

Consultation on proposed changes to Home to School Transport, including a change to policy

Information pack

23 June 2022 – 21 July 2022



Contents

Introduction	3
Background and context	4
Slough Council's consultation policy	5
Why your views are important	5
How to have your say	6
Home to School Travel Assistance Service	7
The proposals in this consultation	8
Proposal One: To award Independent Travel Training as a travel offer for eligible children/young persons	9
What is the current situation?	9
What is being proposed?	9
Why is this being proposed?	9
How would this be implemented?	10
What would be the impact of this change on service users?	10
Proposal Two: Introduce a Travel Bursary as an appropriate form of assistance with Travel to School/College	11
What is the current situation?	11
What is being proposed?	11
Why is this being proposed?	11
How would this be implemented?	12
What would be the impact of this change on service users?	12
Proposal Three: Begin use of safe, co-ordinated pick-up and drop-off points	13
What is the current situation?	13
What is being proposed?	13
Why is this being proposed?	13
How would this be implemented?	14
What would be the impact of this change on service users?	14
Proposal Four: Cease provision of transport to Faith Schools or same sex Establishments in line with statutory obligations	15
What is the current situation?	15
What is being proposed?	15
Why is this being proposed?	15
How would this be implemented?	16
What would be the impact of this change on service users?	16
Proposal Five: Introduction of a contribution charge for children/young persons for those not of compulsory school age	17
What is the current situation?	17
What is being proposed?	17
Why is this being proposed?	17
How would this be implemented?	18
What would be the impact of this change on service users?	18
Frequently Asked Questions	19
Conclusion	20

Introduction

Slough Council is seeking residents' and stakeholders' views on proposed changes to the policies and delivery of Home to School and College Travel and Transport Services for children and young people, including those with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

These changes may affect pupils of all ages, attending both mainstream and specialist schools. The proposed changes reflect statutory obligations and best practice by other local authorities. This includes:

- the provision of Independent Travel Training (ITT) where it is appropriate to do so,
- the introduction of a Travel Bursary to enable families to make their own travel arrangements,
- introduction of the use of safe, co-ordinated pick-up and drop-off points for pupils with SEND,
- no longer providing assistance with travel to faith schools or same sex establishments unless statutory eligibility criteria is met
- introduction of a contribution charge for those in receipt of travel assistance who are not of compulsory school age, except those aged over 19.

Where the Council is proposing changes to the existing eligibility criteria for receiving Home to School Transport, or removing the service from existing service users, it is proposing changes to eligibility would affect new applications for transport from September 2023.

Where the eligibility criteria continue to be met, any agreed changes to current travel provision will be identified and implemented based on an individual needs assessment. Changes to provision of travel assistance may be introduced from January 2023 onwards with appropriate notice being provided to users.

The Council is required by law to consult on any changes to its Home to School/College Travel and Transport policies.

The consultation is open from **Thursday 23 June 2022** and closes at 11:59pm on **Thursday 21 July 2022**.

Background and context

The proposed changes in the organisation and delivery of the Home to School Transport Service aims to contribute £0.7 million towards this target.

Respondents to the Balancing the Budget consultation made some suggestions relating to the Home to School Transport Service, including improving service efficiency by increasing capacity of vehicles, making greater use of public transport, the voluntary sector, and private operators, and increasing charges and means testing for service users. It was also suggested that eligibility criteria for the service could be changed. The Council has considered these suggestions, some of which would not be permissible under legislation, when developing the proposals in this consultation.

The Council currently spends £3.4 million on providing Home to School and Post-16 Transport to around 710 children and young people. Of these, 520 attended schools and colleges that provide for their SEND. Service demand, and costs, are increasing and the Council wishes to use this budget more efficiently.

Cost comparisons in the table below¹ show similar demographic local authorities, including Birmingham City Council and Hillingdon Council. Whilst the cost per pupil at Slough is below the national average, when comparing against urban unitaries, metropolitan and London Councils, Slough is ranked 14 out of 25 where the highest cost per person is £8,591 per year and the lowest cost per year of £3,556 per year per person. Councils where transport for children and young people with SEND operates at a lower cost is typically achieved through more cost-effective models of transport delivery including:

- increasing the number of co-ordinated pick-up points where it is safe to do so;
- significant delivery of independent travel training
- comprehensive range of travel options, including Travel Bursary, Travel Buddies, Travel Training, Collection Points, etc...

Comparative costs are shown below:

Authority	Annual transport cost per pupil with SEND 2019/20
Slough Council	£5,769
National Average	£7,286
Birmingham City Council	£4,688
Hillingdon Council	£7,640

¹ Association of Transport Coordinating Officer (ATCO) benchmarking unit cost analysis 2019/20.

Birmingham City Council and Hillingdon Council are comparable local authorities to Slough Council in terms of demographics.

Nationally, the number of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) for children with SEND are currently increasing at a rate of 10% per annum. This is leading to higher demand for Home to School Transport and, on many occasions, for more complex support being necessary. This, combined with higher demand for specialist school places, is leading to additional costs.

Slough Council's consultation policy

The Council is committed to five principles of consultation, which are:

- to consult on key issues and proposals;
- to consult in good time;
- to be inclusive but with clear and appropriate limits;
- to consult using clear, simple information; and
- to ensure that responses are taken into account when decisions are made.

Why your views are important

It is important to the Council that the views of parents, carers, and children and young people who may be affected by the proposals are carefully considered to ensure that the service continues to meet the needs of its users. Feedback is also sought from Slough residents and other interested stakeholders.

The final policy proposals will be presented to the Council Cabinet meeting in September 2022. Findings of the consultation will be published and presented with the final proposals. Feedback from the consultation will help to inform any decision by the Council on the proposed changes to the Home to School/College Travel policies and how travel assistance is delivered.

How to have your say

Open Public Consultation

You are invited to give your views on the proposed policy changes and the way in which transport assistance is arranged and delivered. You can do this by using the online Response Form at <https://slough.citizenspace.com/transport/travel-assistance-policy> . The Information Pack and Response Form are available to download and print from the consultation webpage.

If you require a paper copy of the Information Pack or the Response Form, a copy in another language or format (such as audio, large print or Braille), or if you have any queries about the consultation, please email schooltravelconsultation@slough.gov.uk .

You can also email your response directly to Slough Council using the email address schooltravelconsultation@slough.gov.uk . You can also use the pre-paid envelope if you have been provided one to respond; if you do not have a pre-paid envelope then you can send your response by post to: *Fleet Operations – H2S Consultation, Slough Borough Council, Chalvey Recycling Centre, White Hart Road, Slough, Berkshire, SL1 2SF*

The consultation is open from **23 June 2022** and closes at 11:59pm on **21 July 2022**. Please note that responses received after this date will not be included in the findings report.

Consultation information events

Children and young people, their parents and carers, and other stakeholders will also have the opportunity to attend consultation events to get more information on the proposals. These events will be advertised on the Council's consultation webpage (<https://www.slough.gov.uk/consultations>), in press releases and using the Council's social media channels.

Public Meeting Event Details

Date	Venue	Time
27 th June	The Curve, William Street, Slough SL1 1XY	10:00am – 12:00pm
27 th June	The Curve, William Street, Slough SL1 1XY	12:30pm – 2:30pm
4 th July	Romsey Close Children/s Centre, Marish Primary School, Romsey Close, Langley SL3 8PE	12:30pm – 2:30pm
7 th July	Chalvey Hub, Ladbroke Road, Chalvey, SL1 2SP	11:00am – 1:00pm
7 th July	Chalvey Hub, Ladbroke Road, Chalvey, SL1 2SP	7:00pm – 9:00pm

Home to School Transport Service

The Council currently arranges daily Home to School Transport for about 710 children and young people. Of these, 190 attend mainstream school places and 520 attend places that provide for their SEND.

Information on the Home to School Transport Service, eligibility criteria, and the application process is available [here](#).

The Council is required by law to provide Home to School Transport support, free of charge, to all children and young people of compulsory school age who meet the nationally set distance criteria, where any of the following apply:

- The child is of compulsory school age but under eight years old, and they attend the nearest catchment school or one that is nearer to their home, and the shortest available walking route is more than two miles.
- The child is eight years old or over, but not above compulsory school age, and they attend the nearest catchment school or one that is nearer to their home, where the shortest available walking route is more than three miles (this is reduced to more than two miles if the child meets low-income criteria).
- Parents or carers apply for a place at the designated catchment school and a place is not available. In this situation, Home to School Transport assistance would be offered to the next closest school with an available place if the walking distance criteria above are met.
- The walking route to school is classified as an 'unsafe walking route'.
- The child or young person has SEND and meets the distance criteria described above for Home to School Transport. This also applies where, for reasons of their Special Educational Needs, disabilities or mobility problems, such children and young people cannot reasonably be expected to walk to their nearest suitable school.
- The child or young person is entitled to free school meals or their parents are in receipt of maximum Working Tax Credit and either:
 - the nearest suitable school is beyond 2 miles (if aged 8-11);
 - the school is between 2 and 6 miles (if aged 11-16 and there are not three or more suitable nearer schools); or
 - the school is between 2 and 15 miles and is the nearest school preferred on the grounds of religion or belief (if aged 11-16).

Discretionary provision can also be provided for some exceptional circumstances.

The proposals in this consultation

There are 5 proposals that are being put forward to deliver Home to School Transport more efficiently and support the development of independent travel options. These reflect and support the delivery of the Council's strategic aims which are as follows:

- Social integration of children and young people whatever their needs
- Independent for children and young people with SEND
- Promotion of parental responsibility to make any necessary arrangements to ensure their children attend school
- School responsibility to collaborate with the council on SEN Travel
- Environmentally sustainable travel
- Efficient use of public resources

The proposals presented within this consultation are:

1. The allocate the provision of Independent Travel Training as an appropriate form of travel assistance.
2. Introduce a Travel Bursary as a form of travel assistance available to families, to enable travel arrangement to be made or undertaken by the family.
3. Begin the use of safe, co-ordinated pick-up and drop-off points for transport arrangements which historically have been co-ordinated using home collections.
4. To cease provision of transport to faith Schools or same sex establishments in line with statutory obligations
5. Introduction of a contribution charge from those in receipt of assistance where the Council does not have a statutory obligation to provide free assistance to eligible individuals

The proposals in this consultation would contribute to reducing spend by around £200,000 in relation to delivery of support for travel to School and College

Proposal One: To award Independent Travel Training as a travel offer for eligible children/young persons

What is the current situation?

At present the current Home to School and College policies refer to Independent Travel Training as a form of travel assistance offered to eligible children and young persons. To date any support or training to develop a child or young person's independent travel skills has been undertaken by the Schools or Colleges. Those successfully developing those skills have been able to make journeys independently to services and activities but in general continue to remain on arranged transport to access their education from the Council.

Many Councils offer Independent Travel Training and offer this assistance to eligible children and young persons. Feedback from other Councils suggests that 14% of children and young people who would typically qualify for Home to School/College transport may have the potential to make their journey to School/College independently using public transport.

What is being proposed?

That after an appropriate and robust assessment of needs and the route the Council will be able to make Independent Travel Training and appropriate and reasonable offer to families. It would be expected that families, Schools and the trainers work collaboratively and in support of training the child to travel independently to School/College.

Training would be conducted on a 1:1 basis with ongoing assessment and monitoring. In some cases, training will be unsuccessful, in this situation the Council would ensure that appropriate assistance with travel is in place that reflects the needs and circumstances of the individual. Where Independent Travel Training is identified as not suitable for the child or young person then an alternative form of assistance will be offered.

Why is this being proposed?

Moving into adulthood the ability to access services and activities independently is vital. It is important for a number of reasons; 1) the level of support available in adulthood is normally significantly less than at School age, 2) the ability to access services and activities independently improves self-esteem, improve the employment/education opportunities available to an individual, and 3) Improve resilience for the family and individual and reduces reliance/dependency on others.

Independent Travel Training is not suitable for everyone and would only be offered following completion of necessary observations and assessments.

Successfully training just 15 children and young persons could reduce spend on transport arrangements by up to £85,000 per annum

How would this be implemented?

The Council would work closely with Schools and families to identify children and young persons with genuine potential to travel independently. A review of needs and conducting of observation/assessments will require time to be conducted correctly. It is expected that an initial small group of children/young persons will be identified and able to begin training on a 1:1 basis with an identified trainer early in 2023.

If training is successful with the initial group of trainers, then it is possible they could be travelling independently to their School/College after the Easter holidays.

What would be the impact of this change on service users?

The change will impact a small proportion of service users, most children and young person's using the service will not be impacted as they are unlikely to benefit from this training/travel option.

For users identified as having potential to travel independently, they will no longer automatically be offered arranged transport as their travel offer from the Council. They will be expected to participate in the training offered as soon as it is available. If training is successful, the child/young person will be provided with a public transport pass by the Council to enable them to continue to make their journey to and from their place of education.

Proposal Two: Introduce a Travel Bursary as an appropriate form of assistance with Travel to School/College

What is the current situation?

One of the travel options offered by the Council to families is the option to accept a mileage reimbursement of £0.45p per mile. This is paid monthly in arrears subject to monthly claims being submitted and approved. Using the reimbursement travel option is voluntary for those families whose children meet the agreed eligibility criteria.

Best practice and feedback from other Councils indicates that the current set up is often not attractive to families, either financially or how it is administered and have moved to schemes that offer a regular monthly payment in advance.

Currently 20 families use the existing reimbursement travel option.

What is being proposed?

The introduction of a Travel Bursary for families to make necessary travel and non-travel arrangements to enable their child to access their education. Families will take responsibility for the arrangements they use, in return they will receive a pre-agreed monthly payment to pay towards those costs. The value and formula used to calculate the value of the Bursary is being consulted upon with the aim to identify an appropriate template for implementation.

Examples of how some families have used payments from similar schemes with other Councils includes:

- Using the family car
- Paying for Bus/Train passes
- Contributing towards the cost of family organised transport e.g. taxi
- Paying towards breakfast or after school clubs/care

The list is not exhaustive, and the bursary could pay towards other options or a combination to fit in the family arrangements/circumstances.

Why is this being proposed?

It is important that a range of options are available to ensure the most appropriate travel option is provided. It is also accepted that traditional travel options are not as flexible as some families need and therefore the Travel Bursary looks to address this as a viable option for some families.

It is acknowledged that this travel option may not be appropriate for all families. Where the Travel Bursary is used by families it is expected that this will be more cost effective to the Council than the traditional travel options that have been historically available.

How would this be implemented?

Is this proposal is agreed, the Council would put in place the necessary mechanism to enable Travel Bursary's to be effectively managed and ensure the payment process operates as intended.

Once the Travel Bursary is set up it is expected that families will be notified that the Travel Bursary is available with families able to make a request. The Council will look to make families aware of the Travel Bursary potentially available to them to encourage voluntary uptake.

It is expected that the Travel Bursary will be available to for families to access and use from early 2023.

What would be the impact of this change on service users?

For children and young people who meet that statutory eligibility criteria as outlined in the proposed policies, the acceptance of a Travel Bursary is voluntary and families can decide not to accept this offer, the Council would then be required to identify an alternative appropriate travel option to offer the family.

Therefore, the impact of the Travel Bursary amongst children, young persons and their families is likely to be positive by providing an alternative travel option for consideration that may be more appropriate or a better fit with existing family circumstances/commitments.

Proposal Three: Begin use of safe, co-ordinated pick-up and drop-off points

What is the current situation?

Transport for children and young people with SEND is currently arranged on a door-to-door basis in most cases, where arranged transport is being used. The use of pick-up and drop-off points is a practice utilised by other Council, where it is identified as an appropriate arrangement for the individual child/young person (based on their needs).

The use of pick-up and drop-off points is typically seen as a smaller step towards independent travel, it also enables transport routes to run more effectively with fewer collection points and less reliance on having to manoeuvre down congested residential roads to create a more effective and consistent service.

What is being proposed?

It is proposed that where a child or young person is identified as able to access and wait at an appropriate pick-up and drop-off point then travel arrangements will reflect this. Children and/or young people will be picked up and dropped off at a single nominated and designated safe location, instead of their home address, where:

- multiple children and/or young people in receipt of transport assistance are living in close proximity, or
- the child or young person lives within a mile of a more efficient place for the transport provider to use as a pick-up and drop-off point.

Where a child/young person's needs identify that a pick-up and drop-off arrangement is not suitable then alternative travel arrangements will be used, which will include collection and drop-off from the home address

Why is this being proposed?

The proposed change would allow for more efficient school journeys by combining multiple pick-ups and drop-offs. It will enable routes to avoid some congested residential roads which significantly add to time required for collections and drop offs. Supporting children and young persons to use a nearby collection point and less reliant on home collections will aid their development to travel more independently and may be a small steppingstone towards travelling on public transport independently at some point in the future, as well as promoting healthy lifestyles, wellbeing, and preparing for adulthood.

The travel arrangement would be more like mainstream transport provision (using pick-up and drop-off points) but would continue to use a dedicate route (and crew) in the same way that typical SEN transport services operate.

How would this be implemented?

If this proposal is agreed, it is anticipated that changes would begin to be introduced from January 2023. Existing transport arrangements and individual needs of all existing passengers would be reviewed and where appropriate would be moved to consolidated pick-up and drop-off points. Working in partnership with Schools and families it is expected that changes will be phased with advance notice provided to families.

With an estimated 520 current service users, it is anticipated that **up to 10% of those service users with SEND** may be affected by this proposal.

It is proposed that designated pick-up or drop-off points would be no further than 1 mile walking distance from a child's or young person's home address. The journey from the home to the pick-up point would be considered for safety and whether it is reasonable to expect the pupil to walk that distance, accompanied as necessary by an adult. In practice a pick-up or drop-off point is likely to be approximately 300 metres from the home address.

What would be the impact of this change on service users?

There would be a greater impact on children with SEND, as they more commonly receive transport from their home address.

More children and young people would join their transport arrangement at a designated safe pick-up point (such as a bus stop, or other suitable location). The pick-up point could be up to 1 mile from their home address and parents / carers would need to consider how their child could travel safely to the pick-up point.

Proposal Four: Cease provision of transport to Faith Schools or same sex Establishments in line with statutory obligations

What is the current situation?

The Council's statutory obligation is to provide assistance to children meeting the eligibility threshold and attend their nearest educational establishment that can meet their educational needs. Councils are not obligated to support travel to Schools of choice, such as faith Schools and same sex establishments where a closer education establishment exists.

Currently families whose children attend a School (that is not a faith or same sex establishment) that is not the nearest, are expected to make their own travel arrangements.

Currently there are 20 children/young persons with travel assistance to either a Faith School or same sex establishment where a nearer educational establishment exists. This currently costs the Council £20,000 per annum.

What is being proposed?

From September 2023 assistance with travel will only be granted to those attending their nearest School. Existing arrangements will continue to be honoured during the 2022/23 academic year. The proposed change aligns the eligibility criteria with students attending non-faith or same sex establishments and ensures assistance is only provided to the nearest education establishment.

Why is this being proposed?

Current arrangements exceed the Councils statutory obligations. It has enabled a more favourable offer of assistance for those attending Faith Schools or same sex establishments which other children/young person's attending other establishments are unable to access. The proposal aligns the provision on offer from the Council whilst meeting is statutory obligations.

This proposal would reduce spend by approximately £20,000 per year.

How would this be implemented?

This proposal would be implemented by agreeing to the proposed policy change, the change will automatically to new applications for the 2023/24 academic year, whilst a review of existing provision will be undertaken to establish if individuals could be educated at their local education establishment.

Changes to eligibility will be considered on a case-by-case basis based on individual needs and circumstances. Any review of existing eligibility will be concluded before April 2023 and one terms notice given to affected families.

What would be the impact of this change on service users?

The proposed change is expected to affect 20 children/young persons who currently are in receipt of travel assistance to the Faith School or Same Sex Establishment they attend.

Proposal Five: Introduction of a contribution charge for children/young persons for those not of compulsory school age

What is the current situation?

At present the Council provides travel assistance to all children/young persons who meet the agreed eligibility criteria. The Council must provide free travel to all children of compulsory school age meeting the statutory eligibility criteria.

Although the Council may have to provide assistance for those attending post 16 education settings, the Council is not obliged to provide this for free and is able to request a fair and reasonable contribution towards the cost of provision.

Many other Councils request a contribution for non-compulsory age travel assistance, including the following:

Council	Maximum Annual Contribution Charge
Hertfordshire	£1,554
Buckinghamshire	£1,179
Essex	£900
Wiltshire	£850
Bexley	£400
Redbridge	£300

The current average cost to the Council to provide travel assistance is £5,769 per year per person.

What is being proposed?

The Council is proposing to introduce a contribution charge for young persons in post 16 education up to the age of 18, where a young person is 19 and their study programme has continued into their 19th birthday then the contribution charge will still apply.

Based on the current average cost of providing travel and the contribution charges of other Councils, Slough Council is proposing the introduction of a £1000 charge per annum (17% of the average cost per person per year).

The Council will consider a reduced rate where low-income thresholds are met.

Why is this being proposed?

Many young people are unable to benefit from Council support in relation to travel arrangements to their post 16 education setting. They often pay for their own travel arrangements including utilising the public transport network in Slough, discounted ticket prices, and College/setting arranged transport.

Some young persons in Slough are unable to access or use existing public transport services and rely on the Council to provide suitable travel assistance to access their placement. On average this provision costs the Council £5,769 per person per year.

Where financial hardship exists young persons and families are able to access additional funding which is intended to support with travel costs, such as the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund.

This proposal is expected to generate a £50,000 per year income whilst maintaining support with travel where it is necessary to support attendance at post 16 education settings.

How would this be implemented?

The proposed contribution charge would come into effect for all users of the service in post 16 education settings for the 2023/24 academic year. Applications for assistance are expected to be submitted in advance of the start of the academic year and will be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

A young person will be confirmed as entitled subject to contribution payment if the agreed eligibility criteria is met. The young person will only be confirmed entitled to assistance once the contribution payment has been received by the Council. At this point the Council will begin to make appropriate arrangements for travel and confirm arrangements in due course.

What would be the impact of this change on service users?

The introduction of a contribution towards travel costs will be a new requirement for those young persons who historically have accessed the service. Where there is an identified financial burden on families that would present a barrier to them accessing the service then there is an expectation that financial support will be sought from available channels and contribute towards the charge for assistance.

Frequently Asked Questions

If these proposals are agreed when would changes be implemented?

The findings of this consultation will be reported back to the Council's Cabinet meeting in September 2022. Following the results of the public consultation, if agreed, the eligibility changes may take effect from September 2023, whilst travel option changes may be introduced earlier (if appropriate to do so).

When would I know how these changes could impact my child(ren)?

If these proposals are agreed, and if your child(ren)'s transport is likely to change through their implementation, you would be advised by the Fleet Operations Team. You would be given a minimum of one month's notice of any changes.

What would happen if I could not get my child to a pick-up point, like a bus stop?

It would be the parents' or carers' responsibility to ensure they can get their child or young person to the designated pick and drop-off point, where it is safe and reasonable to do so based on the circumstances of the child or young person and the safety of the walking route.

What benefits would there be for my child in changing from home pick-up arrangements to a designated pick-up point, and/or mixing with different groups of children on transport?

The proposals would align transport for pupils with SEND with mainstream travel arrangements, which would enable children and young people, where suitable, to develop greater independence when travelling, provide more opportunities for social interaction during journeys, and help them to prepare for adult life.

Conclusion

You are invited to give your views on the proposed policy changes and the way in which transport assistance is arranged and delivered. You can do this by using the online Response Form at <https://slough.citizenspace.com/transport/travel-assistance-policy> . The Information Pack and Response Form, along with Easy Read versions of both documents, are available to download and print from the consultation webpage.

If you require a paper copy of the Information Pack or the Response Form, a copy in another language or format (such as audio, large print or Braille), or if you have any queries about the consultation, please email schooltravelconsultation@slough.gov.uk.

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The findings from this consultation will be published and presented to the Executive Lead Member for Children’s Services for consideration of a decision on the proposed changes later in the year.

The consultation is open from **23 June 2022 and closes at 11:59pm on 21 July 2022**. Please note that responses received after this date will not be included in the findings report.