alternative travel options and support to enable access to placement.</p> | Applications are better evidenced, and WBC officers are then able to make faster decisions to ensure the outcome of the application is known early enough. | Ming Zhang | Data from nonattendance following policy implementation. Data on numbers who are taking up travel training offers. Updates from dedicated SEND transport officer's case referrals. | 31/01/24 |
| Socio-economic disadvantage | <p>Engage and communicate with families before the end of the Spring term to inform them of the changes to policy and the likely impact.</p> <p>Work with schools and families to identify alternative travel options and support to enable access to placement.</p> | Awareness and understanding of what policy changes mean to help eligible families submit successful applications and where unsuccessful, understand how to appeal any decisions. | Ming Zhang | Data from nonattendance following policy implementation. | 31/01/24 |

Table B: Implementation table

| Notes from implementation | Actions completed | Impacts eliminated or mitigated |
|---------------------------|--|--|
| Comms plan | Following exec decision to implement Communicate changes widely | Applicants can have time to submit early and officers can have time to assess their application for quicker decision making. |
| | | |

| | | |
|--|--|--|
| | | |
|--|--|--|

4. Conclusion, sign-off & Publication

The completed EqIA must be reviewed by the management team for your service and submitted for sign-off to the relevant Assistant Director or project sponsor. The EqIA must then be attached to the project or policy paper to be considered by the Executive or other relevant committee and will be published to the council’s website.

Please complete the table below:

| | |
|--|--|
| Date of executive paper publication: | 04-08-2023 |
| How do you intend to communicate any changes to the affected groups? | Via direct contact with email and letters to those who have no emails. Via stakeholder leaders like SEND Voices and the schools. |
| Date of communication: | After the exec paper is approved and before admission applications open. 31- 08-2023 |

Annex 2:

Notes the outcomes of the 28 working day public consultation

260 members of the public responded to the formal public consultation on the Council’s website between 14th June and 21st July 2023.

Schools and current service users were notified of the consultation, given appropriate links to the consultation page, and notice of the closing dates. Officers also raised awareness of the consultation through e-newsletters and flagged the consultation in meetings with key stakeholders in the build-up to the consultation.

The consultation was promoted through the Council’s social media platforms, professional networks including schools, the Parent Carer Forum (SEND Voices Wokingham) network, and the Children with Additional Needs (CAN) Network.

The Council directly contacted service users and sent reminder communications throughout the consultation period.

90% of responses were from Wokingham residents and 65% of respondents were service users.

Participants of the survey were as follows.

| | |
|--|--------|
| A Wokingham borough resident | 90.63% |
| An elected borough councillor | 0.00% |
| A town or parish councillor | 0.00% |
| Representing an organisation | 4.17% |
| Completing the survey for someone else | 0.52% |
| Other (please specify): | 4.69% |

The survey responses have been categories as follows:

| |
|---|
| Broad agreement with proposed change greater % than disagreement |
| Broad disagree to proposed greater than agreement but less than 50% |
| Broad disagreement with proposed change greater than 50% |

Summary:

Total number of responses received: **260**

Total percentage broadly in support of the proposals: 46%

Total percentage neutral or without an opinion: 22%

Total percentage who broadly disagree: 32%

6. Proposed changes to definitions (Section 2,2.3b)

| | |
|----------------------|-----|
| Broadly agree: | 35% |
| Neutral/ no opinion: | 18% |
| Broadly disagree | 46% |

7. Proposed changes to qualifying school and parental preference (Section 2.2.4)

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Broadly agree: | 33% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 22% |
| Broadly disagree | 45% |

8. Proposed change to travel assistance during the school day and accompaniment (Section 2.2.6b)

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Broadly agree: | 38% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 32% |
| Broadly disagree | 30% |

9. Proposed changes to timing of assessment of eligibility (Section 2.2.7)

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Broadly agree: | 41% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 20% |
| Broadly disagree | 39% |

10. Changes to provision for children aged 5 to 16 with Special Educational needs and/or disabilities (Section 3.1)

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Broadly agree: | 35% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 22% |
| Broadly disagree | 43% |

11. Changes to transport provided on medical grounds (Section 3.2)

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Broadly agree: | 38% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 34% |
| Broadly disagree | 28% |

12. Changes to types of travel assistance provided (Section 4)

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Broadly agree: | 37% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 29% |
| Broadly disagree | 34% |

13. Changes to travel assistance for those not eligible for free home to school transport under this: children below statutory school age (Section 6.1)

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Broadly agree: | 36% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 30% |
| Broadly disagree | 35% |

14. Changes to travel assistance for those not eligible for free home to school travel assistance under this policy: fare-paying options for non-eligible children (Section 6.2)

| | |
|----------------|-----|
| Broadly agree: | 28% |
|----------------|-----|

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Neutral / no opinion: | 34% |
| Broadly disagree | 38% |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 15. Changes to exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance: a) change of address (Section 7) | |
| Broadly agree: | 58% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 18% |
| Broadly disagree | 24% |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 16. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance: b) Pupils living in temporary accommodations (Section 7) | |
| Broadly agree: | 40% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 29% |
| Broadly disagree | 31% |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 17. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance: d) changing schools (Section 7) | |
| Broadly agree: | 42% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 22% |
| Broadly disagree | 36% |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 18. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance: h) elective home education (EHE) and Education other than at school (EOTAS) (Section 7) | |
| Broadly agree: | 50% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 38% |
| Broadly disagree | 12% |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 19. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance *children in foster care and those in our care (Section 7) | |
| Broadly agree: | 65% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 24% |
| Broadly disagree | 8% |

| | |
|--|-----|
| 20. New policy: to limit the number of times a parent / carer can submit an application for travel assistance, when circumstances have not changed following a refusal | |
| Broadly agree: | 60% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 22% |
| Broadly disagree | 18% |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 21. New policy: New section to clarify circumstances that on their own will not make a child eligible for travel assistance | |
| Broadly agree: | 46% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 32% |
| Broadly disagree | 22% |

| | |
|---|--|
| 22. End current practice of providing 'fare payer' travel assistance for pupils in post-16 education. | |
|---|--|

| | |
|-----------------------|-----|
| Broadly agree: | 14% |
| Neutral / no opinion: | 16% |
| Broadly disagree | 75% |

Extract from the consultation portal.

260 responses

| 1. Are you responding as | | | | |
|--------------------------|--|--|------------------|----------------|
| Answer Choices | | | Response Percent | Response Total |
| 1 | A Wokingham borough resident | | 90.38% | 235 |
| 2 | An elected borough councillor | | 1.15% | 3 |
| 3 | A town or parish councillor | | 0.00% | 0 |
| 4 | Representing an organisation | | 3.85% | 10 |
| 5 | Completing the survey for someone else | | 0.38% | 1 |
| 6 | Other (please specify): | | 4.23% | 11 |
| | | | answered | 260 |
| | | | skipped | 0 |

| 3. Are you a parent / carer / guardian of a school-aged child or children? | | | | |
|--|-----|--|------------------|----------------|
| Answer Choices | | | Response Percent | Response Total |
| 1 | Yes | | 93.02% | 240 |
| 2 | No | | 6.98% | 18 |
| | | | answered | 258 |
| | | | skipped | 2 |

| 4. Do you have a child or children who currently receive any home to school travel assistance under our current home to school travel assistance policies? | | | | |
|--|-----|--|------------------|----------------|
| Answer Choices | | | Response Percent | Response Total |
| 1 | Yes | | 65.25% | 169 |
| 2 | No | | 34.75% | 90 |
| | | | answered | 259 |
| | | | skipped | 1 |

5. We have two home to school travel assistance policies, one for children aged 5 to 16, and another for children over 16.

Which policy(ies) do you want to comment on? If you would like to see the questions for both policies, please select both.

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|--|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Home to School Travel Assistance Policy for children resident in Wokingham aged 5 to 16, including children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) | 86.82% | 224 |
| 2 | Travel Assistance Policy for young people resident in Wokingham post-16, including young people with SEND | 41.86% | 108 |
| | | answered | 258 |
| | | skipped | 2 |

6. Section 2.2.3b Definitions

In this section, we are proposing to clarify how we measure distances from a child's home to their school. We would also clarify what we mean by a "suitable school", and what is meant by "nearest qualifying school".

Current policy

b) "Distances" will be measured from where the home meets the public street, for example from the front gate to the nearest gate or point of access to the school premises, and by the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk safely. As such, the route measured may include footpaths, bridleways, and other pathways, as well as recognised roads. Distances for Extended Rights are measured in the same way. The upper limits for Extended Rights transport are measured via the shortest road route.

c) "A suitable school" is defined in the Act as the nearest qualifying school with places available that provides education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child, and any Special Educational Needs and/or Disability that the child may have.

d) "Nearest qualifying school" means the nearest available and suitable school.

Proposed changes

b) We are proposing to add that distances will be measured in miles to two decimal places.

c) We are proposing to better clarify that a "suitable school", is a school that a child would have been offered a place at if they had applied.

d) We are proposing to clarify that a "nearest qualifying school" would include schools in neighbouring boroughs and is not always the same as a catchment school. The new definition would also describe under what circumstances travel assistance would be provided if the nearest qualifying school to the home address is full. Evidence would have to be provided by the parent/carer to show that they have applied for and been refused a place at the school which is the nearest school to their home address and any other schools closer than the school offering admission. This would include schools in neighbouring boroughs.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed changes?

| Answer Choices | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|------------------|----------------|
|----------------|------------------|----------------|

6. Section 2.2.3b Definitions

In this section, we are proposing to clarify how we measure distances from a child's home to their school. We would also clarify what we mean by a "suitable school", and what is meant by "nearest qualifying school".

Current policy

b) "Distances" will be measured from where the home meets the public street, for example from the front gate to the nearest gate or point of access to the school premises, and by the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk safely. As such, the route measured may include footpaths, bridleways, and other pathways, as well as recognised roads. Distances for Extended Rights are measured in the same way. The upper limits for Extended Rights transport are measured via the shortest road route.

c) "A suitable school" is defined in the Act as the nearest qualifying school with places available that provides education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child, and any Special Educational Needs and/or Disability that the child may have.

d) "Nearest qualifying school" means the nearest available and suitable school.

Proposed changes

b) We are proposing to add that distances will be measured in miles to two decimal places.

c) We are proposing to better clarify that a "suitable school", is a school that a child would have been offered a place at if they had applied.

d) We are proposing to clarify that a "nearest qualifying school" would include schools in neighbouring boroughs and is not always the same as a catchment school. The new definition would also describe under what circumstances travel assistance would be provided if the nearest qualifying school to the home address is full. Evidence would have to be provided by the parent/carer to show that they have applied for and been refused a place at the school which is the nearest school to their home address and any other schools closer than the school offering admission. This would include schools in neighbouring boroughs.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed changes?

| | | | | |
|---|----------------------------|--|----------|-----|
| 1 | Strongly agree | | 8.00% | 18 |
| 2 | Agree | | 27.11% | 61 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | | 16.44% | 37 |
| 4 | Disagree | | 17.78% | 40 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | | 28.89% | 65 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | | 1.78% | 4 |
| | | | answered | 225 |
| | | | skipped | 35 |

Comments: (76)

7. Section 2.2.4 Qualifying Schools and Parental Preference

The proposed change to this section is only to clarify the existing policy rather than to change it.

Current policy

The policy explains the eligibility criteria used when determining if a child qualifies for travel assistance.

Proposed change

For all children, including those with SEND, a child may not qualify for travel assistance unless they attend the nearest suitable school which meets their needs. If a parent selects a school which is not the nearest suitable school which meets their child's needs, and following discussion with the SEND team, parents may then be responsible for making their own travel arrangements and paying for all travel costs for the whole time that their child is at that school. For children attending a mainstream school who do not have an EHCP, if the nearest suitable school becomes full after the parent applies for a school place at a school that is not the nearest, free travel assistance to any alternative school, would not be provided. The nearest suitable school will not necessarily be listed as a catchment school.

To what extent do you agree that the proposed change makes the policy clearer?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 8.93% | 20 |
| 2 | Agree | 24.11% | 54 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 18.30% | 41 |
| 4 | Disagree | 16.96% | 38 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 28.57% | 64 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 3.13% | 7 |
| | | answered | 224 |
| | | skipped | 36 |
| Comments: (63) | | | |

8. Section 2.2.6b Travel Assistance during the school day and accompaniment: b) Accompaniment

This proposal would change the process for how we review these applications, rather than change the policy.

Current policy

We promote equality of opportunity for parents with disabilities. Where a parent’s disability prevents them from accompanying their child along a walking route that would be considered unsafe without adult supervision, a reasonable adjustment might be to provide free home to school travel assistance. Under the current policy, the adult social care team considers a parent’s disability and the transport team separately considers applications for travel assistance.

Proposed change

The new policy would direct adults who receive support from our adult social care team to contact their social worker if they have a disability which is impacting their ability to accompany their child along a walking route that would be considered unsafe without adult supervision.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed change?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 6.25% | 14 |
| 2 | Agree | 30.36% | 68 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 24.55% | 55 |
| 4 | Disagree | 15.63% | 35 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 14.73% | 33 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 8.48% | 19 |
| | | answered | 224 |
| | | skipped | 36 |
| Comments: (41) | | | |

9. Section 2.2.7 Timing of assessment of eligibility

This proposal would clarify when travel assistance would be reviewed following a child's eighth birthday.

Current policy

Where travel assistance is currently provided, it would normally be reviewed following the child's eighth birthday and then removed if the child is no longer eligible. The current policy does not specify the notice period parents / carers will receive before transport is removed following the review. A child under eight is eligible for travel assistance if their nearest suitable school is more than two miles away. A child over eight years old is eligible if their nearest suitable school is more than three miles away.

Proposed change

We are proposing to expand this section to clarify that when a child turns eight, their travel assistance would be reassessed. If a child no longer qualifies for travel assistance because their nearest suitable school is less than three miles away, the travel assistance would end at the end of the school term following the assessment.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed change?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 8.48% | 19 |
| 2 | Agree | 32.14% | 72 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 22.32% | 50 |
| 4 | Disagree | 17.41% | 39 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 16.96% | 38 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 2.68% | 6 |
| | | answered | 224 |
| | | skipped | 36 |
| Comments: (42) | | | |

10. Section 3.1 Provision for children aged 5 to 16 with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities

This proposal aims to clarify what happens when parents express a preference for a school to be named in an education and health care plan (EHCP).

Current policy

The current policy states that we have a responsibility to provide travel assistance for pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities who attend their nearest suitable school within the statutory walking distance from their home if they cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school because of mobility problems or associated health and safety issues related to their special education needs and/or disabilities.

Proposed change

We are proposing to clarify that for parents of children and young people with an EHCP, if they request that a school other than the nearest school which could meet their child's needs be named in the EHCP, travel assistance will not be provided unless the low income criteria are met.

To what extent do you agree that the proposed change makes the policy clearer?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 7.62% | 17 |
| 2 | Agree | 26.01% | 58 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 18.83% | 42 |
| 4 | Disagree | 15.70% | 35 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 26.91% | 60 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 4.93% | 11 |
| | | answered | 223 |
| | | skipped | 37 |
| Comments: (52) | | | |

11. Section 3.2 Transport Provided on Medical Grounds

This proposal would change the travel assistance available for pupils with temporary medical conditions.

Current policy

The current policy states that we will consider providing travel assistance for pupils with temporary medical conditions. Applications for travel assistance on this basis must be supported by appropriate evidence from a medical professional. If the child attends a school which is not their nearest suitable school, parents will normally be required to pay a contribution towards the costs and the assistance will be reviewed every half term.

Proposed change

National guidance requires councils to provide travel assistance to the nearest school which meets a child's needs, unless the low income criteria apply. We are proposing to amend our policy to bring it in line with national guidance, and to clarify what information is needed to apply for assistance and how long it will be provided for.

For applications for travel assistance based on medical grounds, the child or young person must be attending their nearest suitable school. The application must be supported by appropriate evidence from a medical professional, which would normally be a letter from a consultant, or another medical professional involved in the child's medical welfare. Travel assistance would only be provided for the time specified by the medical practitioner. If a time period has not been specified, or the medical condition is long term, we would review the situation at least once each term and may require further evidence.

To avoid excessive delays in assessing applications, we are proposing to add to the new policy that where additional medical evidence is requested, it must be provided within 20 working days or the application will be refused. If the medical evidence cannot be provided within 20 working days, an extension must be requested before the period expires.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed change?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 8.44% | 19 |
| 2 | Agree | 29.78% | 67 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 24.44% | 55 |
| 4 | Disagree | 17.33% | 39 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 11.11% | 25 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 8.89% | 20 |
| | | answered | 225 |
| | | skipped | 35 |
| Comments: (33) | | | |

12. Section 4. Types of Travel Assistance provided

This proposal would clarify the role of a personal assistant / escort and could require a parent to act as the escort for their child in certain circumstances. This applies to all children and young people who are eligible for travel assistance.

Current policy

The current policy states that the types of transport assistance that might be offered include, but are not limited to: A parent consenting to use their car in return for payment of a mileage allowance; A parent consenting to a walking escort or responsible adult to escort the young person on public transport; Training and support to travel independently (see Independent Travel Training section below for more details); Free passes for children on public transport; Provision of a seat on a dedicated school bus or minibus; or A seat in a taxi, usually shared with one or more other pupils, where a pupil's needs require more personalised arrangements.

Proposed change

The new policy would clarify that the role of a personal assistant / escort is to accompany a child when travelling within a council commissioned vehicle when the child or young person has additional needs that mean that they cannot travel in a vehicle without one. In some circumstances personal assistants / escorts may also be provided as part of a travel training arrangement to encourage greater independence for a young person and to help with the transition to adulthood.

The new policy proposes that if a child attends a school within the statutory walking distance (two miles for children under eight years old; three miles for children eight years old and older) and a personal assistant /escort is required, the council may request that a parent act as the personal assistant / escort. We would make the decision about asking a parent to accompany their child based on the type of transport provided.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed change?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 7.62% | 17 |
| 2 | Agree | 29.15% | 65 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 23.32% | 52 |
| 4 | Disagree | 18.83% | 42 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 15.25% | 34 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 5.83% | 13 |
| | | answered | 223 |
| | | skipped | 37 |
| Comments: (49) | | | |

13. Section 6.1 Travel Assistance for those not eligible for free home to school transport under this policy: Children below statutory school age

This proposal would remove all travel assistance for children under the age of five.

Current policy

There is no statutory duty to provide travel assistance for those under the age of five. Under the current policy, we provide travel assistance for children under the age of five on a case-by-case basis.

Proposed change

We are proposing to remove any travel assistance for children under the age of five.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed change?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 11.71% | 26 |
| 2 | Agree | 23.42% | 52 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 23.87% | 53 |
| 4 | Disagree | 12.61% | 28 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 22.52% | 50 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 5.86% | 13 |
| | | answered | 222 |
| | | skipped | 38 |
| Comments: (43) | | | |

14. Section 6.2 Travel assistance for those not eligible for free home to school travel assistance under this policy: fare-paying options for non-eligible children

This proposal would continue to use the low income criteria for eligibility, but remove the extra discount for pupils from low income families who purchase a 'fare paying' seat on council commissioned school coaches and change how refunds are handled.

Current policy

If a pupil does not qualify for free travel assistance under the existing policy, a seat may be purchased on an existing contract vehicle where a seat is available, subject to certain conditions. This is called a 'fare payer fee' and is currently set at £785 per year. If a family are on a low income, we currently give them a 50 percent discount on the fare payer fee.

Proposed change

National guidance does not require councils to make seats available on a fare payer fee basis on council commissioned school transport. Where fare payer seats are made available, these are at the council's discretion, and under our terms and conditions.

Under the new policy, we would continue to use low income as part of the main eligibility criteria for travel assistance, but no further discount for students from low income families would be given.

Where an annual pass has been purchased from the council and is no longer required, we are proposing to change the refund policy so that a refund would be provided for full school terms only. To receive a refund against an annual pass, the bus pass must be returned to the community transport team and then a refund will be processed from the start of the next school term for which the pass was valid.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed change?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 5.83% | 13 |
| 2 | Agree | 21.52% | 48 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 26.01% | 58 |
| 4 | Disagree | 20.63% | 46 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 17.94% | 40 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 8.07% | 18 |
| | | answered | 223 |
| | | skipped | 37 |
| Comments: (40) | | | |

15. Section 7. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance: a) Change of address

The proposed change to this section is only to clarify the existing policy rather than to change it.

Current policy

When a family moves house, they need to let us know as soon as possible, as eligibility for travel assistance will need to be reviewed.

Proposed change

We are proposing to make it clear that when a family already receives travel assistance and they move house, they will need to reapply for travel assistance. When this happens, travel assistance will only be provided to the child's existing school if a place has been applied for at the nearest suitable school to the new address, and a place is refused due to the year group being full.

We are also proposing that the policy strongly advises parents to check the availability of school places before moving house, as there are no guarantees that places will be available at a new school.

To what extent do you agree that the proposed change makes the policy clearer?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 10.67% | 24 |
| 2 | Agree | 46.67% | 105 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 16.00% | 36 |
| 4 | Disagree | 7.56% | 17 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 15.11% | 34 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 4.00% | 9 |
| | | answered | 225 |
| | | skipped | 35 |
| Comments: (32) | | | |

16. Section 7. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance: b) Pupils living in temporary accommodation

This proposal would limit the length of time travel assistance is provided for when a pupil is in temporary accommodation.

Current policy

For children aged five to 16 and living in council arranged temporary accommodation, travel assistance may be provided for a limited period. The policy does not specify how long the assistance will be provided.

Proposed change

We are proposing that pupils living in council arranged temporary accommodation, which is three miles or more from their current school, would be offered travel assistance for a limited period of time (generally one term). Any further travel assistance would be subject to the usual eligibility criteria.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed change?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 5.86% | 13 |
| 2 | Agree | 34.23% | 76 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 20.27% | 45 |
| 4 | Disagree | 15.32% | 34 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 15.32% | 34 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 9.01% | 20 |
| | | answered | 222 |
| | | skipped | 38 |
| Comments: (39) | | | |

17. Section 7. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance: d) Changing schools

We are proposing to add a new subsection to Section 7 called 'managed moves'.

Current policy

When a family decide to change their child's school after they have started, the current policy states that any transport assistance that has been provided will need to be reassessed.

Proposed change

We are proposing to clarify that when a school and a parent agree that it is in a child's best interest to change schools (which is referred to as a 'managed move'), any future travel assistance would need to be reassessed. If a child currently has travel assistance and moves to a school further away, they would be reassessed and if the new school is not their nearest suitable school, they would no longer qualify for travel assistance.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed change?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 7.66% | 17 |
| 2 | Agree | 33.78% | 75 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 17.12% | 38 |
| 4 | Disagree | 20.72% | 46 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 15.32% | 34 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 5.41% | 12 |
| | | answered | 222 |
| | | skipped | 38 |
| Comments: (39) | | | |

18. Section 7. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance: h) Elective Home Education (EHE) and Education Other Than at School (EOTAS)

We are proposing to change the way we process applications for pupils who have education other than at school (EOTAS).

Current policy

The current policy states where we arrange for a pupil to have education other than at school, we will provide travel assistance subject to the normal eligibility rules.

Proposed change

Under the current policy, we pay mileage for students who receive education other than at school. We are proposing to instead work with families whose children and young people receive EOTAS packages to build travel assistance funding into the overall EOTAS funding package. This would remove the need to submit separate travel assistance mileage claims.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed change?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 10.36% | 23 |
| 2 | Agree | 40.09% | 89 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 27.48% | 61 |
| 4 | Disagree | 4.95% | 11 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 6.76% | 15 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 10.36% | 23 |
| | | answered | 222 |
| | | skipped | 38 |

Comments: (22)

19. Section 7. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance

We are proposing to change the way we process applications for children in foster and those in our care.

Current policy

The current policy does not clearly specify which team a foster carer should approach in relation to travel assistance. Requests are often submitted to the child's social care team and then forwarded to the transport team to deal with. As a result, families need to deal with several different departments.

Proposed change

We are proposing to have the need for travel assistance be considered by the children's social care team who are responsible for foster children and those in our care. Any funding for travel assistance would then be provided as part of the overall care package.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed change?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 13.39% | 30 |
| 2 | Agree | 51.34% | 115 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 19.64% | 44 |
| 4 | Disagree | 3.57% | 8 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 4.02% | 9 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 8.04% | 18 |
| | | answered | 224 |
| | | skipped | 36 |
| Comments: (14) | | | |

20. New policy section

This proposal would limit the number of times a parent / carer can submit an application for travel assistance, when the circumstances have not changed following a refusal.

Current policy

The current policy does not specify how many times an applicant can apply for travel assistance.

Proposed change

Create a new section

As the current policy does not specify how many times an applicant can submit an application, there are times when applicants repeatedly apply, even though it has already been refused and the circumstances have not changed. Reviewing these applications is not an efficient use of the council's limited resources.

We are proposing to limit the number of times an applicant can apply so applications would only be considered once by the community transport team, once at Stage 1 appeal and once at Stage 2 appeal. The only exception to this is if there has been a change in circumstances and then a new application may be made.

To what extent do you agree with the proposed change?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 12.95% | 29 |
| 2 | Agree | 44.64% | 100 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 21.43% | 48 |
| 4 | Disagree | 9.38% | 21 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 8.93% | 20 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 2.68% | 6 |
| | | answered | 224 |
| | | skipped | 36 |
| Comments: (23) | | | |

21. New policy section

This proposal would add a new section.

Current policy

We would like to add a new section to the policy that clarifies certain circumstances that on their own will not make a child eligible for travel assistance.

Proposed change

Create a new section

The following circumstances will not be considered in evaluating whether a child meets the eligibility criteria for travel assistance. This does not mean that a child that meets one or more of the criteria below will not receive assistance, but that they will not receive assistance solely because of the following:

- Journeys to and from breakfast or after school clubs
- Trips and journeys during the school day which are in the curriculum
- To or from a venue that isn't your normal home address, for example the address of a childcare provider or a short break placement (unless there is a legal order in place, or a statutory care plan agreed by us)
- If your child is unwell and has to be collected from school during a school day
- If your child is excluded during a school day
- For medical appointments or other approved activities which affect the start or end of and during the school day
- If a child has missed the contracted transport
- For transitional/integration placements in schools/colleges
- For attendance at work experience programmes
- If a child is withdrawn from school by their family and placed in an alternative education setting
- To fall in line with other family members travelling in the same/similar direction
- Work commitments or domestic difficulties of parents/carers including taking other children to school or a pick-up point
- Parents are unwilling, or unavailable to escort their child to school or pick-up point
- Single parent families
- Children in temporary care, including foster care
- An inability to afford existing transport arrangement, for example, resulting from loss of employment
- Family breakdown and fragmentation
- Long-term or temporary medical conditions without sufficient medical evidence from an appropriate medical professional

To what extent do you agree with the proposed change?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 9.38% | 21 |
| 2 | Agree | 36.61% | 82 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 25.00% | 56 |
| 4 | Disagree | 9.38% | 21 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 12.50% | 28 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 7.14% | 16 |
| | | answered | 224 |
| | | skipped | 36 |
| Comments: (34) | | | |

22. This proposal would end our current practice of providing 'fare payer' travel assistance for pupils in post-16 education.

Current policy

For young people aged 16 to 19 in post-16 education, the current policy provides the option of travel assistance at a set rate of £785 per year, called a 'fare payer fee', in the following circumstances: When we have surplus seats available on council commissioned school coaches; and / or When the young person has additional needs

Proposed change

National guidance states that councils do not have to provide free transport for students aged 16 to 19 or to make available any transport provision based on a financial contribution from families, which is often known as a 'fare payer fee'.

We propose updating our policy to be in line with national guidance, which means we will no longer offer a 'fare payer fee'.

For post-16 pupils with additional needs, we are keen to encourage independent travel to help with the transition into adulthood. We propose supporting young people aged 16 to 19 who qualify for travel assistance based on their needs, with a personal budget and skills training, commonly known as 'travel training' instead of the current 'fare payer fee'.

To what extent do you agree with this proposal?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Strongly agree | 4.63% | 5 |
| 2 | Agree | 9.26% | 10 |
| 3 | Neither agree nor disagree | 8.33% | 9 |
| 4 | Disagree | 24.07% | 26 |
| 5 | Strongly disagree | 50.93% | 55 |
| 6 | Don't know / no opinion | 2.78% | 3 |
| | | answered | 108 |
| | | skipped | 152 |
| Comments: (70) | | | |

27. What town or parish do you live in?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|---------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Arborfield and Newland | 1.52% | 3 |
| 2 | Barkham | 2.54% | 5 |
| 3 | Charvil | 0.51% | 1 |
| 4 | Earley | 15.23% | 30 |
| 5 | Finchampstead | 7.61% | 15 |
| 6 | Hurst | 0.51% | 1 |
| 7 | Remenham | 1.02% | 2 |
| 8 | Ruscombe | 0.00% | 0 |
| 9 | Shinfield | 15.74% | 31 |
| 10 | Sonning | 0.51% | 1 |
| 11 | Swallowfield | 1.52% | 3 |
| 12 | Twyford | 5.08% | 10 |
| 13 | Wargrave | 2.54% | 5 |
| 14 | Winnersh | 3.05% | 6 |
| 15 | Wokingham | 23.86% | 47 |
| 16 | Wokingham Without | 3.05% | 6 |
| 17 | Woodley | 10.15% | 20 |
| 18 | Don't know | 1.52% | 3 |
| 19 | Outside Wokingham borough | 4.06% | 8 |
| | | answered | 197 |
| | | skipped | 63 |

28. What sex/gender do you identify as?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|-------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Female | 72.50% | 145 |
| 2 | Male | 26.50% | 53 |
| 3 | Transgender | 0.00% | 0 |
| 4 | Prefer not to say | 1.00% | 2 |
| 5 | Other (please specify): | 0.00% | 0 |
| | | answered | 200 |
| | | skipped | 60 |

29. How old are you?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|---------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | 17 or younger | 0.50% | 1 |
| 2 | 18-20 | 0.00% | 0 |
| 3 | 21-29 | 0.00% | 0 |
| 4 | 30-39 | 10.95% | 22 |
| 5 | 40-49 | 52.74% | 106 |
| 6 | 50-59 | 29.35% | 59 |
| 7 | 60 or older | 6.47% | 13 |
| | | answered | 201 |
| | | skipped | 59 |

30. What race or ethnicity best describes you?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------------------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Arabic | 0.50% | 1 |
| 2 | Asian/British Asian: Bangladeshi | 0.00% | 0 |
| 3 | Asian/British Asian: Chinese | 2.49% | 5 |
| 4 | Asian/British Asian: Indian | 3.48% | 7 |
| 5 | Asian/British Asian: Pakistani | 2.99% | 6 |
| 6 | Black/British Black: African | 2.49% | 5 |
| 7 | Black/British Black: Caribbean | 0.50% | 1 |
| 8 | White: British | 70.15% | 141 |
| 9 | White: Other | 9.95% | 20 |
| 10 | Mixed race | 1.00% | 2 |
| 11 | Gypsy/Traveller | 0.00% | 0 |
| 12 | Prefer not to say | 3.48% | 7 |
| 13 | Other (please specify): | 2.99% | 6 |
| | | answered | 201 |
| | | skipped | 59 |

31. What do you consider your religion to be?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|----------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Buddhism | 1.00% | 2 |

31. What do you consider your religion to be?

| | | | | |
|---|-------------------------|--|----------|-----|
| 2 | Christianity | | 39.30% | 79 |
| 3 | Hinduism | | 2.99% | 6 |
| 4 | Islam | | 3.48% | 7 |
| 5 | Judaism | | 0.00% | 0 |
| 6 | Sikhism | | 0.50% | 1 |
| 7 | No religion | | 41.79% | 84 |
| 8 | Prefer not to say | | 8.96% | 18 |
| 9 | Other (please specify): | | 1.99% | 4 |
| | | | answered | 201 |
| | | | skipped | 59 |

32. Which of the following terms best describes your sexual orientation?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total | |
|----------------|-------------------------|------------------|----------------|-----|
| 1 | Asexual | 2.01% | 4 | |
| 2 | Bisexual | 3.02% | 6 | |
| 3 | Gay | 0.50% | 1 | |
| 4 | Lesbian | 1.01% | 2 | |
| 5 | Heterosexual/Straight | 79.40% | 158 | |
| 6 | Prefer not to say | 13.07% | 26 | |
| 7 | Other (please specify): | 1.01% | 2 | |
| | | | answered | 199 |
| | | | skipped | 61 |

33. Have you undertaken any form of sex/gender reassignment?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total | |
|----------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|-----|
| 1 | Yes | 0.00% | 0 | |
| 2 | No | 91.92% | 182 | |
| 3 | Prefer not to say | 8.08% | 16 | |
| | | | answered | 198 |
| | | | skipped | 62 |

34. Are you currently pregnant or have you given birth within the last year?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Yes | 1.50% | 3 |
| 2 | No | 84.50% | 169 |
| 3 | Not applicable | 9.00% | 18 |
| 4 | Prefer not to say | 5.00% | 10 |
| | | answered | 200 |
| | | skipped | 60 |

35. Do you have a disability, long-term illness or health condition?

| Answer Choices | | Response Percent | Response Total |
|----------------|-------------------|------------------|----------------|
| 1 | Yes | 13.93% | 28 |
| 2 | No | 78.11% | 157 |
| 3 | Prefer not to say | 7.96% | 16 |
| | | answered | 201 |
| | | skipped | 59 |

Selection of comments received:

| Theme | Comments |
|---|---|
| School suitability and choice | <p>I wanted my son to go to a single-sexed school, so the nearest school was not suitable. You should get travel assistance to whichever school you choose is right for your child, regardless of the distance.</p> <p>I do not quite agree with the new changes on "suitable school," the school allocated by the council to the children may not be the school they applied due to insufficient school places available.</p> <p>By including the section on the suitable school, you reduce the parents' right to choose a school. If this wasn't including sen children with EHCPs then i'd have been ok with it, but i don't like how you're proposing to word this as it should be about the right school meeting needs. For children with special needs, the definition of a "suitable school" is too vague and could be misinterpreted.</p> <p>It should allow for the knowledge and skills of the professionals involved with the child to select a school that may not be the nearest conveniently available to the council. The child's needs are more important than the council's financial affairs; this is not an area in which the council should be trying to reduce expenditure.</p> |
| Catchment area considerations and fairness | <p>Changing boundaries when a sibling is already at one school should not affect other siblings when they apply later down the line. You should not be including schools that are not of catchment.</p> <p>If they are not available for us to choose from when we are making our options, then other local schools should be ruled out of the equation. It feels unfair to exclude kids from traveling to a school inside their catchment if there is an available school outside of their catchment.</p> |
| Proximity and distance considerations | <p>Part c is not logical because no one knows if a child would have been offered a place at their nearest straight-line distance school unless they actually applied, as schools have different admission oversubscription criteria.</p> <p>Nearest school surely isn't the only variable with children with disabilities. The phrase 'suitable' is open to wild interpretation, and the current administration and officers, unfortunately, do not have the ability to make such a decision.</p> <p>To my mind, the distance should be measured from the child's home to the agreed school that they are attending.</p> |

| | |
|---|--|
| Concerns about transport assistance and decision process | <p>If the child was not offered a place at their catchment school (which is a whole other issue!), then the school they are offered should be their defined school.</p> <p>I believe these proposed changes will be detrimental to the local families. It is not acceptable to not be offered a place in the local catchment school due to over-subscription and have to pay to get your child to the neighbouring borough school.</p> <p>You need to look at the school capacity and keep children local as much as possible. I really feel that this will impact on children's attendance rates if you are expecting the parents to pay for transport further than their local catchment school.</p> |
| Concerns about schools in neighbouring boroughs | <p>I feel very strongly that it should not include schools in neighbouring boroughs. One reason people live in Wokingham borough is because of the quality of the schools and shouldn't be disadvantaged because Wokingham council hasn't made enough provision for education.</p> <p>Residents do not have influence over councils in neighbouring boroughs, they can't vote for the councillors who influence neighbouring boroughs and ultimately impact the schools.</p> |
| Travel assistance for children with special needs | <p>Eg my local school is maiden earley, oak bank was not of catchment and was not an option, my daughter has been sent to bulmersche by the council. That is 3.1 miles walking distance. Under your new proposal, i would not get council support because oak bank is closer, even though it is not of catchment and was not available as an option. Special needs differ per child; sen school, for example, Addington, would not be suitable for my lad who needed a school specializing in attachment trauma and ptsd, for example.the nearest sen school is not necessarily right for all children with a sen ehcp. It's too complex for that.</p> |
| Impact on send children | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - concerns about the proposed change disproportionately affecting children with special educational needs and disabilities (send). - clear discussions are needed to consider why another school may be chosen for a child with send, as not all sen schools will be suitable for every child with special needs. - parents cannot be held liable for transport costs in disputes regarding "nearest qualifying school," especially for children with send. - the proposed change may penalize send children, which may not be fair considering a particular school may be necessary for them. - it is essential to ensure children with send are adequately supported, even if it means providing transport to a school that can better cater to their needs. |
| Parental choice and preference | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - parents should have the right to choose the most suitable school for their children, and any assistance should be provided within reason. - removing parental choice and enforcing a school chosen by the la might be considered discriminatory, especially for children with disabilities. |

| | |
|---|--|
| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - concerns about the onus being put on parents to prove when the closest school became full, leading to potential challenges and unnecessary work for parents and schools. - the proposed change may negatively impact families with multiple children, especially when siblings need to attend the same school for practical reasons. |
| Impact on school capacity and catchments | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - worries about schools becoming full and the implications for travel assistance eligibility, especially for mainstream children without EHCPs. - some parents are concerned that if the nearest suitable school is not within catchment, it might not be considered a viable choice, limiting their options. - concerns about potential increased traffic and safety issues if parents have to drive children to schools farther away due to lack of travel assistance. - disagreements with the proposed change's handling of school capacities and its potential impact on available alternatives for children who applied to schools not within the nearest suitable school's catchment. |
| Clarification of eligibility criteria | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - acknowledgment of the proposed change's potential to provide better clarity on eligibility criteria for travel assistance. - the change is seen as positive in terms of clarifying eligibility requirements, but some question if it's fair in practice. - some respondents appreciate the proposal's aim to clarify the concept of the "nearest suitable school," especially for children with SEND, but still have reservations about its implementation and potential consequences. |
| Practical considerations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - some practical concerns raised about the difficulty of proving when the nearest school became full, especially for SEND parents already facing challenges in daily life. - worries about the added workload for schools in dealing with transport assistance requests and queries. - criticisms about allocating funds for unnecessary projects (e.g., cycleway design) while cutting provisions for bussing children to school. |
| Safety and well-being | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - emphasis on the importance of a child feeling safe and settled at a school, especially for children with EHCPs and SEND. - concerns about the safety and well-being of vulnerable children, especially if they have to travel long distances via unreliable public transport. - worries about disruptions in a child's education due to unnecessary changes in school placement. |

Miscellaneous

- some respondents express disbelief or frustration with the proposed change or the overall policy. - comments about unfairness and challenges faced by families due to the proposed change. - concerns about how the proposed change may interact with other aspects of school placement and funding. - some comments suggest that the proposed change may not align well with the reality of school choices and placements, especially with the proliferation of academies and their individual application criteria. - questions raised about the impact of SENDIST (special educational needs and disability tribunal) rulings on the LA's local policy

Question 8

| Theme | Comments |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Impact on disabled parents | <p>- concerns that the proposed change may create additional stress and burden for disabled parents, who are already dealing with amplified stress.</p> <p>-worries that the change might negatively impact vulnerable parents, making the process more complicated for them.</p> <p>- some respondents question the decision to rely on disabled parents to sort out accompaniments and express concern about the child being penalized if the adult is unable or unwilling to do so.</p> <p>- worries about passing the responsibility to disabled parents without adequate support or resources to address their needs.</p> <p>- some see the proposed change as discriminatory against the most vulnerable, and it may not adequately consider various medical conditions that can affect a parent's ability to accompany their child to school.</p> |
| Impact on social workers | <p>- concerns about social workers' capacity and workload, and worries that they might not have enough time to effectively help with the added responsibility of assessing travel assistance applications for parents with disabilities.</p> <p>- some respondents question whether social workers have the capacity to handle additional work and worry about possible delays in obtaining support for parents and children.</p> |

- worries about increasing handovers between teams and the divide between adult social care and transport teams, potentially impacting children's attendance levels.

Lack of clarity and explanation

- some comments express confusion about the proposed changes, as the question lacks clarity in differentiating between what is being removed and what is staying in the current policy.

- some respondents request more information about the intended effects of the proposed changes and their implications for parents with disabilities and their children.

- the question does not address parents who do not have a social worker and are not currently receiving support from the adult social care team, leaving them uncertain about how the proposed changes would apply to their situation.

Practical considerations

- some respondents agree with the proposed change if it simplifies the process for disabled parents, but they emphasize the importance of quick access to a social worker for effective support.

- worries about complicating the process for parents and the potential impacts on children with special needs who may currently travel independently.

- some suggest that if the proposed change adds extra hurdles or delays in obtaining support, they would not agree with the change.

- questions raised about the reason for the change and the need for further clarification on its implications.

Inclusivity concerns

- worries about the proposed change not being inclusive, especially if it relies on the parent's ability to sort out accompaniments and potentially penalizes the child when the adult cannot fulfill this responsibility.

- concerns that the proposed change might not adequately support vulnerable parents.

- comments questioning the fairness of the proposed change, considering the potential negative impact on already vulnerable parents and children with special needs.

Expertise and decision-making

- some respondents question the competence of social workers to make decisions about travel assistance for parents with disabilities, emphasizing the need for professionals with relevant expertise in logistics and transport to handle such matters.
 - worries that the decision-making process might be less effective if given to social workers rather than specialized professionals.
 - doubts about social workers' ability to make informed decisions regarding travel assistance applications.
-

Disagreement with the proposed change

- some comments express disagreement with the proposed change without specific reasons given.
 - emphasis on the preference for the current policy or lack of acceptance for any change in the process.
-

Concerns about additional workload

- some respondents express concerns about increasing the workload for social workers, who may already be stretched and may not have the capacity to handle additional tasks related to assessing travel assistance applications for parents with disabilities.
 - doubts about the social care team's ability to take on further workload and additional responsibilities.
-

Lack of justification for the change

- some comments express skepticism or dissatisfaction with the lack of explanation or justification provided for the proposed change.
 - concerns that the question does not provide a reason for the change or adequately explain its purpose and potential benefits.
-

Safety and well-being

- concerns about the safety and well-being of the child, especially when relying on disabled parents to manage accompaniments, particularly if they are unable to fulfill this responsibility safely.
-

- worries about the potential negative impact on the child if the proposed change results in them not receiving assistance when they normally would.

Miscellaneous

- miscellaneous comments express frustration, disapproval, or concern about the proposed change without specifying the reasons for such sentiments.

- questions and doubts about the effectiveness and practicality of the proposed change without further explanation or justification.

Question 9

| Theme | Comments |
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| Safety and age | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- concerns about the safety of young children, particularly those aged 8, walking long distances (e.g., 3 miles) to school without adult supervision- some comments highlight that children under 11 should not be walking two miles, and children under 16 should not be walking three miles.- worries about the suitability of the proposed policy for children aged 8, and suggestions to reconsider the age criteria or set different criteria based on individual cases and their specific needs.- questions about the safety and ability of an 8-year-old child to travel unsupervised, especially if they have a disability. |
| Individual considerations | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- suggestions to assess each case individually, taking into account the unique circumstances of the child and their needs.- worries about the impact on children with special needs or disabilities and whether the proposed change considers their specific requirements.- concerns about potential negative effects on children attending existing specialist schools if new, nearer suitable schools are built, leading to changes in school or the loss of school transport.- emphasis on the need to consider disabilities and individual cases rather than solely relying on distance criteria. |
| Transition and notice period | <ul style="list-style-type: none">- suggested improvements to the policy by providing a specific number of weeks' notice period (e.g., 6 weeks) if a child is no longer eligible for transport assistance, allowing parents sufficient time to make alternative arrangements. |

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| - some comments highlight that the policy should end at the end of the school year, not mid-year, to minimize disruptions for children and families. | |
| - questions raised about what support would be in place to help a child during the transition if they have to change schools due to the proposed changes in travel assistance eligibility. | |
| Lack of clarity and justification | <p>- some comments express confusion or lack of clarity about the rationale behind the 3-mile distance criteria for travel assistance eligibility.</p> <p>- worries about the lack of consideration for disabilities in the proposed policy and how decisions are made.</p> <p>- some respondents question the justification for the proposed change and express concerns about the possibility of travel assistance being withdrawn for children over a 1-mile difference.</p> |
| Review frequency and parental notice | <p>- suggestions for annual transport arrangement reviews, allowing parents to plan accordingly each year.</p> <p>- requests for at least 2 to 3 months' notice to parents if changes in eligibility occur, enabling them to make necessary adjustments.</p> <p>- some respondents express the need for clear communication to parents during the initial qualification process for transport assistance.</p> <p>- some comments express agreement with the policy clarification, offering positive feedback on its definition.</p> |
| Budgetary impact and resource allocation | <p>- some comments express concern about potential budgetary implications and the impact on children if school transport provision is changed based on new availability of places elsewhere.</p> <p>- criticisms about the allocation of resources, particularly in light of other investments, such as a cycleway design, while cutting provisions for school transport.</p> <p>- worries about potential policy changes being driven by budget considerations rather than focusing on the well-being and safety of children.</p> |
| Support and transition | <p>- questions raised about the support available for children during the transition if they need to change schools due to changes in travel assistance eligibility.</p> <p>some respondents suggest that support and safe routes to school for all children should be a priority, promoting independence.</p> <p>- worries about the impact on single parents and those who are less able to travel without assistance.</p> |

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| Disagreement with the proposed change | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - some comments express disagreement with the proposed change without providing specific reasons for their dissent. - some respondents express concern about the proposed policy ending at age 8 or being withdrawn from children over a 1-mile difference. |
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Question 10

| Theme | Comments |
|------------------------------------|---|
| Financial considerations | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - suggestions to consider the financial situation of parents who may not fit the low-income criteria but still face challenges in affording transport to a school that is further away. - proposal for parents to contribute financially if they can afford to do so, rather than removing assistance completely. - concerns about penalizing parents who choose a school based on their child's needs, especially if it is not the closest school deemed suitable by the local authority (la). - criticisms about the potential impact on children with special needs and disabilities, who may face additional struggles and disadvantages. |
| Individual needs and choice | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - calls for special considerations and assessments to be given to parents and carers based on their individual situations and needs. - worries about the policy's lack of consideration for parental views and preferences when selecting a school that best meets their child's needs. - concerns about the policy's impact on parental choice, removing the right to choose a school that parents believe is most suitable for their child, even if it is not the closest. - emphasis on the importance of considering the welfare and well-being of the child when making decisions about school transport. |
| Suitability of schools | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - disagreements with the la's view of suitable schools, with some parents highlighting significant differences between the la's perspective and their own when choosing a school for their child with special needs or disabilities. - worries about the potential negative consequences on children if placed in schools deemed suitable by the la but not considered appropriate by parents based on their knowledge and experience with their child's needs. - concerns about the suitability of certain schools for children with EHCPs and whether the proposed changes consider the diverse needs of children with special needs. |
| Transparency and clarity | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - criticisms about the lack of clarity and transparency in the proposed policy changes, with some comments suggesting that the presented changes are not a clarification but an actual policy change. - concerns about the policy's wording and the potential for misinterpretation or ambiguity. - questions about the practical implications and impact on transport assistance for children attending alternative provision or specialist settings if the distance criteria are removed. |

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| Budgetary impact and resource allocation | - criticisms about budgetary decisions, with some comments expressing frustration over allocating funds for projects (e.g., cycleway design) while cutting school transport provisions, especially for children with special needs. - worries about the potential pressure on the borough to provide a broader range of schools capable of supporting children with various needs, and the associated costs and resource allocation required to meet those needs. - criticisms about decisions being driven by convenience and cost-cutting rather than focusing on the well-being of children. |
| Impact on send children and families | - concerns about the disproportionate impact of the proposed changes on children with special needs and their families, who already face significant challenges in navigating the education system and obtaining the right support. - criticisms about the potential negative effects on children with EHCPS if the local authority disagrees with parents on what provision is right for their child, potentially leading to the removal of transport assistance or placement changes that can be disruptive to the child's education and personal development. - calls for greater consideration of the child's voice and the individual needs of children with send. |
| Support for parents and children | - suggestions for policies to be done on a case-by-case basis, taking into account parents' research and discussions with potential schools to determine what is best for the child. - calls for policies to be designed to make the lives of parents with children with EHCPS easier, considering the significant challenges they already face. - worries about the lack of support and services for children with disabilities and special needs if the travel assistance is reduced or removed. - concerns about the potential for more appeals for transport, which can be costly and time-consuming for the local authority. |
| School transition and placement | - questions raised about the impact on children if they are required to change schools based on the proposed changes in travel assistance eligibility. - worries about the emotional well-being of children if they have to move to the nearest suitable school, causing disruptions to their education and personal development. - concerns about the impact on children if they move to a different school due to a placement won through a tribunal or appeal, which may not be considered the closest suitable school by the local authority. |
| Low-income criteria | - criticisms about the proposal to remove assistance unless the low-income criteria are met, expressing that low-income parents should not be given priority over others. - some comments highlight the challenges in determining eligibility based solely on low-income criteria and the potential unfairness in such an approach. - suggestions for clearer wording or the removal of the low-income criteria from the proposed policy. |

Question 11

| Theme | Comments |
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| Notice period | - concerns about the tightness of the 20-day notice period, stating that documents can take a while to come through, and the 20-day window may not be sufficient for some parents to arrange alternative transportation. - suggestions to review transport assistance at the end of each school year instead of every term to provide a buffer for parents or carers to make arrangements. - calls for clear processes to request extensions to the 20-day notice period due to delays in obtaining required medical documents. |
| Impact on families and stress | - concerns about the added stress and complications for families in challenging situations due to the proposed changes in transport assistance. - worries about the potential impacts on mental health and well-being for families, suggesting that savings from policy changes should be directed to increase access to mental health and support services. - concerns about children having to change schools to access transport assistance if they become medically incapable of traveling to their original school, especially if it's not the closest suitable school. |
| Access to medical information | - worries about the ability of parents to access timely medical information due to paperwork, waiting lists, and an overworked nhs, which may lead to difficulties in meeting the requirements for transport assistance. - suggestions to closely monitor and accommodate situations where families face challenges in obtaining the necessary medical documentation. - concerns about the broad definition of "temporary medical conditions" and the potential for abuse, debates, and litigation. |
| Equitability and fairness | - concerns about fairness and equity for children who couldn't get into their nearest school due to lack of places and how the proposed changes might penalize them. - suggestions for policies to be more equitable by allowing parents to contribute to the transport scheme if they don't qualify as low income, enabling the service to remain viable. - disagreements with the one-sided 20-day limit for providing notice, suggesting that all involved parties should have a limit for responding. |
| Accessibility of services and support | - calls for clear definitions of "temporary medical conditions" to avoid broad interpretations and potential inequities in determining eligibility for transport assistance. - worries about potential inequities in policies if some parents can access private medical perspectives while others rely on overworked nhs services. - suggestions to ensure parents can easily access services and information they need to comply with transport assistance requirements. |
| Impact on education | - worries about the potential impact on children's education if they are required to change schools to receive transport assistance due to medical conditions or other eligibility criteria. - disagreements with the policy wording, which might lead to situations where children lose access to transport assistance if they are already attending a school that is not the nearest suitable school. |
| Policy clarity and implications | - criticisms about the lack of clarity and potential implications of the policy, highlighting that it may not have been written with a full understanding of the implications. - suggestions for clearer wording and processes in the policy to avoid misinterpretations and misunderstandings. |

Question 12

| Theme | Comments |
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| Impact on parents' ability to work | - concerns about how the proposal may affect parents' ability to work, especially if they have to accompany their child during school runs. - worries about parents' capacity to support other dependents or work due to the responsibilities of being a personal assistant/escort. - criticisms of the policy for not considering the challenges faced by parents who have to balance their work commitments with providing assistance for their child during school travel. |
| Equality and discrimination | - complaints about potential discrimination, with worries that some parents may not be able to fulfill the role of a personal assistant due to various factors, such as work commitments, disabilities, or having other dependents to support. - concerns about the impact on parents of children with special educational needs (sen) who already face difficulties accessing breakfast and after-school clubs and now may be burdened with additional responsibilities. |
| Costs and logistics | - questions raised about the logistics of parents acting as escorts for their children, especially if the parent has to be dropped back home after drop-off and picked up again before pick-up. - concerns about the costs and practicality of parents acting as escorts, as it may not save money, and there may be additional expenses related to mileage, dbs checks, and transportation arrangements. - suggestions for clear guidelines and processes to address these cost and logistical concerns. |
| Impact on siblings and family life | - worries about the impact on other children in the family if a parent has to act as an escort for one child, potentially affecting their own school transportation arrangements and daily routines. - concerns about how the proposal may affect family life and the quality of life for parents and their dependents. |
| Eligibility and policy clarity | - confusion about the proposed changes and how they relate to the previous questions about the statutory walking distance and eligibility criteria. - requests for clarity on specific circumstances and under what conditions parents would be expected to accompany their child as an assistant. - concerns about the wording of the policy and the need for more explicit guidance to avoid misunderstandings and misinterpretations. |
| Promotion of public transport | - criticisms about the potential increase in cars on the road and the impact on congestion and the environment, suggesting that the council should promote more use of public transport. - worries that the policy may not consider the promotion of independence and social skills through the use of public transport. |
| Impact on children with send | - concerns about the potential negative impact on children with special educational needs (send) who require personal assistants or escorts for transportation, and how the policy may affect their attendance at school and the education of siblings. - suggestions for policies to consider individual cases, taking into account the capacity of parents and the needs of children with send and their siblings. |

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| Role and compulsion of parents | - questions about the parents' role and whether they can be compelled to be personal assistants for their children. - concerns about potential conflict if a parent declines or is unable to fulfill the role of a personal assistant. - worries about parents being asked to accompany children in council vehicles while also considering work commitments. - suggestions for clear guidelines on the parents' role and the circumstances under which they can be requested to be escorts. |
| Policy writing and considerations | - criticisms about the policy writing, suggesting it may not have considered the implications and practicalities of the proposed changes. - worries about the policy being written without fully understanding the challenges faced by parents and families. - suggestions for policies to be more considerate of the real-life circumstances of parents and children. - criticisms of the policy in relation to the current work situation for the majority of the workforce following the covid pandemic. |
| Costs and prioritization | - criticisms of the proposal as it may not save costs and may result in additional expenses, such as employing escorts or providing alternative transport. - worries that cost-cutting measures may disproportionately affect children with send and their families. |

Question 13

| Theme | Comments |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Impact on low-income families | - concerns about the removal of the 50% discount for low-income families, as it may create financial barriers and hinder access to education for vulnerable children. - criticisms of the proposal as it penalizes low-income families, who may already be struggling financially due to the cost of living. - suggestions to consider the financial burden on low-income families and find alternative ways to generate revenue without disproportionately affecting them. |
| Equity and discrimination | - accusations of discrimination, with some suggesting that the proposal is means-testing children for education, which is perceived as unfair and disadvantageous to certain families. - worries about the impact on families of children with special educational needs (send) who often have lower incomes due to limited work capacity, yet may be affected by the removal of the discount. |
| Impact on school attendance | - concerns that the increased cost may lead to some pupils missing out on education due to financial reasons. - worries that this change may have a detrimental impact on school attendance for some students, especially those from low-income families. |

Cost-cutting and revenue generation - criticisms of the proposal as cost-cutting for the council at the expense of low-income families. - suggestions for alternative revenue generation strategies that do not disproportionately burden low-income families. - accusations that the council is not doing a favor by offering the service, as it generates revenue from spare seats.

Practical implementation - suggestions for a more reasonable pro rata refund instead of a whole term refund. - recommendations for offering refunds based on the period the pass is not used once it is returned. - concerns about the accuracy and effectiveness of means testing and potential abuse of such systems.

Impact on post 16 education - worries that the proposal may prevent some pupils from attending 6th form or post-16 settings, potentially hindering their educational opportunities and future prospects.

Council's approach and fairness - criticisms of the council's approach, suggesting that the burden of increased costs should be shared among all fare payers rather than solely on low-income families. - worries about the fairness of increasing charges for low-income families, especially given the rising costs of living. - suggestions to consider the financial impact on families when making policy decisions.

Refund period - recommendations for a more reasonable and less harsh refund period, such as a half-termly refund instead of a whole term refund.

Refund mechanism - suggestions for a pro-rata refund based on the unused period of the pass once it is returned, as opposed to the proposal's termly refund.

Question 14

| Theme | Comments |
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| Impact on early development | - concerns about the impact on early development for children with special needs, particularly those with severe disabilities, who benefit greatly from early years educational, social, and health support. - worries that children with severe disabilities, including wheelchair users, may be unable to attend pre-school or foundation due to transportation barriers without assistance. - criticisms of the proposal as discriminatory, potentially denying children with the most severe or |

multiple disabilities the right to start school with their peers. - suggestions to consider the importance of the foundation year in early education and its critical role in learning.

Discrimination and equity - accusations of discrimination against children with special needs, especially those with severe disabilities, summer-born children, and children of parents with disabilities. - worries about the impact on children who may not be able to attend any educational setting until statutory school age. - criticisms of the proposal as disadvantageous to children with disabilities, potentially hindering their access to education and health support. - recommendations to consider individual needs on a case-by-case basis instead of outright refusing assistance for all under-fives.

Case-by-case basis - suggestions to continue providing support on a case-by-case basis as it allows for flexibility and consideration of individual circumstances. - recommendations to retain the current approach that considers individual situations, especially for under-fives with specific needs or disabilities. - worries about the impact on children attending the foundation year at age four if support is not provided based on individual needs.

Importance of early intervention - arguments for investing in early development and early intervention, as the early years are crucial for children's overall development and can lead to cost savings in the long run. - concerns about the potential delay in early intervention for children with special needs and the increased pressure on schools if early intervention is not adequately provided.

Practical considerations - worries about the lack of safe public transport for many children with special educational needs (send). - concerns about parents' abilities to take their children to school due to lack of driving or distance from school. - recommendations to clarify the guidelines for considering cases on an individual basis instead of removing the possibility of assistance altogether.

Concerns about age - worries about children who turn five later in the school year and may miss out on education if unable to get to school without assistance. - criticisms of the proposal as it may deny children starting school at age four the right to attend with their peers.

Criticisms of the proposal - criticisms of the proposal as disturbing, outrageous, and appalling, given its potential impact on vulnerable children with disabilities. - accusations that the proposal is part of a cost-cutting exercise and fails to consider the basic human right to education for vulnerable children.

Uncertain usage - requests for clarification on whether this support is currently being used and what purposes it serves.

Justifications for the proposal - some comments express that there may be good reasons or valid cases for the proposal, although they are not explicitly specified.

Other criticisms - additional criticism regarding the council's decisions and expenditures, such as spending on a cycleway while cutting children's bussing.

Question 15

| Theme | Comments |
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| Impact on child's well-being | - concerns about the well-being of the child and the potential negative effects on their mental health if they are forced to change schools due to a house move. - worries that children who are settled and doing well in their current school may face disruption if they have to move due to a house move. - recommendations to consider the best interest of the child when implementing the policy and its potential impact on their education and emotional development. |
| Discrimination and rigidity | - accusations of discrimination, rigidity, and unfairness in the proposed changes. - worries that the changes are too rigid and do not account for various circumstances that may require a house move. - criticisms of the policy for potentially discriminating against families who are forced to move due to circumstances beyond their control, such as homelessness or eviction. |
| Exemption for local moves | - suggestions to include an exemption for families who are moving locally within the borough, especially if it is a short distance and the school selection/review considered before the current school allocation still applies. - worries about the discouragement for parents to move house if they have to reapply for school transport, especially if they are moving slightly closer to another school. |
| Impact on special schools | - concerns about how the policy applies to special schools and the unique circumstances of children with special educational needs (send). - suggestions for a sensible conversation about what is best for a child with send when the move puts them closer to another special school. - worries that moving a well-settled child with send to a new school for transport criteria may not be in the child's best interest if the difference in distance is minimal. |

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| Emergency situations | - concerns about the impact of the policy on families who have to move quickly in emergency situations, such as domestic abuse. - criticisms of the blanket policy that does not consider the specific circumstances of emergency moves. |
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| House move by choice | - recommendations for the policy to apply to families who choose to move houses but not to those who are forced out of their homes due to circumstances like eviction or homelessness. - arguments that the policy should not penalize families who move by choice, as it may be due to personal reasons like wanting a bigger or more suitable premise. |
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| Impact on education and stability | - arguments that the policy may negatively impact a child's education and social-emotional development by forcing them to change schools. - criticisms of the focus on budgetary savings rather than the stability and consistency needed for children's well-being. - worries about breaching the child's human rights to have consistency and stability in their lives, especially if their current school provides this. |
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| Criticisms of the proposal | - strong criticisms and accusations against the proposed policy as penny-pinching, affecting children's education, and prioritizing budget cuts over children's well-being. - criticisms directed at the authority and its expenditure choices, such as spending on a cycleway while reducing bussing for children. - political statements criticizing the liberal/labour coalition and its approach to family support. |
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Question 16

| Theme | Comments |
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| Impact on vulnerable families | - concerns about the impact on vulnerable families who find themselves in temporary accommodation. - worries that forcing children in temporary housing to change schools will be detrimental to their education and well-being. - recommendations to provide travel support for the entire time the children are in temporary accommodation, as it may not be their choice to stay there, and it is beyond their control. - arguments that school can be a protective factor for vulnerable children, and ensuring their attendance should be a priority. |

Duration of travel assistance - criticisms of limiting travel assistance to only one school term when families may be in temporary accommodation for a longer period. - suggestions to extend the period of travel support until families can secure permanent housing. - arguments that if the local authority cannot provide permanent accommodation within one term, travel assistance should not be limited. - concerns that changing temporary locations may result in frequent school changes for the child, which is unfair.

Discrimination and rigidity - accusations of discrimination and rigidity in the proposed changes for travel assistance. - worries that limiting assistance to one term is unfair and unjustly affects families in temporary accommodation. - recommendations to consider the reason for temporary accommodation and the family's history before making decisions about travel support. - arguments that offering support only for one term may penalize low-income families living in council-arranged temporary accommodation.

Distance consideration - suggestions to reconsider the 3-mile distance criterion for travel assistance, especially when there are multiple children in different schools. - arguments that the distance from the school should not be the sole criterion, as it may not account for families with multiple children attending different schools.

Criticisms of the proposal - strong criticisms of the policy for being mean and unfair to families in temporary accommodation. - arguments that families may have no control over their temporary housing situation, such as those facing homelessness, domestic abuse, or forced moves. - criticisms directed at the council for potentially adding stress to already disadvantaged children and making it harder for them to attend school. - recommendations for the local authority to increase social housing to address the issue of families in temporary accommodation.

Impact on attendance - worries that limiting travel assistance to one term may impact attendance for children in temporary housing. - arguments that children in temporary accommodation are already at a disadvantage, and this policy may exacerbate their challenges in attending school. - recommendations to provide support for children in temporary accommodation to ensure their attendance is not hindered.

Need for case-by-case approach - suggestions for a case-by-case approach to assess the duration of travel assistance based on individual family circumstances. - arguments that each family's situation in temporary accommodation may vary, and decisions should not be made based on a blanket policy. -

concerns about the impact on children's education if they have to change schools frequently due to temporary housing situations.

Question 17

| Theme | Comments |
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| Concerns about suitability | - worries about the definition of "nearest suitable school" and whether the term is ambiguous or may lead to discrimination. - arguments that the proposed rule does not account for situations where the nearest school may not meet the child's needs, and a further school would be more suitable. - recommendations for flexibility to consider the reasons for the school change and its impact on the child's welfare before denying transport assistance. - concerns that the policy may discourage managed moves, which are intended to provide a fresh start for pupils at risk of exclusion or facing crises. - suggestions for providing financial support if the move is deemed to be in the child's best interests. |
| Case-by-case approach | - arguments for a case-by-case approach to assess the eligibility for transport assistance when a child changes schools. - suggestions for considering individual circumstances before making a decision. - worries about potential reassessment workload for wbc employees if the criteria need to be reviewed every time a child moves schools. - recommendations for providing funded transport to the nearest suitable school and allowing parents to be accountable for the remaining mileage costs if they choose a different school. |
| Rigid and unfair policy | - criticisms of the proposed rigid policy and its implications for children and parents. - worries that penalizing parents for finding a better provision for their child may not be in the child's best interest. - arguments against the policy for potentially forcing children to stay in a school that does not meet their needs or may be detrimental to their well-being. - suggestions for a more flexible approach and case-by-case assessments rather than outright refusal of funding. |
| Managed moves | - concerns about the impact of the policy on managed moves and their intended purpose to provide a fresh start for pupils at risk of exclusion. - recommendations to consider the needs and welfare of the child in managed moves when deciding on transport assistance. - worries that the policy may hinder the success of managed moves or parents' willingness to engage in them if it leads to increased financial burden. |

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| Need for definition and examples | - requests for a clear definition of "managed moves" to understand the criteria better. - suggestions for providing examples of what constitutes a managed move and how parents can prove that their nearer schools are not suitable. |
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| Impact on bullying incidents | - arguments that children should not be bullied to ensure they receive transport assistance. - concerns about school environments where bullying may be a factor influencing a school change. - recommendations for assessing the reasons for a school change carefully, particularly if it involves issues like bullying. |
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| Criticisms of the council | - criticisms directed at the council for seemingly prioritizing cost-saving measures over the welfare of children. - accusations of penny-pinching by the authority, which may negatively impact children's interests. - references to unnecessary spending on other projects while cutting transport for children. |
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Question 18

| Theme | Comments |
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| Positive feedback | - i think this is a good idea so parents can choose where to send the allocated money to benefit the family situation |
| Discrimination | - discrimination |
| Teamwork issues | - this makes a lot of sense as i've had to deal with teams not working together and different panels being needed for each bit |
| Insufficient information | - not enough info provided. |

Balancing family rights - anything that makes things easier for families in this category, but doesn't remove their rights, is good.

General acceptance - that sounds sensible

Concerns about limited funding - it is already very difficult to fund these things and money is limited. This will make things more difficult for these families

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**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Home to School Travel Assistance Policy
for children resident in Wokingham aged 5 to 16, including
children and young people with Special Educational Needs
and/or Disabilities.**

Academic year 2024/25

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1. Introduction

It is the responsibility of parents/carers to ensure that their children regularly attend school. This includes making any necessary travel arrangements, except where there is a duty on the local authority to do so.

This policy sets out Wokingham Borough Council's responsibilities and commitment to meeting the home to school Travel Assistance needs of eligible children and young people (including those with special educational needs and disabilities) who are resident in Wokingham Borough and of compulsory school age (5-16).

Arrangements for young people of sixth form age and above are set out in a separate policy. Parents/carers are referred to the Post 16 travel assistance policy which can be found at: *(insert web address once finalised)*

The Council is committed to promoting children and young people's independence, social, and life skills essential for their preparation for adulthood. These goals underpin our Home to School Travel Assistance Policy because, where possible, children and young people, including those with special educational needs and/or disability, will be encouraged and supported to travel independently.

This approach helps to deliver our Community Vision and Strategic Priorities:

- Enriching Lives
- Safe, Strong Communities
- A Clean and Green Borough
- Right Homes, Right Places
- Keeping the Borough Moving
- Changing the Way We Work For You.

Parents/carers are legally responsible to ensure their child's regular attendance at school. However, for a small number of children who are classed as "Eligible Children", as defined in Schedule 35B of the Education Act 1996, Wokingham Borough Council has a duty to ensure that suitable Travel Assistance is provided, where necessary, to facilitate their attendance at school. In general, this relates to children with Special Educational Needs, a disability or mobility problems.

A parent will have a defence in law against a prosecution by a local authority for their child's non-attendance at school in cases where the local authority has failed to meet its duty to provide Travel Assistance for children classed as eligible for support.

THIS POLICY SUPERCEDES ALL PREVIOUS POLICIES and will be regularly reviewed to take account of statutory duties and any changes to legislation.

2. The Council's Statutory Responsibilities

➤ The duty to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport

The Council has a general duty under Section 508A of the Education Act 1996 to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport. This duty applies to children of compulsory school age who travel to receive education or training within the area - journeys to and from institutions where education or training is delivered¹.

The Education Act 1996 defines sustainable modes of travel as those that the local authority considers may improve the physical well-being of those who use them, environmental well-being, or a combination of the two. This may include walking and cycling, as well as other types of travel.

The Local Authority has a duty to make arrangements to facilitate attendance at schools and colleges by providing travel assistance in certain circumstances. This document outlines **Wokingham Borough Council's** home to school/college transport policy. This does NOT mean free transport will be provided for all pupils.

The Council also has discretion to make transport arrangements, to subsidise travel costs, and to make appropriate charges for children who do not meet the criteria set out in the Act.

➤ The duty to provide suitable travel assistance for eligible and other children

The Council has a duty under the Education Act 1996 (section 508B) to ensure that suitable Travel Assistance is provided, for eligible children, to facilitate their attendance at school².

'Eligible children' are defined in schedule 35 B of the Education Act 1996 as those children of compulsory school age (5 -16) for whom free travel assistance will be required.

The criteria specified within the Act is set out in the sections below.

The Council also has a duty under Section 508C of the Education Act 1996 to make travel arrangements "as the Council consider necessary" in relation to any child in its area to facilitate attendance.

Compulsory school age is the age when a child must be in school. In Wokingham "primary" aged children range from 5 to 11 and "secondary" aged children range from 11 to 16.

¹ Section 508A of the 1996 Education Act

² Sections 508B and 508C of the 1996 Education Act.

Travel assistance is only arranged for the normal start and finish times of schools/colleges and is not tailored for individual courses, work experience, examination timetables or any other similar situations. Similarly, transport will not be arranged for travel between institutions during the school day, to offsite locations or to enable children to attend extra-curricular activities and other commitments outside school hours.

The Council has taken into account relevant Statutory Guidance issued by the Department for Education.

3. Definitions

- **“Home”** is defined as the place where the child is usually resident. Where parents/carers are separated or divorced, entitlement is assessed in terms of the home where the child spends the majority of their time. Where a child spends equal amounts of school days with parents/carers at separate addresses, eligibility for travel assistance will be evaluated from what was deemed the main parent address from which the school admissions team evaluated the nearest suitable school.
- **“Distances”** will be measured to **two decimal places** from where the home meets the public street, for example from the front gate to the nearest gate or point of access to the school premises, and by the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk safely. As such, the route measured may include footpaths, bridleways, and other pathways, as well as recognised roads. Distances for Extended Rights are measured in the same way. The upper limits for Extended Rights transport are measured via the shortest road route.
- **“A suitable school”** is defined in the Act as the nearest qualifying school with places available that provides education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child, and any Special Educational Needs and/or Disability that the child may have. A school will only be considered as unsuitable if there is a physical reason that a child cannot attend. Reasons for a school being unsuitable may include, but not be limited to:
 - a secondary-aged child attending a primary school and vice versa.

The local authority is entitled to determine which schools are “suitable” under the definitions described above. This will normally include all types of schools or other educational establishments that are state funded, namely; Community, Voluntary Controlled and Voluntary Aided Schools and Academies or Free Schools, unless a child has an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) which specifies a requirement for a specialist setting. This includes schools in other local authority areas but does not include independent (fee-paying) schools, except in the case of approved independent special schools for children with Special Education Needs or Disabilities, where this is named in the child or young person’s EHCP.

- **“Nearest qualifying school”** means the nearest available and suitable school. **Please note the nearest qualifying school with places available may not necessarily be the catchment school for your home address.** For pupils with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) the nearest qualifying school is taken to mean the school deemed most appropriate by the local authority to meet the pupil's needs.
- **“Nearest”** is determined by straight line distance;
- **“Available”** means a place is available to be allocated to the child or young person at the time an application is made.
- **“Normal school admissions round”** is when children start at a school at the earliest possible time for that school. Normal round admissions are at the beginning of:
 - Reception for primary and infant schools
 - Year 3 for junior schools
 - Year 7 for secondary schools

Important

The eligibility test for transport purposes is undertaken at the same time as the normal school admissions round when places are allocated:

- For transfer to secondary schools this is during September and October with school place offers being sent to parents/carers in early March
- For entry to primary and transfer to Junior school this is during November to January with school place offers being sent to parents/carers in early April

Where parents/carers apply late i.e., after the published closing date for applications for admission, eligibility for travel assistance is assessed for the school(s) applied for taking into account available places in the nearest schools at that point of allocation.

For the normal school admissions round, unless there are exceptional circumstances, it is generally assumed that each of your nearest schools will have space to accommodate your child, including schools in neighboring Boroughs. Parents/carers will be expected to have named all four nearest schools on their application, which may include schools in neighboring Boroughs.

If a parent makes an application for schools as part of the normal admissions round, but their application is late, if there are no spaces left in their chosen schools and their child is allocated a place at a different school, transport provision will be the responsibility of the parent, unless they can demonstrate that their application could not have been made on time

4. Statutory Walking Distances

The Council has a duty to provide free Travel Assistance for children whose homes are outside the statutory walking distance to the nearest suitable school, which is:

- More than 2 miles (if the child is below the age of 8) (Primary School); or
- More than 3 miles (if the child or young person is aged 8 to 16) (Secondary School)

5. Extended Rights

There are some additional rights to travel assistance for children aged 8 and over if they are eligible for free school meals, or a parent with whom they live receive maximum Working Tax Credits. Travel assistance may be considered in the following circumstances:

- If they are aged **8 to 10 years**, attend their nearest suitable school and it is more than 2 miles from their home; **or**
- If they are aged **11 to 16 years**, and attend one of their three nearest suitable schools which is between 2 and 6 miles from their home; **or**
- If they are aged 11 to 16 years, attend a school that is between 2 and 15 miles from their home that their parents/carers have chosen on the grounds of their religion or belief and, having regard to that religion or belief, there is no suitable school nearer to their home.

The introduction of Universal Credit has not changed the way eligibility for extended rights to home to school transport is determined. It will remain the case that children will be eligible for extended rights if they meet the criteria set out above.

If a parent is struggling through financial hardship to get a child to school, then they should contact the Council so that they can be signposted to possible sources of additional help.

Children attending schools on grounds of religion or belief

Ordinarily assistance with travel to a faith school will only be provided if it is the nearest suitable school. If parental preference results in children's attendance at a faith school when there are suitable schools nearer to home, then no travel assistance will normally be provided. However, if children meet the Extended Rights eligibility category criteria, then travel assistance to a faith school which is not the nearest suitable school may be considered.

Under Extended Rights, when considering whether a faith school is preferred on the grounds of religion or belief, Wokingham Borough Council will consider the nature of other schools that may have been named as higher preferences on the application form. For an application for travel assistance to be agreed under this section, the expectation will be that the school

that is preferred on the grounds of religion or belief will be named above any non-faith schools that have been named on the application form.

Parents/carers must provide supporting evidence regarding their genuine adherence to their religion or belief, and this will normally be confirmed by asking their minister of religion to sign the application form.

6. Qualifying Schools

Qualifying schools are all types of schools or other educational establishment that are state-funded, namely:

- Community, foundation or voluntary schools;
- Community or foundation special schools;
- Non-maintained special schools including residential (where deemed appropriate);
- Pupil referral units; and
- Academies, including free schools and University Technical Colleges (UTC).

When a child cannot be offered a place at the nearest school to the home address, the Council will, subject to the criteria set within this policy and the qualifying distance being met, provide transport to the **next nearest Wokingham school** with space to admit. **For transport to be provided in this instance the parent must provide evidence that they have applied for and been refused a place at the school which is the nearest school for their home address and any other schools closer than the school offering admission. This includes schools in neighbouring boroughs.**

For pupils with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities an independent school can also be a qualifying school where this is named on the child's Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC Plan), or where it is the nearest of two or more schools named.

Where a child is enrolled at more than one school their eligibility for Travel Assistance will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Please note, the relevant educational setting in relation to an eligible child will be either a qualifying school or the place, other than a school, where they are receiving education.

7. Parental Preference

The Council has no statutory duty to provide travel assistance if a child is attending a school on parental preference grounds. This means the schools applied for are not the nearest schools, or one of the 3 nearest eligible schools in the case of extended criteria (low income). **In cases of parental preference, parents/carers are responsible for making their own travel arrangements.**

For the normal school admissions round, unless there are exceptional circumstances, it is generally assumed that each of your nearest schools, including schools in neighbouring Boroughs, will have space to accommodate your child. Parents/carers will be expected to have named all four nearest schools on their application, which may include schools in neighboring Boroughs when.

If you only apply to one school, you will only be considered for that school. You may then be allocated a school that is not one of your preferences, that is further from your home address and to which you would not be entitled to travel assistance should your preference be unsuccessful.

For all children, including those with SEND, a child qualifies for travel assistance when they attend the nearest suitable school which meets their needs. **If a parent selects a school which is not their nearest suitable school which meets their child's needs, parents/carers may then be responsible for making their own transport arrangements and all travel costs for the whole time that their child is at that school.**

During the normal school admissions round, if parents/carers choose to apply for a place for their child at a school that is not the nearest school as their first preference and instead apply for another preferred school, then the child will have no transport entitlement to that preferred school (on the basis that space would have been available at the nearest school at the time of allocation and there would have been a reasonable opportunity to secure a place had parents/carers made this their first preference).

During the normal admissions round, if an application for a place at the nearest school is refused, transport may then be provided to the next nearest school with space, subject to the standard eligibility criteria being met. However, to qualify for transport to the next nearest school with space, parents/carers must have listed their four nearest schools as one of their preferences and been refused a place at those schools.

For children attending a mainstream school who do not have an EHCP, please note free travel assistance will not be provided if you apply for a place at schools which are not the nearest but don't get into those schools and are allocated a place at a school further away because there are no spaces left at the nearest suitable school.

With respect to In-Year Applications, i.e., those not made during the normal admissions round, the Council will not approve applications for travel assistance following a parent's decision to change schools (even if the decision is supported/encourage by the existing or receiving school) unless:

- The school they transfer to is the nearest school and the standard eligibility criteria are met.

Please note, the relevant educational setting in relation to an eligible child will be either a qualifying school or the place, other than a school, where they are receiving education.

8. Safe Walking Routes

Route Safety

Where children live within statutory walking distance of their transport area or nearest qualifying school the Local Authority has a duty to provide travel assistance where the nature of the available walking route is such that a child cannot reasonably be expected to walk (accompanied as necessary) in reasonable safety.

Routes are assessed to be safe using the National road safety guidelines *“Assessment of Walked Routes to School’ guidelines” as published by Road Safety UK.*

The Courts have defined an “available route” as one “along which a child, accompanied as necessary, can walk to school with reasonable safety. It does not fail to qualify as ‘available’ because of dangers which would arise if the child is unaccompanied”. The route measured may include footpaths, bridleways and other pathways, as well as recognised roads.

The Local Authority will provide free travel assistance when:

- the walking route to the **nearest school** is within statutory walking distance but is assessed as unsuitable because of the dangers which would arise for an accompanied child, and once measured, the alternative safe route is longer than the statutory walking distance.

Walking routes are assessed against the following criteria:

- That the child will be accompanied
- Road width, visibility and the severity of bends
- Existence of 'safe refuge' - this means footpaths and verges, road markings at the side of the road
- The volume of traffic at the relevant time of day
- The type of traffic and its speed
- Difficulty of road crossings
- Nature of road (urban or rural) and driver expectation
- The presence or absence of speed limits and other warning signs
- The accident record along the route

A range of factors are taken into account. **The fact that there is a high volume of fast-moving traffic is not in itself a reason to assess a route as unsuitable - there may be a footpath and good crossing points along the route that would mean it is safe.**

Similarly, the lack of a footpath or verge would not be a reason to assess a route as unsuitable if there was, for instance, a very low volume of traffic and good visibility.

The following are not taken into account:

- The parent's individual circumstances, for instance personal availability to walk with the child or that it may be necessary to walk with younger children or prams
- Parental finances
- Local weather conditions
- Unusual events - such as, road closures, construction work, flooding
- Lack of street lighting - the majority of roads in Wokingham do not have streetlights and lighting is not an issue all year round
- Lack of pavements - the lack of a paved footpath is not necessarily a reason to assess a route as unsuitable
- The presence of uncut hedges
- Difficult terrain and arduousness of the route
- Practicality or the time taken to walk the route

The Local Authority is committed to improving pedestrian safety; creating walking environments that feel safe and secure for walkers and helping people walk or cycle to school. Part of this commitment may involve the improvement of walking routes. Once such improvements to a walking route are completed, the route will be reassessed, and this may result in a route previously deemed unsuitable on the grounds of road/pedestrian safety being redesignated as safe. If this happens, transport will cease at the end of the current school term.

A route assessment will be undertaken, if a child is attending their nearest qualifying school, and if it is within the statutory walking distance relevant to their age.

For parents/carers with a disability, which means that they are unable to accompany their child/ren along a walking route from home to school in order for the route to be considered suitable, then they can request a walking route assessment. Where there is no other responsible parent, an application will need supporting evidence of the parents/carers' disability. If the walking route is deemed not to be suitable for the parents/carers' disability or the age of child is such that accompaniment is necessary for it to be considered safe, the child will qualify for free travel assistance.

The Local Authority has the right to reassess eligibility when new or revised information is available, including the information held on its mapping system.

Where a route has been reassessed or an alternative recommended and as a result a child no longer qualifies for free travel, transport will cease at the end of the current term.

9. Travel Assistance during the school day and accompaniment

➤ Travel Assistance only for the compulsory part of the school day

The duty to provide Travel Assistance to eligible children does not extend beyond the compulsory part (i.e., the start and finish) of the school day.

The Council is not required to provide Travel Assistance to facilitate a child's part-time attendance; a child's trial placement; the child's attendance at extra-curricular activities, including breakfast clubs and after school activities or to attend medical appointments.

In instances where suitable alternative arrangements are provided by another body or organisation, e.g., the school, there is no duty to provide free bespoke travel assistance.

➤ Accompaniment

In deciding whether a child is eligible for Travel Assistance for reasons of Special Educational Needs, Disabilities or mobility, or unsafe route eligibility, the Council has a responsibility to consider whether the child could reasonably be expected to walk **if accompanied by an adult**. This will also include the ability of a pupil to be able to "walk" to a suitable bus stop/pick up point, **accompanied as necessary**, as part of the "journey to school".

The general expectation is that a child will be accompanied by a responsible adult, usually a parent, carer, or guardian, where necessary, unless it is not reasonable to expect the parent/carer/guardian to do so. **Working arrangements and childcare issues will not normally be considered reasons why a child cannot be accompanied. It is Wokingham Council general approach that all working parents/carers are expected to make arrangements to get their child to/from school, including using wrap around services, childminders or relying on families and friends as appropriate.**

The Council promotes equality of opportunity for parents/carers with Disabilities. Where a parent's

Disability prevents them from fulfilling their parenting responsibility to accompany their child along a walking route that would otherwise be considered unsafe without adult supervision, a reasonable adjustment will be made, for example home to school travel assistance, for the child in question. If a parent is under the care of adult social care, then this should be raised with adult social care in the first instance, as there may be existing support which could be used to assist in carrying out parenting functions.

As a general guide, transport arrangements, should not require a child to make several changes on public transport resulting in an unreasonably long journey time. Best practice suggests that the maximum each way length of journey for a child of primary school age to be about 45 minutes and for secondary school age, about 75 minutes, but these should be

regarded as the maximum. For children with SEN and/or disabilities, journeys may be more complex and a shorter journey time, although desirable, may not always be possible.

Consideration should also be given to the walking distance required in order to access public transport. The maximum distances will depend on a range of circumstances, including the age of the child, their individual needs, and the nature of the routes they are expected to walk to the pick up or set down points and should try to be combined with the transport time when considering the overall duration of a journey. With regards to pick up points, local authorities may at their discretion use appropriate pick-up points when making travel arrangements. 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.

10. Timing of assessment of eligibility

At the point when eligibility for home to school Travel Assistance is considered, the prospect of being able to secure a place in an alternative (usually nearer) school must be a real one. This will usually be at the point the Admissions application was made, and not necessarily at the time that the Travel Assistance application was made.

A smaller number of cases will need to be considered during the school year (e.g. as a result of families moving to a new area within the borough).

Where granted, travel assistance will normally apply for the whole of the school year of entry, unless there are significant changes, such as the family moving house or the child changing school.

Where travel assistance has been provided for children who were below the age of 8 and whose homes are between the statutory walking distances of 2 and 3 miles, to the nearest suitable school, **this assistance will cease at the end of the term following their 8th birthday.**

Any entitlement to Travel Assistance is subject to review on an annual basis. If a child ceases to be eligible any change to provision made by the Council will be considered in the context of the potential impact on the child, in order to avoid disruption as far as possible.

Any future changes to Travel Assistance or school Admissions policies that affect entitlement to free travel for future entry years will not be applied retrospectively to children deemed to be eligible for and entitled to travel assistance under the terms of this Travel Assistance policy.

11. Arrangements and eligibility for those with Special Educational Needs (SEN) and/or a Disability or mobility problems (including temporary medical conditions)

- **Provision for children aged 5-16 with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities**

The Council has a duty to provide Travel Assistance for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities/mobility problems, who are registered at their nearest suitable school which is **within** the statutory walking distance from their home, where the child cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school or use public transport, accompanied as necessary, because of their mobility problems or because of associated health and safety issues related to their Special Educational Needs and/or Disability.

In order to be able to assess whether a child with Special Educational Needs, a Disability or mobility problems can reasonably be expected to walk to school, we will ask a parent (or other person requesting free travel for the child) to provide information about the child.

Eligibility is needs based - there is no automatic entitlement to Travel Assistance just because a young person has a Special Educational Need or Disability, even where an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) has been issued. Applications will be considered on a case-by-case basis, and regularly reviewed, taking into account the child's Special Educational Needs and/or Disability, mobility, or medical needs, as well as any exceptional circumstances.

Professionals supporting an application for Travel Assistance for a child with SEND should provide evidence in support of why, in their professional opinion, it is not reasonable to expect the child to be able to walk to school, even if accompanied. Arrangements for Travel Assistance will be kept under review (annually at a minimum), in order to ensure any arrangements for Travel Assistance are still appropriate; fresh relevant supporting professional evidence may be required at each review.

Please note: the Council has a responsibility to ensure children's needs are addressed, and this includes providing travel assistance which facilitates the best opportunity for developing independence. Further details on this can be found in the Section below; *"Supporting independence and the development of self-reliant travelers"*. However, there remains no statutory duty for the Council to provide transport if your child is attending a school on parental preference grounds. This means the school you applied for is not the nearest suitable school, or one of the 3 nearest eligible schools in the case of the additional criteria (low income).

In cases of parental preference, families are responsible for their own travel arrangements. A child will not be eligible for Travel Assistance if they have an EHCP and due to parental preference resulting in that school being named on their EHCP, they attend any school other than their nearest suitable school.

12. Short Term medical conditions

The Council may provide travel assistance, short or long-term, if confirmation from a medical practitioner is provided that indicates a child is fit to attend school but unable to do so because they are unable to walk or travel by their normal means because of a medical condition and needs additional support. The child must attend their nearest school.

Applications for transport on this basis must be supported by appropriate evidence from the medical profession. This may include, but is not restricted to, a letter from the child's consultant or other medical professional involved in the child's medical welfare.

The Council will only provide transport for the time specified by the medical practitioner. Where no time period has been specified, or the child's medical condition is long term, the Council will review the situation **at least** once each academic year and may require submission of further evidence on completion of a review.

To avoid excessive delays in assessing applications, medical evidence requested by the Council, must be provided within 20 working days of the request, or the applicant must request an extension to this timeframe, otherwise the application will be refused.

13. Types of Travel Assistance provided

The type of travel assistance offered will be for the Council to decide, taking into account the needs of the young person and the nature of the journey to be undertaken. This applies to all children who are eligible for travel assistance.

The assistance offered might include, but is not limited to:

- A parent consenting to use their car in return for payment of a personal budget;
- A parent consenting to a walking escort or responsible adult to escort the young person on public transport;
- Training and support to travel independently (see Independent Travel Training section below for more details);
- Free passes on public transport;
- Provision of a seat on a dedicated school bus or minibus, or
- A seat in a taxi, usually shared with one or more other children, where a child's needs require more personalised arrangements.

The Council will provide an appropriate adult to escort a child on Council arranged transport on a Case-by-Case basis - restricted to;

- A child's medical needs, particularly where rescue medication is required
- Where an individual child's needs creates a clear danger or health and safety risk to themselves and other passengers on the vehicle

- Where the number of children travelling together necessitates the provision of a passenger assistant to help manage a group children and their specific support needs on the journey.

If a child attends a provision which is within statutory distance and an escort is required, the Council may request that a parent accompanies the child, as required. Parent accompaniment will be at the sole discretion of the Council based on the nature of assistance provided.

Applications received during the academic year will be dealt with as quickly as possible with transport arrangements being confirmed within ten working days, or sooner wherever possible.

The Council will determine the means of travel assistance to be provided, to ensure the appropriate Travel Assistance is provided to meet the needs of the child, through the most efficient use of resources.

14. 'Suitable' Travel Assistance arrangements

For Travel Assistance to be suitable, it must be safe and reasonably stress free, to enable the child to arrive at school ready for a day of study. It would not normally require that a child makes several changes on public transport resulting in unreasonably long journey times.

Government Guidance advises that when transport is provided 'best practice' is that a child of primary school age should not travel for more than 45 minutes each way, and secondary school age - a maximum of 75 minutes - including any walking time. However, it is acknowledged that there will be circumstances in which this is not possible, for example in rural areas where a child lives in remote locations.

It is desirable that journeys to special/specialist settings for children with complex needs should be shorter, but it is recognised that this may not be possible, especially where a child's special educational needs can only be addressed in an out-of-borough placement. Journey times for SEN children in shared vehicles may exceed the statutory guidance due to the complexities of the children's needs, to avoid the alternative of increasing numbers of children in costly small taxis, especially primary aged children.

15. Personal Budgets

A personal budget may be offered to parents/carers who are entitled to free home to school Travel Assistance, where this offers best value for money for the Council and the parents/carers agree to this.

This option may be of particular interest to parents/carers if:

- the child person has complex needs and you wanted to make your own travel arrangements;
- you wanted to combine the council's contribution with your personal finances, and other benefits or bursaries to provide the child with bespoke travel assistance to meet their needs and fit in with your family circumstances;
- The child person is attending a course, all or part of which is outside the normal school day

If parents/carers are offered this form of Travel Assistance, it would be the parent's responsibility to ensure that your travel arrangements enable the child:

- to travel safely;
- to attend school regularly and on time;
- to be effectively educated once they arrive at school/college.

Attendance levels will be monitored, and money will be reclaimed for non-attendance at school/college.

Recipients of a Personal Budget are responsible for checking their own HMRC obligations.

16. Pick-up Points

Eligibility for Travel Assistance is assessed based on the child's registered home address, but any transport provided may not necessarily be door to school gate. The Council may use reasonable pick-up and drop-off points in appropriate individual cases. This may be a bus stop or other place where children and parents/carers can safely wait for their vehicle. The Council aims to ensure there are safe and appropriate pick-up points within reasonable distance from schools and centres of population. Children can be required to walk to and from a central pick up and/or drop off point. This will usually be within one mile walking distance from the child's home, and total walking distance will be within the relevant statutory mile walking distances according to age and ability, and in the light of any identified Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities.

17. Supporting independence and the development of self-reliant travellers

The Council is committed to supporting all children and young people to achieve their maximum potential and become as independent as they are able to be. The Council has responsibility to ensure that children's needs are addressed, and this includes providing travel assistance which facilitates the best opportunity for developing independence.

Where it is safe, appropriate, and reasonable to do so, children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities will be expected to walk, accompanied as necessary by a responsible adult, to and from a common pickup point near their home.

In order to better support children and young people to travel independently, the Council may offer Independent Travel Training in their Travel Assistance offer. The training will support the child to learn the necessary skills to allow them to effectively deal with and resolve a range of scenarios that they might encounter when travelling on public transport. Under these circumstances, a trainer will travel and work with the young person on a 1:1 basis to ensure that the skills taught are understood and put in to practice independently. Training may include:

- Timetables (including time management).
- Orientation.
- Road Safety.
- Accessibility (access to transport, exits and purchasing tickets).
- Communication.
- Personal Safety (including what-if scenarios).
- Travel planning and preparation.

Where the Community Transport Unit identify that a child may have the potential to be supported to travel independently through a travel training program, a formal assessment will be undertaken to help create a personalised travel plan and identify what training would be required. Training programmes last on average 12 weeks, and the young person will only complete the training once the trainer and the young person, together with their family agree that they have gained the necessary skills to travel on public transport on their own.

Once a child is deemed capable of independent travel no further Travel Assistance will be offered except in exceptional circumstances.

18. Residential Schools

Where children with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) require a residential placement following assessment, Travel Assistance may be offered as follows:

- Weekly borders: Travel Assistance between home and school once each direction each week
- Termly borders: Travel Assistance between home and school at the beginning and end of each term and half term
- 52-week placements: Travel Assistance between home and school for eight visits throughout the year

Travel Assistance will not normally be provided to and from respite placements.

19. Travel Assistance for those not eligible for Free Home to School Transport under this policy

Children below statutory school age

There is no statutory duty to provide Travel Assistance for those under the age of 5.

Fare-paying options for non-eligible children

If a parent is struggling through financial hardship to get a child to school, then they should contact the Council for signposting to possible sources of additional help in the first instance.

If a child does not qualify for Travel Assistance under this policy, a surplus seat may be purchased on an existing contract vehicle where a seat is available, subject to certain conditions. If the seat is required at any time in the future by another child who is entitled to Travel Assistance, then the parents/carers of the fare-paying child (i.e., who have purchased discretionary Travel Assistance) may need to make alternative arrangements. A 2-week notice period for the removal of any discretionary assistance will be given. In these circumstances a refund of the fare for the unused portion of the year will be payable.

The purchase price for fare-payers will be reviewed annually and will take into account the cost of the transport, the desirability of filling spare capacity with fare-payers, and the Council's wish to provide options for parents/carers whose children are not eligible for free travel assistance.

Additional vehicles will not be provided if the demand from non-eligible children exceeds the spare capacity of a vehicle contracted to carry eligible children.

Parents/carers may also purchase passes for public transport for their children. Please refer to local bus and train operating companies for details

20. Exceptional circumstances, change of circumstances and other assistance

The following are examples of exceptional circumstances and changes of circumstances. The Council may consider a request to exercise its discretion in a particular case to provide travel assistance.

A) Change of address

If changing address parents/carers must reapply for travel assistance as eligibility will need to be reviewed. Parents/carers should check availability of school places before moving house, as there are no guarantees places will be available at a new school or that transport will be provided.

The Council will consider any request for a child to stay at their existing school following a house move as exercising parental preference. This means families will be responsible for making their own transport arrangements. The only exception to this will be if nearer schools

do not have places available in the relevant year group. If you have applied for a place at your nearest suitable schools and a place is refused, due to the year group being full, transport will be provided to the nearest suitable school with a place available, subject to the criteria in this policy being met.

Please note that travel assistance will not be provided to a Wokingham Borough school if there are closer schools, including schools in a neighbouring authority, which are under the qualifying distance. In this instance the family must provide evidence that they have applied for and been refused a place at these closer schools.

In exceptional cases if you changed address when your child is in Years 10 or 11, the Council may provide transport support if it means a child can stay at their existing school and the following circumstances apply:

- the existing school remains the nearest school (subject to age/distance criteria and any applicable low-income criteria) or
- where there have been unavoidable reasons for a move such as a forced move due to fire or flood, or due to a forced eviction.

B) Children living in temporary accommodation

If a child is of statutory school age and the family are placed in Temporary Accommodation by the Council, consideration will be given to the provision of Travel Assistance for the purpose of accessing education for up to **one term**, subject to the standard eligibility criteria being met.

C) Change of child's needs

From time to time a child's needs can change during the year. If the current Travel Assistance is no longer meeting the child's needs, parents/carers should in the first place contact the Community Transport Team to discuss the change in their child's needs, and any reasonable adjustments that may be required. In some cases, further evidence or advice from professionals involved with the child may be required.

D) Changing Schools

Where a parent decides to change their child's school after they have started, the child's eligibility for Travel Assistance will have to be reconsidered. This may include the need to make a completely new application.

E) Managed Moves

Where parents/carers and school agree to a managed move between schools, transport will only be provided to the new school if it is both the nearest suitable school and is outside the statutory walking distance from the home address.

F) Transport to a Pupil Referral Unit or other education provider

Although the Council offers Travel Assistance in cases where the eligibility criteria are met, it is still the responsibility of parents/carers in all circumstances to ensure their children get to school. This includes attendance at a Pupil Referral Unit and any other places where education may be provided.

Parents/carers should be aware that there is no automatic transport entitlement to and from the Pupil Referral Unit or similar education provider at any other time. This also applies to pupil exclusions.

Transport to a Pupil Referral Unit and to other places where education may be provided will only be provided in accordance with the child's general entitlement. If a child has been placed temporarily in a Pupil Referral Unit, they may be eligible for Travel Assistance if the eligibility criteria are met.

Any requests for exceptional assistance will need to be supported by documentary evidence from the Pupil Referral Unit e.g., Medical Certificate or a Court Order.

Travel Assistance may be withdrawn from pupils who regularly fail to attend the PRU – responsibility for transportation to ensure regular attendance will then pass to parent/carers/guardians.

G) Pupils Excluded from School

A pupil permanently excluded from a school will be provided with Travel Assistance to his or her new school provided it is both the nearest suitable school, as agreed by the Council and is outside the statutory walking distance from home.

H) Temporary Attendance at Alternative Provision

Where a pupil is registered at a school but is attending a place other than that school as a result of temporary exclusion, eligibility for Travel Assistance will apply to the other place for the temporary period.

I) Elective Home Education (EHE) and Education Other Than at School (EOTAS)

Where parents/carers have made the choice to educate their child at home no assistance will be available from the Council in connection with any transport need(s) arising.

When the Council arranges for a child to have an education other than at school, the Council will consider a Travel Assistance budget as part of the overall package for families to arrange their own transport.

J) Children in Care

Children for whom the Council is the corporate parent sometimes attend schools other than their nearest school. Where the professional staff responsible for the child decide that it would be detrimental to the child's wellbeing to be moved to another school, funding for travel assistance will need to form part of the overall foster care package.

Following a move into Foster Care, where the school attended is no longer the nearest school for the new address, and the foster carer is unable to provide transport, then transport may be provided to enable the child to continue at their current school on a temporary basis. In these circumstances transport will need to be discussed with the Social Care team and if transport is deemed necessary it will need to be funded as part of any Social Care package for the child/ren concerned.

When it is decided that a child placement will be long term (over six months), consideration must be given to the child relocating to a local school.

K) Other

There may be other circumstances in which the Council will consider providing transport assistance. These include but are not limited to:

- changes of address due to fleeing domestic abuse,
- changes of address or school linked to preventing harm to, or exploitation of, a child.

Parents/carers who believe these circumstances apply to them should contact the Council for advice. They will be expected to provide evidence of the relevant circumstance before their application can be considered.

L) Travel Assistance provided in error

Where free Travel Assistance has been provided in error, or, where there have been material changes to the route to school, provision will be withdrawn. However, Travel Assistance will continue until the end of the term in which the error was notified, in order to allow families time to make alternative arrangements.

M) For clarification Travel assistance will not be provided for the following journeys:

- Journeys to and from breakfast or after school clubs
- Trips and journeys during the school day which are in the curriculum.
- To or from a venue that isn't the normal home address, for example the address of a childcare provider or a short break placement (unless there is a legal order in place, or a statutory care plan agreed by us)
- If a child is unwell and has to be collected from school during a school day

- If a child is excluded during a school day
- For medical appointments or other approved activities which affect the start or end of and during the school day
- If a child has missed the contracted transport
- For transitional/integration placements in schools/colleges
- For attendance at work experience programmes
- If a child is withdrawn from school by their family and placed in an alternative education setting
- To fall in line with other family members travelling in the same/similar direction
- Work commitments or domestic difficulties of families including taking other children to school or an allocated pick-up point
- Where parents/carers are unwilling, or unavailable to escort their child to school or an allocated pick-up point.
- A family being unable to transport their child to school only on the sole grounds that they are a single parent family.
- Children in temporary care, including foster care (these cases should be referred to the children's social care team to consider available support)
- An inability to afford existing transport arrangement, e.g. Resulting from loss of employment
- Family breakdown and fragmentation.
- Long-term or temporary medical conditions without sufficient medical evidence from an appropriate medical professional

Please note that this list is not exhaustive.

21. Behaviour on School Transport

Families, schools, children, transport contractors and the Council, working in partnership, all share responsibility for ensuring that acceptable behaviour is maintained to ensure safe and stress-free school transport for all.

In particular we expect all children and young people to be ready for their transport in good time.

When travelling on transport we expect all children and young people, as appropriate to their ability, to:

- Behave in a safe and responsible way whilst travelling,
- Follow all instructions from the driver (or Escort where one is provided), especially in an emergency,

- Wear seatbelts or appropriate safety harnesses at all times whilst on the vehicle, where these are provided.

Bullying, including the use of hate speech, will not be tolerated, and will be reported to parents/carers and school/college. We will not tolerate abuse of any sort, whether from a young person or from their parents/carers and carers.

Children and young people are expected to behave in a safe and appropriate manner whilst on transport. The Council will work with schools, parents/carers, and the child to help manage behaviours to ensure the ongoing safety and comfort of all passengers including drivers and any passenger assistants.

Should a child or young person misbehave whilst being transported to or from school, the provision of transport may be withdrawn either for a period of time or permanently. Normally a warning letter will be sent to parents/carers/carers/guardians prior to transport being withdrawn. However, in the event that any incident is considered serious enough, following an investigation by the Transport team, the withdrawal of transport may be immediate. In this instance the responsibility for ensuring attendance at school will remain with the parent/carer/guardian of the child.

As part of its responsibilities to ensure that children and young people in Wokingham Borough are safe, the Council will engage with transport operators and providers in the local area to ensure that drivers are aware of and carry out their safeguarding responsibilities appropriately. If parents/carers and carers have any issues or concerns around the safeguarding of their or other children whilst being transported to or from a place of education or learning, they should contact the Travel Assistance team without delay.

22. How to Apply

- **Pupils without an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)**

Application Forms are available online at:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/schools-and-education/school-information-and-services/school-and-college-transport/>

Any application will only be considered once by the Community Transport Unit. If an application is refused, one Stage 1 appeal may be submitted and if that is unsuccessful, one Stage 2 appeal. A fresh application may be submitted if there is a change in circumstances which could affect eligibility.

- **When to Apply**

Parents/carers who wish to apply for Travel Assistance should do so as soon as the offer of a school place has been accepted. For parents/carers and carers who file an appeal against a placement, the application should be made as soon as possible after the appeal outcome is known.

Those wishing to be considered for Travel Assistance under the extended rights criteria should include evidence of income and/or entitlement to free school meals with their application.

If Applications for Travel Assistance are made as soon as the offer of a school place has been accepted, applicants will be notified of outcomes from their application as soon as appropriate Travel Assistance has been secured, and at least 21 calendar days before the start of the Academic Year.

Travel Assistance arrangements will be reviewed on an annual basis, to ensure that any Assistance provided during the Academic year remains appropriate and that eligibility criteria for the forthcoming Academic year are met. Reviews will be carried out in the Spring of each academic year. One possible outcome of these reviews is that Parents/carers/Carers may be asked to re-apply for Travel Assistance support. Applications will need to be submitted and assessed before the end of the Summer term in the Academic Year.

➤ **In year transfers or newcomers to the area**

Applications for Wokingham Borough schools are considered half-a-term in advance of the school place being required. Parents/carers and carers should apply for travel assistance as soon as they have a school place confirmed.

➤ **Pupils with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP)**

Parents/carers will still have to complete an application form, but they should include evidence of additional needs, including why they believe it is unreasonable for them to accompany their child to school, where this is appropriate.

Completed application forms should be sent to the SEND Team:

SENDTransport@wokingham.gov.uk

If Applications for Travel Assistance are made as soon as the offer of a school place has been accepted, applicants will be notified of outcomes from their application as soon as appropriate Travel Assistance has been secured, and at least 21 working days before the start of the Academic Year.

Travel Assistance arrangements will be reviewed on an annual basis, to ensure that any Assistance provided during the Academic year remains appropriate and that eligibility criteria for the forthcoming Academic year are met. Reviews will be carried out in the Spring of each academic year. One possible outcome of these reviews is that Parents/carers/Carers may be asked to re-apply for Travel Assistance support. Applications will need to be submitted and assessed before the end of the Summer term in the Academic Year.

23. Complaints and Appeals

What is the difference between an appeal and a complaint?

Complaints arise when you are unhappy about something, for example, you may feel you have not been dealt with properly or in a professional manner, that information given to you was incorrect or that there has been an unacceptable delay.

In the first instance please contact the Community Transport Unit (CTU) via email to Schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk. If further to this your issue has not been resolved, please follow the Complaints Procedure.

With an appeal, you may be perfectly happy with the way that you have been treated but feel that the wrong decision has been made and would like it re-examined. For these issues, please follow the Appeals Procedure.

Complaints Procedure

Complaints about the provision of Travel Assistance will be investigated in accordance with the Council's Complaints Policy.

The complaints policy can be found at:
<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints-and-compliments/>.

This does not apply to complaints about a refusal to grant transport, which will be dealt with through the Transport Appeals procedure (see below).

24. Appeals procedure

Parents/carers/guardians/carers or a young person are entitled to challenge the decision of the Council to refuse to provide assistance with transport as set out in this policy or when the parents/carers/guardians/carers or young person consider that the Travel Assistance, offered by the Council, is unsuitable.

A decision may be challenged on the following grounds:

- eligibility
- distance measurement; and/or
- safety of the route
- suitability of transport arrangements offered

➤ **Stage 1 – Review of decision**

You have 20 working days from the receipt of the transport decision to make a request for a review of the original decision.

The request should detail why the decision should be reviewed and give personal and/or family circumstances, which you believe should be considered during the appeal process.

How to make a Stage 1 appeal

You should make your appeal in writing, either by letter or email and then email your appeal request to: schooltransportappeals@wokingham.gov.uk

Please provide us with the following information:

- Confirmation that you are the legal parent or guardian of the child
- the date you received our transport notification
- Child's first name and family name
- Child's date of birth
- Your full name and address
- Your email address
- Your phone/mobile number
- Reasons for the appeal (i.e. eligibility, distance, route safety or transport assistance) and your reasons for challenging the Council's decision
- Any additional evidence you wish to present to support your request for travel assistance.

Community Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN or email to schooltransportappeals@wokingham.gov.uk

A Senior Officer from the Council will review the original decision and will send you a letter, detailing the outcome of the review within 20 working days of the receipt of the written request.

This will set out the following information:

- the nature of the decision reached
 - how the review was concluded
 - information about other departments and/or agencies consulted as part of the process
 - what factors were considered
 - the rationale for the decision reached
 - Information about escalation to Stage 2, if appropriate.
- **Stage 2 - Appeal**

If you are unhappy with the decision made at Stage 1, you will have 20 working days from the receipt of the Council's decision to make a request to escalate the matter to Stage 2 appeal.

How to make a Stage 2 Appeal

Please send your written request to:

Community Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN or email to schooltransportappeals@wokingham.gov.uk

Within 40 working days of receipt of the parent's request, an independent appeals panel will consider written and/or verbal representations from both the parent and officers involved in the case and will give a detailed written notification of the outcome (within 5 working days).

No member of the appeal panel will have been involved in the original decision to decline Travel Assistance. This panel will consider verbal and/or written representations from the parent/guardian/young person involved in the request.

You may request to attend the hearing to present your case in person if you wish.

The Senior Officer involved in the review of the decision at Stage 1 may also be invited to attend.

You will receive a letter, detailing the outcome of the appeal hearing, which will set out the following information:

- the nature of the decision reached
- how the review was concluded
- information about other departments and/or agencies consulted as part of the process
- what factors were considered
- the rationale for the decision reached

- information about escalation to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) if appropriate

25. Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

You have a right of complaint to the LGO if you feel that there was a failure on the part of the Authority to comply with procedural rules or there was an irregularity in the way the appeal was handled.

The LGO can be contacted at:

Local Government Ombudsman
PO Box 4771
Coventry
CV4 0EH

Helpline: 0300 061 0614.

www.lgo.org.uk

26. Key Contacts

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT UNIT (CTU):

schooltransport@wokingham.gov.uk

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) TEAM:

SENDTransport@wokingham.gov.uk

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**WOKINGHAM
BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**Transport Assistance Policy for young people
resident in Wokingham post-16, including young
people with SEND**

Academic Year 2024/25

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1. Introduction

The Council's annual Post 16 Policy Statement and the practice that results from it is intended to encourage the use of more environmentally sustainable forms of transport, supporting young people to walk, cycle and use public transport such as local buses and trains.

Local authorities do not have to provide free or subsidised post-16 travel support but do have a duty to prepare and publish an annual transport statement by the 31 May each year. This statement specifies the arrangements for the provision of transport and/or other support that a local authority considers necessary to facilitate the attendance of young people of sixth form age receiving education or training.

In determining the Wokingham statement, we have taken into account all relevant matters including the Council's aims and objectives to support independence and prepare young people for adulthood, and where appropriate employment. Wokingham is also committed to reducing emissions and improving Air Quality, to improve the quality of life for all our residents. This links to our [Climate Emergency Action Plan](#).

This policy statement gives information about the schemes and support available within Wokingham for the provision of college Transport Assistance aged 16 to 19 and 19 and 25. It outlines the transport schemes and assistance available for post 16 learners who live and study in Wokingham or those learners who live in Wokingham and attend an educational establishment outside of the Borough if it is the nearest provider offering the appropriate course.

This document is the current policy of Wokingham Borough Council. It will be reviewed annually and republished on the 31 May each year.

The full [National Home to School Transport guidance](#) is set out for reference.

Further information regarding Wokingham's commitment can be found by accessing the **statutory school age Transport Assistance policy**.

All young people carrying on their education Post 16 must reapply for travel support in Wokingham.

'Sixth form age' refers to those young people who are over 16 years of age but under 19 or continuing learners who started their programme of learning before their 19th birthday (years 12,13,14).

Local authorities also have a duty to encourage, enable and assist young people with learning difficulties / disabilities to participate in education and training, up to the age of 25.

This policy uses the term 'Post 16' to include both learners of sixth form age and those with learning difficulties / disabilities up to the age of 25.

This policy document specifies the support that Wokingham Borough Council (the Council) considers necessary to facilitate the attendance of Post 16 learners receiving education or training.

Education or training refers to learning or training at a school, further education institution, a council maintained or assisted institution providing higher or further education, an establishment funded directly by the Education Skills Funding Agency, learning providers delivering accredited programmes of learning which will lead to positive outcomes and are funded by the Council, for example, colleges, charities, and private learning providers.

This document describes the support available to young people of Wokingham entering or continuing with full-time Post 16 Education. It explains the support packages in place to encourage participation and prevent transport being a barrier to young learners.

This policy statement gives information from the Local Authority, schools, academies and FE colleges and other relevant sources. The aim is to provide the most up to date details of the latest charges and any means testing procedures.

This statement gives advice on the support available to learners with learning/mobility difficulties and explains the commitment to encourage independent travel to and from the place of learning.

Another aim of this policy is to support those that are vulnerable to becoming not in education employment or training (NEET) at 16-17 by offering transport assistance to help overcome barriers in registered places of learning. The same will apply to Young Parents (Care to Learn C2L) aged under 20.

The provision of transport assistance to Post 16 students will support those students wishing to continue in education as part of the Raising Participation Age legislation.

2. Transport Assistance Offered by External Organisations

The Council seeks to support all Post 16 students to continue with their education and training. Through running this scheme and providing information about the Bursary funding available to support student access to education through their Post 16 education provider (FE Colleges and school 6th Forms), the Council considers it has met its statutory duties with regard to the majority of students.

➤ Concessionary fares schemes available

On most local bus routes operators offer reduced fares for under 19s, this helps ensure that students can buy passes at reduced rates, including those for travel to establishments outside the Borough. Where students attend sixth form provisions attached to secondary schools within the borough, the Council may be able to offer annual fare payer seats on school coach services.

The parent/young person should check for themselves the cost of season tickets and compare the rates before selecting the best value for their own travel arrangements.

If, having purchased an annual ticket for transport from the Council and it is later decided that it is no longer required, refunds will be available on the following basis:

- If the Community Transport Team receive the bus pass before the last day of the Autumn Term, a refund for 2 terms of transport will be provided.
- If the Community Transport Team receive the bus pass before the last day of the Spring Term, a refund for 1 term of transport will be provided.
- If the Community Transport Team receive the bus pass after the last day of the Spring Term, then no refund will be offered.

➤ Bursaries available from your Education Provider

Students should contact their school, sixth form college, or further education college to find out about financial and other support available, for example help with Childcare or other costs visit [Learner Support: Overview - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/learner-support)

➤ The 16-19 Bursary Fund

The 16-19 Bursary Fund, administered by individual education providers, is available to support any young person who faces genuine financial barriers to participation in education, including transport costs. All education providers must make available a copy of their 16-19 Bursary Fund Policy. Applications should be made directly to the education provider.

For further information on the 16-19 Bursary Fund visit: www.gov.uk/1619-bursary-fund. Key Local providers and contact details can be found on the [Council Local Offer website](#).

There are two types of 16-19 bursary available;

Vulnerable student bursary

You could get a bursary worth up to £1,200, depending on your circumstances and benefits.

Discretionary bursary

You could get a discretionary bursary if you need financial help but do not qualify for a bursary for students in vulnerable groups. Your education or training provider decides how much you get and what it's used for.

If you're over 19, you'll only be eligible for a discretionary bursary.

For further information on the Vulnerable Students Bursary and the Discretionary Bursary, including the eligibility criteria and how to apply, visit the [GOV.UK website](#).

➤ **Residential Support Scheme**

You may be able to get help with the cost of accommodation from the Residential Bursary Fund (RBF).

You must:

- meet the residency requirements (your college will check this)
- be at least 16 and under 19 on 31 August 2023

You may be eligible if you're 19 and either:

- continuing on a course you started aged 16 to 18
- have an [education, health, and care plan \(EHCP\)](#)

Your course must:

- be at a specialist residential centre (your college can confirm this)
- be too far to travel to each day (your college must agree with this)
- be full-time
- be '16 to 19 funded' (your college can confirm this)

What you'll get

Your college will decide how much you get. It depends on your household income. You can get payments for a maximum of 3 years.

➤ Care to Learn

The Care to Learn scheme can help with childcare costs while you study.

You must be aged under 20 at the start of your course.

The scheme is available for publicly-funded courses in England.

You can get up to:

- £180 per child per week if you live outside London
- £195 per child per week if you live in London

What it covers

Care to Learn can help with the cost of:

- your childcare, including deposit and registration fees
- a childcare taster session for up to 5 days
- keeping your childcare place over the summer holidays
- taking your child to their childcare provider

Payments

Childcare payments go directly to your childcare provider.

Before they can be paid:

- your childcare provider needs to confirm your child's attendance
- your school or college needs to confirm that you're attending your course

Travel payments go direct to your school or college - they'll either pay you or arrange travel for you.

When payments stop

Payments end when:

- you stop attending your course
- you reach the end of your course

- your child stops attending childcare
- **Special educational needs and disability information advice and support service (SENDIASS)**

SENDIASS Wokingham provide free, confidential, impartial advice, guidance and support for;

- Parents of children and young people up to the age of 25 with special educational needs and disabilities.
- Children and young people up to the age of 25 with special educational needs and disabilities

For more information visit [About us \(sendiasswokingham.org.uk\)](http://sendiasswokingham.org.uk)

3. Local Authority Transport Support

The local authority has a **discretionary** power to provide transport assistance to those past Year 11 or over 16years.

Whilst there is no legal duty to provide free or subsidised transport to all post-16 students, the scheme operating under this policy recognises that the Authority needs to support all young people, including those from low-income families and those with learning difficulties and/or disabilities

Students of sixth-form age

This is defined as;

- Being a person receiving education or training at an establishment and he/she is over compulsory school age but is under the age of 19 or has begun a particular course at the establishment before attaining the age of 19 and continues to attend that course, **or**
- Is over the age of 16 and out of cohort, repeating year 11.

This definition also applies to a young person with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) up to age 25, if they are continuing a course started before their 19th birthday.

Eligibility criteria for Local Authority Support

Students of sixth-form age: 16- to 18-year-olds attending a school

A young person will qualify for transport assistance if they:

- Are a resident of Wokingham Borough

- Have an EHCP and are attending the nearest school **allocated by the Local Authority**, identified in their most current EHCP as meeting their needs, or a nearer qualifying school.

and

- Live more than 3 miles from their allocated school. (The distance criterion will be waived for students where their learning difficulty or disability prevents them from walking to school or college or from using public transport)

16- to 25-year-olds attending a further education college/free-standing sixth form college

A young person will qualify for transport assistance if they:

- Are a resident of Wokingham Borough
- Are going to a full-time college course (648 hours in an academic year)
- Live more than 3 miles from the nearest school or college. (The distance criterion will be waived for students where their learning difficulty or disability prevents them from walking to school or college or from using public transport)

and either

- The school or college they are attending is the nearest school or college to offer the course

or

- They have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) and are attending the nearest school or college allocated by the Local Authority, identified in their most current EHCP as meeting their needs, or a nearer qualifying school or college.

***The nearest suitable learning provider is the closest school or college to the home address able to offer a suitable level of study in accordance with the young person's educational needs. If you choose to study a course which is not offered by your nearest college or educational setting, you will not normally qualify for assistance. If parents choose to send their young person to a school or college (or the young person chooses this themselves) which is not the nearest suitable setting, as described above, assistance with travel arrangements will not normally be provided by the Authority.**

16 to 19 Local Authority Transport Assistance Offer

The standard offer of transport assistance for students aged 16-19 is a **Personal Transport Budget (PTB)**. A PTB is a direct payment to you and is designed to help you to get your child to school/college. It replaces council-organised transport (COT), although requests for traditional transport methods will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

The term “Transport Assistance” is used to describe the options of EITHER a Personal Transport Budget (PTB) or council-organised transport (COT).

The legislation that applies to 19+ students is slightly different and for that reason, families of this group may still be offered council-organised transport (COT) or a PTB.

For all students moving into post 16 education for the first time they will need to apply for a PTB if they require transport assistance as this is the standard offer. Following their application acceptance and approval of eligibility, if families feel that the only way they can get their child to school is by using traditional transport (e.g. taxi or minibus), you will be able to appeal the offer of a PTB in order that the Council can consider your individual and/or any exceptional circumstances.

A young person already in receipt of post-16 COT before September 2024 will not have that COT withdrawn until an assessment has been done that shows that a PTB is suitable for the young person

Exceptional Circumstances

The offer and type of Post 16 transport remains at the discretion of the Council, but we will take into consideration individual circumstances and the needs of your child (including a consideration of your application form, the EHCP and any current transport risk assessment that the Council has undertaken).

The Council is aware that all children to whom this policy applies will have varying degrees of SEND. Some examples that the Council would not ordinarily see as exceptional (in their own right) are:

- Single parent families
- Parent(s) that work
- Having other children to look after and/or at other schools
- Living in a rural area with or without access to public transport
- Parents/students unable to drive or having access to a car
- Students in wheelchairs

However, it is likely that a family with a number of those circumstances listed above could be classed as exceptional. By the very nature of 'exceptions', the Council recognises that there may be many reasons why a student could only access school/college using council approved transport; so it naturally follows that it will be for parents to demonstrate that.

The Council will consider any exceptional circumstances advised for individuals on a case-by-case basis.

Personal Transport Budgets

A Personal Transport Budget (PTB) is a payment designed to help you to get your child to school. It is available to SEND children who have been assessed as eligible to receive Home to School transport by Wokingham Borough Council.

A PTB is granted at the discretion of the Council, therefore even if your child is assessed as being eligible to transport assistance, you may not be granted a PTB if it is not cost effective for the Council to do so, for example if your child could be placed onto existing transport at no additional cost to the authority.

A Personal Transport Budget (PTB) is a payment to help you to get your child to school or college. You can use the PTB in any way you wish that enables your child to get to school or college.

Why choose a personal transport budget (PTB)?

- Freedom to make your own arrangements – to suit your family
- Control over how the money is spent
- Your child may feel more secure and relaxed at school or college
- You can share the cost and save money by joining up with other parents
- You could use the money to help your child become more independent

You could use your PTB in many ways:

- Drive your child to school or college yourself
- Arrange for a friend or relative to cycle or walk with your child
- Car share with other parents
- Get a bus pass for a friend to go with your child
- Pay for a bus pass for your child
- Pay for childcare for another child – so you can take your eligible child to school or college
- Work with the school or college to join up with other parents
- Use it towards the cost of a taxi or share the cost of the taxi with other parents

Calculation of the PTB amount

The amount of PTB payment that you will receive will be determined by the straight-line distance from your child's home address to their school or college.

If a child receives a PTB partway through the school or college year, or attends school or college on a part-time basis, the total payment will be on a pro rata basis to account for the reduced amount of time that a parent will be responsible for transport arrangements.

Please refer to **Annex A** of this document for further information and guidance on personal budgets and to find out how much money you may receive.

Change of circumstances

You must notify the Council immediately in writing or by email about any change in your circumstances that may affect your eligibility to transport assistance and/or your PTB payment, for example:

- If you move address or change school/college or school/college site.
- Change of timetable that affects your child's school hours or days.
- Long term absences (5 consecutive school days or more).

If you fail to notify the Council of any change to your circumstances, which the Council later decides would have had the effect of reducing or ending your child's entitlement to payments then the Council may terminate your PTB payments and will seek to recover any monies that you should not have received for the period in which you failed to notify.

If you are unsure about whether a change of circumstances will affect the PTB payments, you are advised to discuss this with the Council.

If any change to your circumstances means that your child's eligibility to transport assistance is withdrawn, then the PTB payments will cease.

Change of payment

There are circumstances in which the amount of PTB payment may be reviewed, adjusted, suspended or terminated. These are:

- Your child's attendance falls below 90%.
- Your child regularly arrives late at school/college in the mornings.
- Your child arrives at school/college in an unfit state to learn.
- The travel arrangements that have been put in place for your child using the PTB are deemed to be unsuitable or unsafe.

- Your child accesses short – break stays away from the family home.
- There is a change to national legislation and/or the Council’s policies.
- You have more than one child or other member of the same household each receiving a PTB and attending the same school/college or another school/college nearby

Review of PTB arrangements

The PTB will be reviewed on a regular basis. As part of the PTB review, the Council will contact your child’s school/ college to request their attendance records to confirm their level of attendance, and that they are able to fully access their learning opportunities.

Once this information has been received and the review has been completed, any decision to adjust or withdraw the PTB will be given to you in writing.

Payment of the PTB will be paid into a nominated bank account every calendar month in advance. In exceptional circumstances alternative payment arrangements may be made by agreement between you and the Council.

Using the PTB

You must always spend the payment, or allow the payment to be spent, in a way that ensures the young person’s attendance at school or college.

You can use the PTB in any way you wish to do this, for example:

- You or someone in your family can drive your child to and from school/college.
- You can arrange with a friend or relative to cycle with or walk your child to school/college.
- You can car share with other parents.
- You could provide a relative or friend with a bus pass to take your child to and from school/college.
- You could pay for a place on a vehicle that the school organises to take children to and from their school/college.
- You could pay for childcare for another child in order for you to take your eligible child to school/college.

If you use the PTB to employ someone yourself, then you will be responsible for complying with relevant rules regarding Tax and National Insurance, Employment Law, Insurance, Health and Safety or any other relevant rules or legislation in force at that time.

The Council always recommends that you have a check carried out by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) on anyone that you are thinking of employing.

If you use the PTB to enter into contracts with organisations e.g., after school clubs, or individuals: you are responsible for complying with the terms and conditions of those contracts e.g., payment arrangements, notice of cancellation, etc.

The Council advises you to seek your own independent legal advice on the terms of the agreement that you may be entering into and any obligations that are placed on you.

You will:

- have control over how the payment is used that allows you to get your child to school/college.
- accept responsibility for the decisions made regarding the use of the payments and understand what the consequences are for misuse.

You cannot use your payment:

- To buy or utilise a space on transport services from the Council.
- For any purpose that does not enable you to get your child to or from school/college.
- For any activity that is illegal, unlawful, or unsafe.
- For other purposes that may bring the Council into disrepute.

Although you have control over how payments are spent, the money can be reclaimed by the Council if it is not used in accordance with this Guidance.

If you are granted a PTB, you may wish to discuss this with your child's school/college as they may be able to put you in touch with other parents who also receive a PTB. You could look into working collectively to ensure the best use of the PTB for all of the children and families.

Terminating the PTB agreement

You may terminate the agreement by providing at least one calendar month's written notice to the Council but note that when a PTB is awarded to start at the beginning of a new academic year then the earliest date that the agreement can be terminated is 31st October.

You must also tell anyone you have engaged to provide services under the PTB. The Council will provide you with at least one calendar month's written notice if it decides to terminate the PTB agreement with you.

Full Terms and Conditions

You are advised to read the PTB Agreement terms and conditions and further information, by visiting the following website:

Unsuccessful applicants

If your child or young person is not eligible for the PTB, you may be able to **purchase a concessionary seat** on existing transport for their journey, if a spare seat is available.

You may also want to ask your college or sixth form for details of any bursary schemes they may have to help with expenses. If their application for home to school transport has been unsuccessful they can **appeal the decision**.

Independent travel training

In line with the Council's aims and objectives to support independence and prepare young people for adulthood, and where appropriate employment, independent travel training (ITT) will be expanded as an option. The Council will identify young people, and those who will be transitioning from compulsory education into Post 16 and above who could benefit from ITT and contact their families with a view to undertaking an ITT assessment.

An ITT assessment will be carried out with the support of the family and/or school, to confirm the suitability of the young person for the one-to-one ITT programme, taking into account the following criteria:

- The likelihood of the pupil being eligible for SEN transport under the 16 to 19 policy
- Existing level of independent travel skills
- The age of the pupil
- The distance between home and school
- The SEND of the pupil
- The route which the young person would need to undertake
- Journey times using public transport and the complexity of the journey
- The frequency of the journeys required.

This assessment would take place before the pupil undertakes the ITT programme, which would last for approximately four to six weeks. During the programme, the pupil will travel

to and from their education or training provision each day with their dedicated one to one ITT trainer both in the morning and afternoon from the home to the school and vice versa.

During the period when a pupil is taking part in the ITT, this will be their Transport Assistance offer. At the end of the ITT programme, the Council will review the pupil's progress with the family to decide if it is appropriate for the pupil to continue to travel independently. If it is not appropriate for the pupil to travel independently, their Transport Assistance offer will be reviewed.

Although the vast majority of young people are successfully supported to achieve and benefit immensely from becoming independent travellers, it is however acknowledged that for some young people, due to the nature of their SEND, ITT will not be appropriate.

Review of eligibility

If a young person is assessed as not eligible for Transport Assistance, the Council will not be obliged to re-assess the individual for the remainder of that academic year, unless the place of residence or education changes, except where an appeal is lodged in line with the Appeals procedure.

All Transport Assistance offered is subject to annual review, in line with Education Funding Agency Guidelines, and it is at the discretion of the Council.

4. Appeals and Complaints

What is the difference between an appeal and a complaint?

Complaints arise when you are unhappy about something, for example, you may feel you have not been dealt with properly or in a professional manner, that information given to you was incorrect or that there has been an unacceptable delay. For these sorts of issues, please follow the Complaints Procedure (link provided in section below).

With an appeal, you may be perfectly happy with the way that you have been treated but feel that the wrong decision has been made and would like it re-examined. For these issues, please follow the Appeals Procedure.

Complaints procedure

The Council is committed to ensuring that Transport Assistance provided is appropriate to the needs of the young person, is of a high quality and meets required safety standards.

Complaints about the provision of Transport Assistance will be investigated in accordance with the Council's Complaints Policy. This does not apply to complaints about a refusal to grant transport, which will be dealt with through the Transport Appeals procedure.

The complaints policy can be found at:

<https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints-and-compliments/>.

Appeal procedures

Parents/guardians/carers or a young person are entitled to challenge the decision of the Council to refuse to provide assistance with transport as set out in this policy or when the parents/guardians/carers or young person consider that the Transport Assistance, offered by the Council, is unsuitable.

A decision may be challenged on the following grounds:

- eligibility
- distance measurement; and/or
- safety of the route
- suitability of transport arrangements offered

Parents who disagree with the provision of a PTB or the value of a PTB may ask for a review using a pro-forma (available from the Council) that will allow them to detail the reasons why they feel the PTB is not appropriate to meet the transport needs of their child and/or why the Council's policy has not been followed. This will constitute Stage one of the procedure. A written response will be made by a Reviewing Officer.

Stage 1 – Review of decision

You have 20 working days from the receipt of the transport decision to make a request for a review of the original decision.

The request should detail why the decision should be reviewed and give personal and/or family circumstances, which you believe should be considered during the appeal process.

How to make a Stage 1 Review of decision

You should make your appeal in writing, by letter or email.

Please provide us with the following information:

- Confirmation of identity and the capacity in which you are making the appeal (e.g. as legal parent or guardian, or young person)

- the date you received our transport notification
- Child's first name and family name
- Child's date of birth
- Your full name and address
- Your email address
- Your phone/mobile number
- Reasons for the appeal (i.e. eligibility, distance, route safety or transport assistance) and your reasons for challenging the Council's decision
- Any additional evidence you wish to present to support your request for Transport Assistance .

And then email your request to:

Community Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN or email to schooltransportappeals@wokingham.gov.uk

A Senior Officer from the Council will review the original decision and will send you a letter, detailing the outcome of the review within 20 working days of the receipt of the written request.

This will set out the following information:

- the nature of the decision reached
- how the review was concluded
- information about other departments and/or agencies consulted as part of the process
- what factors were considered
- the rationale for the decision reached
- Information about escalation to Stage 2, if appropriate.

Stage 2 Appeal

If you are unhappy with the decision made at Stage 1, you will have 20 working days from the receipt of the Council's decision to make a request to escalate the matter to Stage 2 appeal.

How to make a Stage 2 Appeal

Please send your written request to:

Community Transport Unit, Wokingham Borough Council, Shute End, Wokingham, RG40 1BN or email to schooltransportappeals@wokingham.gov.uk

You will be expected to consider and offer evidence about:

- Details of how the young person currently travels around outside of college/sixth form
- Examples of incidents/concerns as a result of the Council's original decision
- Current Medical evidence from a consultant supporting the young person
- What efforts have been made by family and friends to support the young person with his/her Transport Assistance and attendance at college/sixth form
- Evidence that the alternative travel options have been explored, along with evidence why they are not suitable

Within 40 working days of receipt of the parent's request, an independent appeal panel will consider written and or verbal representations from both the parent and officers involved in the case and will give a detailed written notification of the outcome (within 5 working days).

No member of the appeal panel will have been involved in the original decision to decline Transport Assistance. The panel will consider written submissions from parent/guardian/young person, involved in the request and the Reviewing Officer.

You will receive a letter, detailing the outcome of the appeal hearing, which will set out the following information:

- the nature of the decision reached
- how the review was concluded
- information about other departments and/or agencies consulted as part of the process
- what factors were considered
- the rationale for the decision reached
- information about escalation to the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO) if appropriate

Local Government Ombudsman (LGO)

You have a right of complaint to the LGO if you feel that there was a failure on the part of the Authority to comply with procedural rules or there was an irregularity in the way the appeal was handled.

The LGO can be contacted at:

Local Government Ombudsman

PO Box 4771

Coventry

CV4 0EH

Helpline: 0300 061 0614.

www.lgo.org.uk

Introduction

A Personal Transport Budget (PTB) is a payment designed to help you to get your child to school. It is available to SEND children who have been assessed as eligible to receive Home to School transport by Wokingham Borough Council.

A PTB is granted at the discretion of the Council, therefore even if your child is assessed as being eligible to transport assistance, you may not be granted a PTB if it is not cost effective for the Council to do so, for example if your child could be placed onto existing transport at no additional cost to the authority.

Benefits of a PTB

Some examples of the benefits of a PTB are:

- Freedom and flexibility to make travel arrangements that best meet your family's needs and circumstances.
- Choice and control on how funding to support your child's needs is spent.
- Your child may be more relaxed at school if they are dropped off or collected by someone close or familiar to them.
- Opportunities to co-ordinate with other parents with PTBs to arrange shared transport.
- Opportunity to use the PTB to support your child's personal development, for example to encourage independent travel such as public transport to enable them to access social and employment opportunities in the future.

Applying for a PTB

An application for a PTB can be made by:

- the parent, guardian, or carer on behalf of the child.
- the student themselves if they are over 18 years old.
- a nominated person acting on behalf of the applicant if agreed by the applicant and that nominated person has capacity.

If you would like to apply for a PTB, then please click on the following link to complete the application form:

Calculation of the PTB amount

The amount of money that is awarded is based on the distance between your home and the school your child attends. Many available maps and internet-based measuring tools will give you an indication of the distance from your home to your child's school, but this is only an indication. The distance measured is based on a straight-line distance (as the crow flies) and Wokingham Borough Council's own measuring software is used to determine this. For fairness and consistency, the same software is used for all applications.

There are three distance bands in which you would expect to receive a payment.

| Band | One-way distance from home to school (miles) | Personal Transport Budget Payment |
|-------------|---|--|
| 1 | Up to 5 miles | £2000 per annum |
| 2 | 5 to 10 miles | £3000 per annum |
| 3 | Over 10 miles | £5000 per annum |

PTB payments are made on the basis of your child attending school for 190 days per year. If your child attends school less than 190 school days per school year, or starts during the school year, Wokingham Borough Council will make your PTB payment on a pro rata basis.

PTB payments will also not be made for days where your child is not required to attend school/college (e.g., study leave or other authorised absence from school/college premises). This means you may receive less than the total amount outlined above. Wokingham Borough Council will send you a schedule each year that will detail what your expected monthly payments will be, based on 100% attendance (taking into account your child's timetable). Parents must confirm within 14 days if this schedule is incorrect. Failure to do so may mean that it is not possible to remedy underpayments at a later date.

Should your child be absent from school, even if this is through no fault of their own, your following month's payment will be reduced to account for the reduction in required travel. Free school transport is also not available for work experience or additional journeys that the school requires your child to take. You will be notified of the reduction that will be made in the following month's payment before that month's payment is due to be paid.

Annex B - Personal Transport Budgets (PTB)

Questions and Answers

To be completed by September 2023

Would I receive the PTB until my child finishes at the school they attend?

Once a PTB has been granted, you are not guaranteed to receive it until your child leaves their current school. Wokingham Borough Council will review your child's PTB at least once a year. The review will evaluate whether it remains cost effective for the PTB to be provided and new transport options may mean this is no longer the case. The review will also check your child's attendance records to ensure your child is regularly accessing school.

If your child's attendance at school is not sufficient to continue paying you a PTB or where there is more cost-effective transport in place, the PTB may be withdrawn. If this should happen, you will be given 28 days' notice.

What should I do if my circumstances change?

If your child moves home or changes school, you must ensure that you let Wokingham Borough Council know as soon as possible, but no later than 28 days before the change is due to take place. Failure to notify Wokingham Borough Council of such changes under the terms of the agreement would constitute fraud and could lead to legal proceedings at a later date to recover any undue payments. On notification of a change in circumstances your child's eligibility to receive a PTB would then be reassessed. You are not guaranteed to continue to receive a PTB because one was previously provided. The PTB assessment will be made on the basis of your child's current circumstances and what alternative transport is available at the time. Any transport arrangements that are required after the change but before your child has been reassessed will be the parent's responsibility to arrange. Where payments are made and it is later established that the Local Authority had not been informed of a change in circumstance, payments will be recovered by the Local Authority's Debt Recovery Team and where appropriate, through the courts.

Do I need to collect any receipts for petrol or show how the personal transport budget is being spent?

No. Once the payments are made to you, you can use them any way you wish to for your child to get to and from school every day. However, the Council retains the right to check payments are being spent correctly and lawfully.

Would I receive a PTB if my child attends two schools?

No. Transport assistance is only provided to one school. If you apply for a PTB, this will only be assessed to the school that your child is on roll at and eligible for transport assistance to.

Will the Council arrange short term transport cover for the occasions that I am unable to transport my child to school, for example if I am unwell?

No. The Council will not provide any cover transport arrangements and it will be your parental responsibility to ensure your child's attendance at school.

You are advised to have a contingency plan in place when using your personal transport budget if for any reason you are unable to get your child to school yourself or by your chosen method.

Would I receive the PTB until my child finishes at the school they attend?

Once a PTB has been granted, you are not guaranteed to receive it until your child leaves their current school. The Council will review your child's PTB at least once a year. The review will evaluate whether it remains cost effective for the PTB to be provided and new transport options may mean this is no longer the case. The review will also check your child's attendance records to ensure your child is regularly accessing school. If your child's attendance at school is not sufficient to continue paying you a PTB or where there is more cost-effective transport in place, the PTB may be withdrawn. If this should happen, you will be given 28 days' notice.

My PTB request has been refused, can I appeal?

PTBs are only available to children that are eligible for travel assistance, there is no appeal where eligibility is not in dispute, however, you can have the decision reviewed.

PTBs cannot be provided until we have established whether or not your child is eligible for free school transport.

When applying for travel assistance, parents are advised to provide whatever information they feel best evidences their child's particular need. This may be their child's Education Health and Care Plan, a report from their child's consultant or GP that references how their needs impact their ability to travel to school or any other information that the parent thinks would assist in providing the most appropriate transport arrangements for their child. The Council will use this information to assess your child's eligibility for travel assistance and decide what the most appropriate form of transport is. The Council will then use the cost of this transport to assess whether a PTB can be provided.

If you have been refused a PTB because the cost of the PTB is more than the cost to the Local Authority of transporting your child, you can in the first instance ask for a review of the decision by a Senior Officer by emailing SENDtransport@wokingham.gov.uk

Will the payments be taxed?

The budget is a payment made in relation to the child not the parent and so should not affect your tax situation. It is used to enable your child to get to and from school each day in a safe and legal way and should not be used for any other purpose. If you have concerns that it may impact on your tax situation, you will need to seek your own advice from a tax expert in relation to your personal circumstances.

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Wokingham Borough Council SEND Transport Policy Consultation July 2023

Response from SEND Voices Wokingham for WBC CSO&S Extraordinary Committee Meeting, August 15th, 2023.

SEND Voices Wokingham (SVW) are greatly concerned about the implications of the proposed changes to transport policy for our SEND families and the potential for unintended consequences. These policy changes will impact on the most vulnerable who need specialist provision. Equality impact assessment will be relevant and potential changes go against the principles of early intervention.

Quotes from a few families who have been in touch with SVW on the proposed changes:

My son is due to start post-16 education in September. He is meant to be in education until he is at least 18, but due to his disabilities, he is currently unable to use public transport (in any event his post 16 setting would involve several bus changes that he wouldn't cope with). As both parents work full-time, we would be unable to transport him ourselves. If these proposed changes come into effect, my son will be unable to access the education that he is supposed to attend, because we have no means of getting him there. I can't help but feel that they would be discriminating against my son, if he's not able to attend post-16 education like an able-bodied young person “

“I've seen they are thinking of taking away the fare payment but for pupils with free school meals. I'm one of the parents with a child who goes to an education setting via transport and gets benefits and there is no way I could afford the amount each month without the fare payment. I struggle now to feed my kids etc. without the added costs they are saying”

“Omg! This is illegal surely????? I can forget about getting a job then. “

“Disgusting and a massive backwards step! I'm fuming!!!”

Key Questions:

1. How has the obligation to consult properly has been met?

Numerous Parents and Carers have contacted SVW saying that:

- they were not able to complete the survey due to technical issues,
- they were not aware of the consultation, and it was not publicised appropriately,

- the eligibility criteria and personal budgets were not properly described in the new proposal and therefore informed responses to the consultation cannot be made,
 - that the consultation was carried out at a time which is known to be difficult for families with SEND to respond due to their caring needs and difficulties SEND pupils often have at the end of term
2. **How will the changes impact those U5 SEND children?**
 - And ensure that they are able to access education without discriminating against their age and disability?
 - What are the number of pupils expected to be impacted by this change and expected saving?
 - How does the risk assessment account for those SEND U5, who could potentially miss out on year's education, and their outcomes?
 3. **How will Post 16 SEND young people be able to access education, particularly those who have to use out of borough placements, as not enough provision locally (age and disability discrimination)?**
 - What are the number of pupils expected to be impacted by this change and expected saving?
 - How does the risk assessment account for those SEND post 16, who could potentially become NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training), and their outcomes for adult life?
 - What are the potential impacts for Adult Social Care if these pupils' become NEET, as a result of the proposed changes?
 4. **How many will be affected by the removal of farepayer seats for SEND low-income families (socio-economic discrimination).**
 - What are the number of pupils expected to be impacted by this change and expected saving?
 - How does the risk assessment account for those vulnerable SEND pupils being further disadvantaged?
 - How have constituents of Wokingham been able to make an informed decision about this change without details on what the criteria for concessions and personal budgets will be?

The above are **High Negative** impact in WBC's own EQIA - the proposal is likely to have a significant negative impact on many people or a severe impact on a smaller number of people.

Summary of Concerns for SEND (Special Education Needs & Disability) Pupils

How has the obligation to consult properly has been met?

The obligation to consult properly has not been met. Parents were not able to complete the survey due to technical issues, many parents were not aware of the consultation, eligibility criteria and personal budgets not properly described in the new proposal and therefore informed responses to the consultation could not be made.

The obligation for WBC to consult properly on the proposed changes to the Home to School Transport policy for 2024 has not been met.

- We have been contacted by a number of parents who were unable to submit the survey. On completing the online survey, they received an error message “www.wokingham.gov.uk refused to connect.”. We ourselves had problems Thursday evening and again on Friday morning with the survey crashing mid-way through on my first attempt and then sending an error message when the survey was submitted on the second attempt. We contacted WBC switchboard at 10am on Friday morning to report the problem as we could not find a contact for the Engage Team. The switchboard assured us they would email the Engage team and reply to us to let me know what was happening, but we never received a call back. We did eventually manage to submit a response on the third attempt late Friday afternoon, but we were also contacted on Friday evening saying that there were still issues. Unfortunately, as it was outside of office hours, we were unable to contact anyone to resolve this. We contacted the Engage Team on Monday to highlight this issue.
- Has the post-16 statutory guidance paragraph 47 been met by WBC meeting their wider obligations to consult (especially YP)?
- We have been contacted by many parents saying that they were not aware of this consultation. Families did not receive notice of this consultation via their schools and only sending it to families who currently have transport is not adequate. Was it sent to all CYP who have an EHCP?
- There is insufficient information in the proposed policy about the travel training and personal budget for parents to make an informed response to the consultation. What will the travel training consist of? Who will be eligible? When will it start? How will it work for pupils travelling out of borough? What safeguarding assessments will be done? What will the personal budget cover? How will the amount of personal budget be assessed? How will eligibility for a personal budget be assessed?

Our email requesting additional information/clarification for families was not answered and therefore we could not update families.

How will the changes impact those U5 SEND children and ensure that they are able to access education without discriminating against their age and disability?

A change to policy would effectively remove the right of the most vulnerable under 5s to education and go against the current Safety Valve Programme of early intervention, which aims to support early interventions to prevent the need of the increasing requirement for specialist, often out of borough placements, which are costly.

Under 5's specialist provision in the Borough is limited, even with expansion plans at Farley Hill. If a child has a summer birthday, they would not be eligible for any travel assistance until they turn 5 meaning that they may miss the opportunity of a whole year of education, reducing early intervention and forcing a child to lose out on a year's progress. This would increase the child's disadvantage to their peers even more than their SEND needs. This would also have the potential of resulting in the child needing more costly interventions in the future. This could potentially also mean a child losing their school place if the parent carers were unable to transport their child or cover the cost. This in turn creates an increased disadvantage to their peers. The impact on young children missing out on education has already been clearly seen from the impact of covid.

This proposed change could be discriminatory (age and disability)

- The proposed changes to the transport policy could effectively remove the right of under 5s to education.
- Equality impact assessment will be relevant and goes against the principals of early intervention.

How will Post 16 SEND young people be able to access education, particularly those who have to use out of borough placements, as not enough provision locally? (age and disability discrimination)

Removing post-16 travel assistance could potentially increase the number of 16 and 17-year-olds who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) as they would not be able to travel to their post-16 education placement. There is not enough detail about the proposal of offering a personal budget or travel training. Travel training may not be viable for many post 16 young people because they have to travel long distances out of borough to suitable provision that meets their needs because there is little to no provision in the Wokingham Borough for them e.g. Treloar's in Hampshire, Chilworth House Oxfordshire. Travelling by public transport would mean multiple changes of bus/trains, which is not a viable option for our SEND pupils that require specialist provision (this is why they attend specialist provision and not their local 6th form), therefore these proposed changes have the potential to remove their option of any post-16 education. This would also have an impact on parent carers being able to work and support other children to and from school in their household, as public transport isn't an option and there is no local provision.

There must be no blanket policies for post 16 transport to a 'no' to transport to over 16s (see Education Act 509 AB(3) 509AB[F2LEAs in England: further provision about transport policy statements for persons of sixth form age]

- It is very unclear whether the proposal is to NOT provide transport post 16, or just that the fare payer system will end, and each case will be judged on its own merits. there is no explanation of the criteria that will qualify a Young Person for travel assistance.
- There is no detail about the Personal Budget, i.e., how much, will it even cover travel expenses and therefore an informed decision about the proposed changes could not be made by those completing the consultation.
- No details have been provided about the travel training. We agree in principle to move to offer travel training much more widely but are sufficient trainers available? What would the costs to a family be? What if independent travel is not an option either due to severe LD or physical difficulties? What if there is no sensible alternative to a journey by car as there is no public transport? There is so much more information required here.
- What cost analysis has been done: Will travel training be cheaper than the fare-payer fee? It may not be initially, but successful training may reduce costs long term and be of benefit to the YP in adulthood.
- Will travel training only be available post 16 or will consideration be given to training them in a familiar environment close to home in years 10 and 11 so they can then transfer these skills to their college journey?

This proposed change could be discriminatory (age and disability)

- The proposed changes to the transport policy could effectively mean Post 16 SEND young people unable to access education, particularly those out of borough placements and increase NEET.
- Equality impact assessment will be relevant and proposed policy goes against a young person with SEND of 6th form age (post 16) having no less favourable than the arrangements specified for pupils of the same age

Removal of farepayer seats for SEND low-income families (socio-economic discrimination)

SEND families are often low-income as often one parent carer is unable to work due to caring commitments, they are many single parent families and/or many of the parent cares have disabilities themselves. By removing the fare-payer seats for low-income families this will discriminate against these families.

- Equality impact assessment will be relevant and proposed policy discriminates against this group.

As Cllr Stephen Conway reported to the Wokingham News on 13th July:

“Focusing our limited resources on helping those most in need has been a priority for the current administration running the council. It will continue to be our priority over this year and beyond. Every pound we save elsewhere reduces the pressure on services that make a real difference to those for whom daily life is an ongoing struggle.”

“That is why we are having to make tough choices in areas of the council’s services that are less profound in their impact on people’s lives than the wonderful work done by Adults and Children’s services.”

Access to education is a basic human right and removing this opportunity goes against the council leaders’ own words.

Other points of concern:

Definitions and 7 qualifying schools

In law a ‘suitable school’ is defined as ‘suitable for the child’s age, ability, aptitude and any SEN they may have’ Education Act 1996 Section 7 (see paragraph 4 of the statutory guidance).

‘Evidence would have to be provided by the parent/carer to show that they have applied for and been refused a place at the school which is the nearest school to their home address and any others closer than the school offering admission’

How will SEN parents know what is their nearest suitable special school? This could put the onus on parents to pick the right school, yet there is very poor information available for them to make informed choices. It will be difficult for non-SEN parents to determine this too (especially if they have any difficulties themselves or no access to e.g. google maps). The majority of parents would assume their catchment school is the closest. It will need to be made very clear on the application form how a parent can determine their nearest suitable school.

Travel assistance during the school day and accompaniment.

There is logic to transport requests due to disability of the parent going through Adult Social Care, except not all adults with disabilities have social workers. Also, we anticipate there would be a lengthy wait for an assessment for these parents to access support, which could then affect the child attending school.

Timing of assessment of eligibility.

‘Travel assistance would end at the end of the school term following the assessment’

Clarification needed: does this mean parents will have 1 term’s notice? (ie if you are assessed in the Autumn transport would end at the end of the Spring term) or that transport ends at the end of the term in which you have the assessment.

Provision for children with SEND.

The proposed change suggests that travel assistance will not be provided if there is a nearer suitable school, but if you read para 23 of the guidance they have to also consider if it would be an inefficient use of resources. We interpret this to mean that WBC should pay if the difference is negligible and there are other benefits they should still pay.

Types of travel assistance required:

'if a child attends a school within statutory walking distance ...and a personal assistant is required, the council may request that a parent act as the personal assistant'

We believe WBC could request it but not require it. Travel has to be suitable so if an escort is required then the LA must provide it. However, some parents would probably like this idea, so it is a reasonable suggestion to ask families.

Change of address.

The need to reapply once moved – will there be any grace period whilst the new application is made or will transport stop until it has been re-assessed? Have WBC considered the impact on those who are forced to move, e.g. council tenants/Domestic violence victims/homelessness

Pupils living in temporary accommodation

Is limiting assistance for 1 term realistic? How long does it generally take for permanent arrangements to be made? (We suspect it is longer than 1 term)

Changing schools

Managed moves – We are assuming that the school they are moving from will not count as their nearest suitable school? How will WBC define the nearest suitable school in the context of managed moves? Is it the nearest that accepts them? Sometimes schools that are close may be unsuitable e.g. because they do not meet need.

EHE and EOTAS

We agree that EOTAS transport should be part of the EOTAS budget.

Post 16

There can be no blanket policy to 'no' to transport to over 16s (see Education Act 509 AB(3) 509AB[F2LEAs in England: further provision about transport policy statements for persons of sixth form age]

(1)A statement prepared under section 509AA shall state to what extent arrangements specified in accordance with subsection (2) of that section include arrangements for facilitating the attendance at establishments such as are mentioned in that subsection of disabled persons and persons with learning difficulties.

(2)A statement prepared under that section shall—

(a)specify arrangements for persons receiving full-time education or training at establishments other than schools maintained by the local education authority which are no less favourable than the arrangements specified for pupils of the same age attending such schools, and

(b)specify arrangements for persons with learning difficulties receiving education or training at establishments other than schools maintained by the authority which are no less favourable than the arrangements specified for pupils of the same age with learning difficulties attending such schools.

(3) In considering what arrangements it is necessary to make for the purposes mentioned in subsections (2) and (3) of section 509AA the local education authority shall have regard (amongst other things) to—

(a) the needs of those for whom it would not be reasonably practicable to attend a particular establishment to receive education or training if no arrangements were made,

(b) the need to secure that persons in their area have reasonable opportunities to choose between different establishments at which education or training is provided, (c) the [F3 distances, and journey times, between] the homes of persons of sixth form age in their area [F4 and establishments] such as are mentioned in section 509AA(2) at which education or training suitable to their needs is provided, and

(d) the cost of transport to the establishments in question and of any alternative means of facilitating the attendance of persons receiving education or training there.

Additional Factors for consideration:

SEND Voices Wokingham would like to see some more open transparency around the findings of the previous survey and how those findings fed into the current proposals, along with a breakdown of the costings of transport in the various areas, as our understanding is that the bulk of the transport budget is predominantly over the general mainstream transport and the costing around SEND 0-5 and SEND post 16 is much smaller. A FIO request (Ref No: 16986) illustrates that WBC do not know the numbers and costs of the U5 and post 16 transport and are therefore not able to demonstrate what cost saving the changes to the policy will provide. They cannot evidence that removing post 16 SEND transport would offer any savings at all as some vehicles carry children of different ages to the same school. WBC may even lose revenue with this proposal as the removal of the fare payer post 16 YP will stop these contributions to WBC.

FOI results Ref No: 16986

| | 21/22 | 22/23 |
|-----------------------------|--|-------------------------------------|
| Total cost of H2S transport | £4.248m. | £5.897m. |
| Number of U5 | Unable to provide this data. | Unable to provide this data. |
| Cost of U5 | Unable to provide this data. | Unable to provide this data. |
| | "The number of under 5 children with transport, and the cost of the transport cannot be extracted from the Transport and Finance systems". | |
| Number of post 16 | Average = 54/month (range 53-64) | Average = 45/month (range 35-52) |
| Cost of post 16 | Unable to provide this data | Unable to provide this data. |
| | "The cost of the Post 16 transport cannot be reported, as although some vehicles carry only post 16 students, other vehicles carry children and young people of different ages." | |

We know that Wokingham Borough has the highest number of households affected by the recent rises in mortgage rates and with rates forecast to continue to increase this will only get worse.

25 worst-hit constituencies

by number of affected households and cost increase

| Constituency | Number of households affected | Average increase in mortgage costs | Constituency | Number of households affected | Average increase in mortgage costs |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------------------|
| Wokingham | 14,700 | £4,800 | Beaconsfield | 10,900 | £6,400 |
| Croydon South | 13,400 | £5,200 | Chesham and Amersham | 10,100 | £7,100 |
| East Surrey | 13,400 | £5,000 | Hornsey and Wood Green | 9,700 | £6,900 |
| Esher and Walton | 13,300 | £7,500 | Wimbledon | 9,600 | £8,400 |
| Epsom and Ewell | 12,500 | £6,400 | Ruislip, Northwood and Pinner | 9,500 | £7,000 |
| Twickenham | 12,300 | £7,100 | Ealing Central and Acton | 9,400 | £7,000 |
| Kingston and Surbiton | 12,100 | £5,400 | Tooting | 9,400 | £7,000 |
| South West Hertfordshire | 11,700 | £6,300 | Battersea | 9,300 | £8,400 |
| South West Surrey | 11,600 | £5,600 | Finchley and Golders Green | 8,800 | £8,300 |
| Richmond Park | 11,300 | £9,600 | Hampstead and Kilburn | 7,700 | £9,100 |
| Hitchin and Harpenden | 11,300 | £5,800 | Chelsea and Fulham | 6,300 | £12,100 |
| St Albans | 11,100 | £6,300 | Kensington | 4,600 | £15,000 |
| Chipping Barnet | 11,000 | £6,700 | | | |

SOURCE: ONS AND COMMONS LIBRARY DATA

Background information:

Extract from email sent to WBC on 29th June 23

SEND Voices Wokingham were involved in the Home to School Policy update that happened in 2020/21 which comes into effect in September 23. The impact of those changes are not yet known and won't be known until after September 2023 academic year. However, WBC are now proposing yet further changes to an untested policy change, that has not had an effective impact assessment carried out.

Many aspects of the current proposed changes in this year's consultation were included in the 2020/21 consultation on the transport policy. This consultation clearly demonstrated that the Wokingham residents were not in favour of SEND Children and Young People being excluded from the transport that they need.

Which raises many questions:

- How was the 2020/21 consultation been used to inform the current one?
- What has changed so drastically that another consultation is required before the 2020/21 changes have been implemented in September 2023?
- Why has there been no coproduction with families in this consultation prior to issuing?
- What is the financial impact of these changes?

- What other WBC departments were included in these discussions, such as Adults and Children’s Social Care and the implications these changes could have on their services and budgets?
- How was the Equalities Act applied? Especially with WBC’s own Impact Assessment stating a ‘high negative’ impact for the already disadvantage families of SEND.
- Has there been a travel feasibility study carried out. As most SEND provision is not located in easily accessible areas, for trains and bus travel, they are generally in quieter out-of-town locations.

A summary of the concerns that were raised by parents is in appendix below.

Appendix:

Transport Policy Consultation – Zoom meeting with SVW members 28th June 2023

Points and concerns raised by members:

- What does “suitable qualifying school” mean and who determines that a particular school is suitable.
- If WBC are determining every families “suitable school” then where has the right for parent carers to choose their school gone?
- Why does everything in WBC have to be such a battle to get the support and services we need for CYP, this just adds to the stress and burden.
- Why can’t WBC work in coproduction with families.
- How will these changes impact current provision in place, will it all be changed? I’ve only just got my child in a school with transport, will that now be taken away?
- The commitment to EOTAS packages is very unclear, are we going to lose transport for that as well, it’s taken years to get something effective in place, it’s hugely worrying that we may now loose it all.
- My CYP live close to two others at the same school but we all go in different taxi’s. Why isn’t there a way of working with the schools and families, to develop relationships, so that these CYP could all travel together?
- We already have huge issues with taxi’s and not knowing who they are before they turn up, why isn’t more work and support being given to ensure CYP arrive safely and in a position to learn.
- It’s not clear how you could then appeal any of these decisions.
- Not clear what the criteria is for those who will be considered for exception, so how are we making an informed decision on what’s being asked?
- How am I or any other parent going to be able to work? It’s hard enough as it is, without having to give up work or never be able to work again.
- WBC is not above the law; how does this comply with the 2014 and the care act laws?
- We can never get any answers from Jamie, Charlotte, or Lauren, and now this is going to make life even harder.
- Why has WBC gone ahead with such a radical consultation when its own impact statement, says it will have ‘High Negative’ impact? Where’s their justification for putting families through such hardship?
- How do these changes fit in with WBC Climate and Environmental policies because what they are proposing will mean that more cars will be on the roads, transport CYP of all ages.
- Travel training, this isn’t proactive enough in supporting CYP to learn early enough to be ready for independent travel, most of those with EHCP’s aren’t being offered it. And who decides that a CYP is safe, how much

training do the travel training individuals have to make a judgement on their long-term safety and to understand their complex needs.

- This will remove CYP's choices and their adult outcomes and aspirations.
- What about those who are too anxious to use public transport and aren't getting any MH support?
- What about those who will never be able to use public transport?
- Most post 16 transport is out of borough and in remote locations, is there even public transport available to get there?
- WBC are taking our CYP's future away.
- If WBC expect parent carers to be personal escorts, how will we be able to work and look after other CYP in the household.
- Who do we write to, to complain?
- Yet again SEND families are being penalised, WBC don't care about what happens to our families.

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