

TITLE	Home to School Transport Policy (inc. SEND)
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 29 July 2021
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Children's Services - Graham Howe

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

The purpose of this report is to:

1. Enable Members to review and approve the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies, noting the changes made following outcomes from Public Consultation carried out in Autumn 2020
2. Enable Members to agree any final amendments required prior to implementation of the new Policies from academic year commencing September 2022
3. Enable Members to review some of the ways in which the new proposed Travel Assistance aim to more effectively address key legal and statutory duties relating to Home to School Transport / Travel Assistance, whilst contributing to long-term financial viability and sustainability of the service
4. Provide Members with an overview and the supporting detail of outcomes from the public consultation on the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies, and updates to the proposed new Policies in the light of consultation feedback

The benefits to the community from effective Travel Assistance policies include:

1. To help enable all children and young people to fulfil their potential by facilitating and enabling access to learning and education, making an important contribution to the "Enriching Lives" strategic priority in the Wokingham Community Vision
2. To enable the Council to fulfil its legal and statutory duties to provide Travel Assistance to eligible children and young people in the borough

In addition, new policies for Travel Assistance aim to make an important contribution to the strategic priority "Changing the Way We Work For You" in the Wokingham Community Vision, by:

3. Putting in place policies and criteria which are clearer and easier for parents, carers and professionals to follow
4. Contributing to the substantial portfolio of work which aims to improve the long-term sustainability, quality and financial viability of Travel Assistance
5. Setting out an offer of Travel Assistance which is in line with best practice in local government

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:

- 1) approve the two Travel Assistance policies (statutory school age, and Post-16);

- 2) approve implementation of the new Travel Assistance Policies from the academic year commencing September 2022

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

All Councils are required to periodically review their policies in relation to Home to School Transport (also known as “Travel Assistance”).

In the Spring and Summer of 2020, Wokingham Borough Council reviewed its current Home to School Transport (HST) policy, and approaches to provision of Travel Assistance for eligible children and young people in the Borough.

Further to engagement with a cross-party representative group of elected Members and key stakeholders including representatives from the Parent Carer Forum SEND Voices Wokingham in Spring 2020, and from a review of practice and policies in other local authority areas, a review of Wokingham’s current HST policy was carried out.

Over the course of the Summer 2020, two Travel Assistance policies were drafted as potential updates to the current Home to School Transport policy: one covering Travel Assistance for statutory school age children, the other for young people aged post-16 including young people with SEND.

The Policies were drafted following extensive consultation with professionals across relevant service areas, and engagement with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND through focus groups in the Summer of 2020.

A formal public consultation on the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies was carried out between 18th September and 6th November 2020 in order to get views from service users, professionals working across different services for children, young people and families in Wokingham, and Wokingham residents, on the proposed new policies and how best to make affordable improvements to the service.

This report:

- Enables Members to review the proposed new Travel Assistance Policy for Statutory School Age Children (Appendix 1) and Travel Assistance Policy for young people post-16 including young people with SEND (Appendix 2)
- Summarises how the Travel Assistance Policies have been developed in the light of relevant legal and legislative constraints; the review undertaken at the start of the Policy development process; and consultation with professionals and elected Members
- Provides a summary of the key points from the public consultation on the proposed new Policies, with the full Public Consultation Report (Appendix 3)
- Summarises how the Travel Assistance Policies have been updated in the light of outcomes from formal public consultation
- Provides Members with an Equality Impact Assessment relating to the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies (Appendix 4)

BACKGROUND

The Council is committed to ensuring it continues to meet its statutory responsibilities for Travel Assistance, enabling children and young people to access their place of education safely and ready to learn. The Council acknowledges that without this service some of the borough's children and young people would be unable to access their school or college, especially those who have significant additional needs, or deemed extremely vulnerable.

Prior to the development of new proposed policies for HST and Travel Assistance for young people aged 16+ with SEND, the Council has received feedback on the provision of its home to school transport and travel assistance services. It is clear from this feedback that whilst many receive a very good service, there are some areas for improvement which the Council have an opportunity to address by updating its policies in these areas.

At the same time, the costs of providing home to school transport and travel assistance are extremely high and have increased significantly in recent years, and much of this cost has to be met by the Council's core budget. This affects the Council's ability to provide high quality services to all Wokingham residents, and creates significant additional pressures on its budget.

Throughout the process of reviewing and developing proposed new policies for Travel Assistance, the Council has taken into account statutory guidance and legislative requirements, and the consultation on statutory guidance for local authorities on home to school travel and transport for children of compulsory school age published by the Department for Education.

The Council has also carried out an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) focusing on the proposals featured in the public consultation, attached as Appendix 4.

BUSINESS CASE

Analysis of issues: factors which drive the need for new Travel Assistance Policies

Legal and Statutory Duties in relation to Home To School Transport/Travel Assistance

Local authorities are subject to several legal and legislative requirements in relation to provision of Travel Assistance for children and young people to access places of education and learning, including those set out in the following legislation and statutory instruments:

- The Education Act 1996
- The Education and Inspections Act 2006
- The Equality Act 2010
- The School Admissions Code
- The School Travel Regulations 2007
- The Care Act 2014
- Education Funding Regulations
- The Children and Families Act 2014
- The School Standards and Framework Act 1998

- Statutory guidance from the Department for Education

By way of summary, the legal and statutory requirements around Travel Assistance relate to:

- Legal responsibilities and duties on local authorities to provide Travel Assistance
- Specifics relating to eligibility criteria as described in law, relating to factors such as walking distances from home to places of education and how these are to be calculated; criteria relating to assessment of the safety of walking routes; responsibilities around safeguarding children and young people in receipt of Travel Assistance (which extend to responsibilities of the local authority in terms of relationships with providers); and specific duties and eligibility criteria relating to Travel Assistance for children and young people with SEND
- Terms and conditions under which discretionary Travel Assistance can be provided, and circumstances under which local authorities are able to apply charges for Travel Assistance (e.g. for young people post 16).

This means that local authorities' provision of Travel Assistance is subject to several complex legal, legislative and statutory drivers and constraints. The work undertaken to develop new Travel Assistance Policies has been carried out in the light of these; the Policies aim to provide creative but fair and lawful solutions to the need to meet legal obligations relating to Travel Assistance, whilst laying the foundations for a new approach to providing Travel Assistance which will improve the sustainability and long-term financial viability of the service (see further detail in the Demographics and Demand section below, and the Financial Implications section towards the end of the report).

Demographics and Demand

Demand for Travel Assistance for children and young people to access places of education has increased in recent years, largely as a result of demographic changes such as local population growth.

The Office of National Statistics and Public Health Berkshire data Observatory estimate the population of Wokingham to be approximately 168,000-170,000 currently (compared with 165,000 in 2018), and growing at a rate of just under 1% per year.

Wokingham is a young borough: estimates show that approximately one third of Wokingham's population (over 50,000) is aged 0-24.

The proportion of children and young people in Wokingham with Special Educational Needs and or Disabilities (SEND) has grown significantly in the past three years and continues to grow more significantly than the overall rate of population growth. Research carried out as part of the Wokingham SEND Strategy showed the population of children and young people with SEND is growing at a rate of approximately 8% annually, compared with an average 4% increase in the child and young person population.

The same research showed that SEND needs are increasing, particularly in relation to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH), and complexity of needs is also increasing. During the 2019-20 Academic Year there was a 21% rise in the number of children and young people with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) compared with the previous year, and numbers of children and young

people with SEND who require SEND support but do not require an EHCP have also grown substantially (a greater than 8.5% increase between 2017 and 2020, with numbers of children and young people with SEN Support in state-funded Wokingham schools rising from approx. 2,200 in 2017 to 2,400 in 2020).

These increases in the numbers of children and young people with SEND and in need of SEN support have driven significant increases 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. Approximately 70% of the FY21-22 net opening budget for Home to School Transport / Travel Assistance of £3.8m is indicatively allocated to children and young people with SEND.

Steer from cross-party representative group of elected Members

Initial engagement with a cross-party representative group of elected Members in the Spring of 2020 provided officers with a clear steer on areas which new policies for Travel Assistance could look to address.

Members asked officers to consider the potential for clarifying the policy wording and eligibility criteria; explore opportunities for strengthening Wokingham’s approach to independent travel; and ensure that the Council’s provision of Travel Assistance was in line with its legal responsibilities and statutory duties, whilst also being financially viable and sustainable.

These considerations helped to inform the development of the consultation draft versions of the Policies, and also the questions put forward to the public in the consultation document to assist with further work to develop and complete the Policies.

How the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies respond to these drivers

Table 1 below sets out some examples of legal/statutory requirements and constraints affecting the Council’s approach to Travel Assistance, alongside examples of how the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies aim to address these to ensure statutory duties will be met more efficiently and effectively in future.

Table 1

Examples of legal and statutory requirements	Examples of how the proposed Travel Assistance Policies address these more effectively
Local authorities must apply and adhere to Travel Assistance eligibility criteria described in legislation.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The new Policies set out eligibility criteria clearly, for the benefit of parents and carers making Travel Assistance applications, and to assist professionals in carrying out fair, legal and appropriate assessments of Travel Assistance applications
Local authorities are permitted (and in some circumstances legally obligated) to review Travel Assistance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Both Policies state that Travel Assistance will be reviewed on an annual basis, in order to ensure that Travel Assistance provided for any given academic year is appropriate to a child and/or young person’s needs, and that

<p>arrangements, in order to ensure that these are appropriate to a child/young person's circumstances and needs.</p>	<p>provision of Travel Assistance continues to be subject to satisfaction of appropriate eligibility criteria. The statutory school age Policy makes it clear that one potential outcome of annual reviews of Travel Assistance could be that parents/carers would need to reapply for Travel Assistance. The post-16 Travel Assistance Policy makes it clear that "all post 16 students need to re-apply for travel assistance each year, even where they are on a continuing or multiple year course. Please note that provision of travel assistance in a previous year is no guarantee of entitlement to ongoing provision of Travel Assistance"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two Policies (one for statutory school age children, one for young people post-16) have been developed to help parents, carers and professionals to more easily identify and apply the relevant eligibility criteria to applications and assessments. This approach reflects feedback undertaken during the initial review of the current HST Policy that eligibility criteria were sometimes hard to identify within a single Policy that aimed to cover children and young people at all ages
<p>Local authorities are prevented by law from insisting that all children and young people make their own independent travel arrangements to access places of education and learning</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The Policies make a clear commitment to supporting children and young people to become independent, self-reliant travellers as far as possible, whilst accepting that what is possible in terms of "independent travel" will be different for all children and young people according to their needs and abilities - The Policies clarify what is meant by Independent Travel and provide details of the kind of support potential available to children and young people through Independent Travel Training (ITT) - The Policies clarify circumstances under which the Council has no legal duties to provide Travel Assistance
<p>Local authorities are legally prevented from charging for Travel Assistance for eligible children below the age of 16</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The post-16 Policy clarifies that young people aged 16+ eligible for Travel Assistance will have a charge applied as a contribution towards costs of provision, with discounts for low-income households - The Policies clarify the terms under which Travel Assistance can be purchased for children and young people who do not meet eligibility criteria - The statutory school age Travel Assistance Policy also clarifies the definition of

	Independent Travel and options in relation to Independent Travel Training (see row above)
The Local Authority must formally review its Policies relating to Travel Assistance and consult with the public on any proposed changes to Travel Assistance Policies	- Sections 3 and 4 below set out the details of the Public Consultation carried out on the proposed new Policies and outcomes from this consultation (Section 3), and how feedback from the Public Consultation have been incorporated into the draft Travel Assistance Policies presented in this report for discussion and approval (Section 4).

Outcomes from Public Consultation

Consultation Drafts of the proposed new policies for Travel Assistance for statutory school age children and for young people post-16 including young people with SEND, were made available to the public via the Council's public consultation webpage on September 18th 2020 for a 7-week consultation period. Members were previously presented with these Consultation Drafts in a report to the Executive in March 2021.

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

To assist in this process, a Consultation Document was also prepared. This consultation document set out several questions for respondents, which focused on:

- The most significant differences between the proposed new Travel Assistance policies and the current HST 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 opinion around opportunities to improve its Travel Assistance offer, and improve the long-term sustainability and financial viability of the service

The consultation document also enabled respondents to feed back any views they had on any aspects of the consultation drafts of the two Travel Assistance policies.

The full consultation report showing details of responses from all 76 respondents is attached as Appendix 3.

About the respondents to the public consultation

76 members of the public responded to the formal public consultation on the Council's website between 18th September and 6th November 2020.

Ahead of this date, 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.

89% of these were parents of school age children. 77% of respondents reported that their child/children had transport/travel assistance provided by the council; 36% of respondents have transport/travel assistance provided by a parent or carer.

In addition to responses via the public consultation portal, the Council have also received feedback from:

- SEND Voices Wokingham (Wokingham’s Parent Carer Forum), Additionally, two focus groups with parents and carers were facilitated by SEND Voices Wokingham (in August and November 2020) and attended by officers developing the consultation drafts of the Travel Assistance Policies
- A formal written response from the Liberal Democrat Group (submitted previously to the Executive as part of the March 2021 report on Travel Assistance Policies)

Feedback from Consultation on options to change discretionary Travel Assistance

A **headline summary** of the key questions and responses relating to options to change discretionary Travel Assistance is set out in Table 2 below:

Table 2

Theme	Summary of questions	Summary of responses
Ceasing discretionary transport for children under the age of 5	The council has the option to cease to provide free HST to an infant or primary school for a children under the age of five, where a child is deemed as eligible once they turn 5 years of age – to what extent do you Agree or Disagree with this approach?	64% of respondents Disagreed with ceasing to provide discretionary transport to under 5s who are deemed as eligible once they turn 5. 66% of respondents said they Agreed that the Council should provide discretionary transport to under 5s deemed eligible for transport at the age of 5.
Ceasing discretionary transport for a child turning 8 years	Wokingham has the option to cease to provide HST at the end of the term in which a child turns 8, where the child has been eligible due to living more than 2 miles but less than 3 miles from their nearest school. To what extent do you Agree or Disagree with this Approach?	81% Disagreed with this approach, and 78% said they Agreed that the Council should continue to provide HST to the end of the academic year in which a child turns 8, where the child has been eligible due to living more than 2 miles but less than 3 miles from their nearest school.
Continuing provision for young people aged 17-18	The Council could continue to provide home to school/college travel assistance for young people ages 17-18 who meet	72% Agreed provision should continue under these circumstances; 75% Disagreed that the Council take up the

who meet criteria under existing policies	the eligibility criteria under our existing policies. To what extent do you agree with this approach?	option to cease to provide ordinarily home to school/college travel assistance for young people ages 17-18 whilst promoting the Student Fare Card Scheme, 16-17 Saver and Disabled Person's Bus Pass Scheme to all post 16 students.
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Additional Feedback from Public Consultation

In addition to giving members of the public, service users and professionals the opportunity to give views on specific options as set out in the table above, the consultation also gave respondents an opportunity to give their views on a small number of key issues relating to home to school or college transport, in order to help with further development of the policies and to enable the Council to understand public opinion and perspectives on opportunities to help strengthen the service and improve its overall sustainability and viability.

These subjects included:

- Independent travel
- Collection points
- Use of travel allowances
- Reasonable steps to limit spend on the service
- Existing benefits being taken into account during the assessment process

A summary of the feedback received in response to these thematic areas is set out below:

Feedback on Independent Travel

Questions were asked in the consultation document around Independent Travel, in order to better understand the opportunities, barriers and support required to enable children and young people to be as independent as possible and travel independently to their place of learning where it is possible for them to do so.

A summary of responses to these questions showed:

1. In terms of a child's aspiration to travel independently, 51% said that their aspirations for independent travel included sharing school transport with other children and young people; 48% reported aspiring to being able to carry their own bags and board and alight a vehicle on their own; 45% reported their aspiration as being to travel without a parent or carer in attendance, and 42% reported an aspiration to access transport from a collection point. 31% reported an aspiration to undertake a single journey/route independently using public transport.
2. The greatest benefits to a child or young person who is successfully supported to travel independently were reported as being increased self-esteem and confidence (81%), reduced reliance on family members to assist with travel needs (53%), and improved access to employment or vocational opportunities (43%). The biggest benefits to the family of a young person who is successfully supported to travel

independently on public transport were reported as being family members having time to do their own thing (58%), less need for adults to accompany the young person (49%), reduced dependency financially (47%) and opportunities to access community services (41%).

3. The greatest barriers to independent travel via public transport were reported as limited awareness of danger or being unable to keep safe (54%), not being able to manage situations that aren't planned (44%), risk of getting lost or missing the stop (26%) and being able to access services due to poor public transport links (25%).
4. When respondents were asked if a child or young person has the potential to become an independent traveller and would benefit from independent travel training, should they be expected to undertake that training, a total of 59% agreed with this (42% Strongly Agreed, 17% Agreed). 26% Disagreed.
5. 73% of respondents thought that collection points for some children and young people would be beneficial; when asked how far it is reasonable to ask a child or young person to travel to a collection point, accompanied by an adult as necessary, 46% said the distance should be based on an individual needs assessment. In terms of suitable collection points, Bus Stops were reported as being the most suitable (67%), followed by suitable road-side locations (44%) and local points of interest e.g. local shops (34%) and near to local schools and nurseries (33%).
6. When asked about whether the Council should encourage more young people and families to use a travel allowance to make their own arrangements to travel to school or college, 31% neither agreed nor disagreed with this approach. 38% disagreed, and 28% agreed. The biggest benefits of travel allowances were cited as flexibility to access after school activities (48%), ability to arrange travel around work commitments (43%), ability to arrange travel around family/caring responsibilities (37%) and greater control over travel arrangements (32%). The top three barriers to use of a travel allowance were reported as public transport links not being suitable (69%), distance to school or college being too far (48%) and the value of the travel allowance being too low (38%).
7. It is worth noting that feedback received during the focus group sessions with parents and carers also included points relating to the potential for and challenges around independent travel. From these sessions it was clear that "independence" means different things for different children and young people according to their needs and the challenges they face; independence is an aspiration for many children, young people, their parents and carers, but support to children young people and families is needed if those aspirations are to be realised – both in terms of training, some forms of travel assistance, and a partnership/coproduction approach to ensuring that children and young people with SEND are able to access their place(s) of learning.

Feedback on taking reasonable steps to limit spend on the service

The consultation document flagged the level of expenditure on home to school or college transport for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities and asked respondents whether they agreed that the Council should take reasonable steps to limit spend on this service. 66% disagreed with this approach, and 12% agreed.

However, the full consultation document report attached as Appendix 3 sets out several suggestions from respondents about how the Council could take reasonable steps to limit spend on this service.

Feedback on taking account of existing benefits into account when assessing transport needs

The consultation document proposed the question:

“Children and young people may be receiving Disability Living Allowance, a Personal Independence Payment, or another form of travel benefit or concession. Ordinarily the purpose of this benefit is to provide support with travel and access to services and activities. With this in mind, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following: “Existing travel benefits or support should be one of the factors taken into consideration when assessing if a young person over the age of 16 needs additional support with travel to their education placement.” 41% agreed with this approach, 41% disagreed.

Updates to Travel Assistance Policies following formal consultation

Table 3 below provides an overview of the key changes to the Travel Assistance Policies following the formal public consultation:

Table 3

Feedback on Policies from consultation	Amendments and updates made to the Policies as a result
Some sections of the Policies appear to be duplicated / in an inappropriate section of the Policy	Duplications have been removed; structure of the Policies have been updated to ensure the Policies are easier to navigate
Links to points of contact for the Travel Assistance Team should be included in the Policies	Links and appropriate contact details will be included in the published version of the policies
The timetable for applications needs to be clarified and confirmed in the Policies	A web link to the timetable for applications and process for review of allocations of Travel Assistance will be included in the published versions of the Travel Assistance Policies
Clarification is required around eligibility criteria for young people post-16 with SEND in relation to Travel Assistance	Travel Assistance eligibility criteria for young people post 16 with SEND has been set out in a clear Section in the post-16 policy; clarifications have been made around eligibility at sixth form (aged 16-18) and post-19
Consultees requested that the final Policies make it easier for parents, carers and professionals to identify the appropriate eligibility criteria for Travel Assistance	Two Policies (one for statutory school age children, one for young people post-16) have been developed to help parents, carers and professionals to identify and apply the relevant eligibility criteria to applications and assessments. Eligibility criteria is set out in clear sections of each of the proposed new Policies. This approach also reflects feedback

	<p>undertaken during the initial review of the current HST Policy that eligibility criteria were sometimes hard to identify within a single Policy that aimed to cover children and young people at all ages</p>
<p>Consultees were not in favour of withdrawing discretionary Travel Assistance for children under the age of 5, or at the end of the term in which a child turns 8, where the child has been eligible due to living more than 2 miles but less than 3 miles from their nearest school.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposed new policies retain the option to provide discretionary Travel Assistance under these circumstances, but stress that the Council does not have legal obligations to do so • Work undertaken on the Equality Impact Assessment (see Appendix 4) showed that Policy terms which withdrew completely the option for this discretionary Travel Assistance could have a negative differential impact on the Equality Act 2010 protected characteristic “Age” • Additionally, data modelling showed the numbers of children and young people who would be adversely affected by the decision to withdraw completely this discretionary provision are small; costs of provision under these specific circumstances are <£4k (according to current service user data)
<p>Further clarification required about what is meant by Independent Travel and potential support available to support Independent Travel</p>	<p>Definitions of Independent Travel and examples of support in the form of Independent Travel Training are now included in the updated Travel Assistance Policies</p>
<p>Some consultees disagreed that the Council should take into account other benefits (such as provision of a motability vehicle) when assessing eligibility for Travel Assistance for young people with SEND post-19.</p>	<p>The post-16 Policy wording clarifies this point as follows:</p> <p>“Where there is a 'Motability' vehicle available to the student, but a decision has been made not to use the 'Motability' vehicle to support the student to reach their education placement, we would normally expect the carer/student to make their own appropriate alternative arrangements. If this is not possible/reasonable, further details will need to be provided to inform the decision-making process.”</p> <p>The Policy also clarifies:</p> <p>“Please note that we would not generally consider work or childcare commitments</p>

	as an exceptional reason for travel assistance to be provided for young people with SEND aged 16+.”
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Timeline for implementation

The timeline for implementation of new 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 the 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 Academic Year September 2022, 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 severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

Expenditure on Home to School Transport / Travel Assistance

Table 4 shows the profile of HTST usage (*financial year 2021-22*), and identifies that the largest customer group is Secondary mainstream, followed by children and young people with SEND. 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:

	Primary	Secondary	SEND	Total
Numbers	80	363	294	737

The Council is undertaking modelling as part of its Community Transport Programme to work through scenarios relating to expenditure on Travel Assistance in the current financial year and across the lifetime of the current MTFP. The Programme is also progressing several strands of work relating to Travel Assistance procurement, administration and operations, in order to ensure a quality service is provided and costs are controlled and reduced. As part of this work it is estimated that £50k efficiency savings arising directly from implementation of the new Policies.

Efficiency Savings arising directly from the proposed new Policies

In terms of the £50k efficiencies arising directly from implementation of the Policies, these relate to:

- More effective adherence to Policy eligibility criteria, terms and conditions

- Systematic annual reviews of Travel Assistance support to ensure that Travel Assistance is appropriate and arrangements do not automatically “rollover” across academic years without regard to eligibility criteria

Members are asked to note that validation work is being carried out as part of the delivery of the Community Transport Programme. This validation work will progress and is monitored through the governance arrangements of the Community Transport Programme and will be informed by updates on delivery of the SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme. In terms of ensuring the validation work and progress with delivery is monitored effectively, the co-sponsor of the SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme is also a workstream lead for the Community Transport Programme, and the sponsor of the Community Transport Programme will be a member of the SEND Innovation and Improvement Board from its first meeting in September 2021.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	(£50k)		Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	(£50K)		Revenue

Other Financial Information

The efficiencies identified form part of the Community Transport Review arrangements within which other savings and efficiencies are identified. The policy changes contained within the proposed Travel Assistance Policies provide the foundation for other activity and/or actions that both enhance the offer to children & young people and deliver savings. An example of such is that the proposed policies provide the ability to offer Independent Travel Training as appropriate to young people with SEND in order to meet both their Home to School or Post 16 Transport needs, but also their skills in relation to their transition to adulthood whilst achieving savings against the Home To School Transport budget.

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

The work on developing new Home to School Transport and Travel Assistance Policies forms part of the broader work on the Community Transport Programme.

The policies have been developed with input from stakeholders across Council Departments and services, in order to work through the interdependencies between these proposed new policies, and other council policies and services, and assess the impact of the new policies on a range of council services and processes.

Service areas engaged in work to date include:

- School admissions policy and practice
- The Council’s SEND team
- The Corporate Transport Unit
- Finance
- Democratic Services

- Commissioning
- Children’s Services: Learning, Achievement and Partnerships
- Members of the Community Transport Programme team

The wording of the consultation draft policies, consultation document and recommendations to Members in this report reflect best endeavours to assess the implications of the proposed new policy terms for services across the Council.

As set out in the Financial Implications Section on this report, the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies have been developed in the context of the Community Transport Programme, but also relate to the SEND Innovation and Improvement Programme. In practical terms, this means that development of these Policies has been shaped, informed and steered through engagement with stakeholders of each of these two major programmes – including professionals working across education, health, social care, children’s and adults services, the Corporate Transport Unit, finance and corporate planning and transformation

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 Appendix 4 to 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

The Travel Assistance policies aim to make a positive contribution to the Council's efforts to tackle the climate emergency and achieve its ambition of becoming a carbon neutral Borough by 2030. Examples include:

- The detailed references to "Independent Travel" and Independent Travel Training (ITT) as a possible option for Travel Assistance aim to help enable children and young people to travel to school or college independently as far as possible - for example being supported to make their way to school other than by car (e.g. walking/cycling, potentially with assistance), which has the potential to reduce the need for individualised transport by car
- The Travel Assistance Policies sit within the Community Transport Programme and are key enablers of several strands of work which have the potential to make a positive contribution towards carbon neutrality. For example, the potential use (where appropriate) of "collection points" and optimising route mapping (to find the most efficient transport routes and reduce the amount of transport by motor vehicle, and therefore reduce carbon emissions), and procurement (including options around more carbon-friendly modes of transport including electric vehicles)

- Fare-paying options and discretionary sale of un-filled spaces is designed to maximise utilisation of existing group transport, contributing to a reduction in individual transport by car and associated carbon emissions

List of Background Papers

- Appendix 1: proposed new Travel Assistance Policy for statutory school aged children
- Appendix 2: proposed new Travel Assistance Policy for young people post-16 including young people with SEND
- Appendix 3: Report on outcomes from formal public consultation on consultation drafts of the proposed new Travel Assistance Policies
- Appendix 4: Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) on proposed new Travel Assistance Policies

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