

A photograph of a woman with short blonde hair, wearing a red top and a black quilted vest, walking alongside a young boy with a visible facial condition. The boy is wearing a grey hoodie, a blue quilted vest, and blue jeans, carrying a black bag. They are walking on a paved sidewalk. In the background, a blue bus is visible on the road, and there are trees and buildings under a clear sky.

All Age Travel Assistance Policy Consultation

The closing date for responses to the consultation
is **Midnight on the 29 November 2019**

wolverhampton.gov.uk

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

This document outlines the changes we propose to make to our travel assistance policies, protocols and ways of working as we bring them together into an **All Age Travel Assistance Policy**.

Please read this carefully before responding to the consultation.

If you require assistance or need this information in large print, Braille, audio/CD or in another language, please call or email.

By email: **SENDTeam@wolverhampton.gov.uk**

By phone: **01902 554302**

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What are we consulting on and why?

Local authorities have a statutory duty to provide some travel support services. Within that statutory duty lies an expectation that local authorities will provide a diverse range of travel assistance options that look to improve the outcomes of pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and adult social care eligible individuals.

The City of Wolverhampton Council currently provides transport for around 750 pupils, the majority of which have special educational needs and/or disabilities, and 70 vulnerable adults.

Nearly all these individuals are transported by coach, minibus or taxi. Although we know this is an important service for many of our citizens, feedback received suggests that some people feel they would benefit from more choice in the way they travel.



Feedback we have received to date

Telephone Surveys

Research was undertaken by an independent consultant during 2017 to look at transport for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. As part of this, telephone surveys were carried out with parents and carers. 95% of parents surveyed wanted their children to be as independent as possible by adulthood. However, many believed that in general, their children did not get the support to make that happen.

Promoting Independence Project

Alongside this, the Transforming Adult Social Care Programme launched a second phase of its 'Promoting Independence' project. The project delivered holistic reviews for all those people receiving in-house day care support across the city. These reviews placed more focus on an individual assessment of a person's transport arrangement requirements and the development of independence regarding their travel skills. The project was successful in its ability to demonstrate excellent outcomes for people who were able to develop further independence in several areas of their lives, including travel. This work has also helped to optimise the use of passenger transport services for adult passengers, which is now being realised by the generation of efficiencies in passenger transport routes.



'Ordinary Life' White Paper

Wolverhampton Challenge Board is a body of young people that influence decision making at a strategic level. The Challenge Board launched its first white paper in December 2017 around an 'ordinary life'. They worked with 102 young people aged between 11 and 25, from a variety of backgrounds and had a wide range of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. Pupils stated that they wished to travel independently without relying on council transport.



‘Real Talk’ Event

An event, titled ‘Real Talk’, was held in June 2018. 21 pupils aged between 12-18, from various Wolverhampton schools, participated in the event. The event highlighted that lots of young people want to become more independent and see travelling on their own as an important tool to achieve this goal. Therefore, they want to work towards this goal as soon as possible. Throughout the event, young people stated that it’s important for them, their parents and schools to cooperate in making sure that they are confident and safe whilst travelling.

Focus Groups

Between February and April 2019, The City of Wolverhampton Council conducted public engagement on the travel offer to children, young people and adults to seek the views of Wolverhampton residents more generally. A series of focus groups were held with professionals, eligible individuals and their families, supported by an online survey. From this, it became clear that stakeholders were keen to see a person-centred travel assistance offer adopted, with a range of options available to them.

Following this, a proposed policy was developed, which reflected these views, and this was approved for consultation, by Cabinet on 10 July 2019. The policy is intended to provide clarity for parents/carers and eligible individuals. It is to ensure that those with particular and significant needs are appropriately supported.

We want your views

We are consulting on the policy, which covers travel assistance arrangements to facilitate attendance at educational establishments and social care venues.

Proposal One

City of Wolverhampton Council's current Home to School Travel policy, Post-16 Travel statement and Adult Social Care Transport protocol would be combined into a single All Age Travel Assistance policy.

What the situation is now

We currently have three travel assistance policies/protocols covering school age children, post-16 young people and adults with social care and support needs. This can be confusing.

What the situation might be like in the future

A new single policy will bring a framework to the introduction of wider travel assistance offer and ensure that the policy is clear and easy to understand.

What are the possible positive and negative impacts?

Having a single policy reflects national good practice and our aim is to make transitions easier and ensure individuals and their families/carers are fully informed about the options available to them at every stage of their lives.

The new policy may be longer than previous policies.

Proposal Two

The introduction of a personalised assessment process.

What the situation is now

The current assessment for travel assistance leads to a limited travel offer for those found eligible with council provided transport or bus passes for public transport.

What the situation might be like in the future

The council proposes to promote independent travel training as a first option for people who could benefit from this. This is because it has many benefits for those using it, for example increased confidence, and offers better access to leisure and social activities and better opportunities for education and employment. The travel training that people are offered will be tailored to what they need. Some people may only need a little training while others require a lot more. Whatever travel training is given, it will be appropriate for the age of the child or young person.

This would mean that individuals assessed as being eligible for support, would then be assessed to see whether they could, with training, travel independently on public transport or whether they require a place on council transport. They would then be offered a travel pass or be given a personal travel budget or access to council transport.

Where appropriate, individual travel allowances can provide individuals and families more choice and flexibility by providing direct payments for them to make their own travel arrangements. This allowance could, for example, be used to pay mileage costs or for childcare arrangements that allow families/carers to accompany the individual on their journey.

What are the possible positive and negative impacts?

Freedom and flexibility for families to make travel arrangements that best meet their family's needs and circumstances.

The promotion of independence increases confidence and enables individuals to access more social, educational and employment opportunities.

Some schools in the city may not have the facilities to accommodate an increase in vehicles at peak times.

Proposal Three

The introduction of charges for young people of sixth form age.

What the situation is now

Young people continuing in sixth form at special schools, who have previously received transport, continue to do so in sixth form but those accessing further education or with additional needs in mainstream educational establishments are expected to access bursaries or use their Personal Independence Payments (PIP) mobility component.

What the situation might be like in the future

It is proposed that under the new policy the charge would be £780 unless the family is in receipt of income related benefits, in which case a 50% discount would be applied, and the charge would be £390. This could be paid in monthly instalments.

The costs of transport have increased over the last few years to an average of £3,000 per year for a young person on a minibus. The charge to families is therefore a contribution and does not cover the full cost of transport.

This contribution amount of £780 is suggested as it is less than one third of the annual mobility component of PIP and it is recognised that this allowance is also designed to enable access to leisure and social activities.

What are the possible positive and negative impacts?

This proposal will ensure a fair and equitable offer for all children of sixth form age.

It will also allow the most effective use of public money to ensure sustainability of statutory services.

Individuals may feel that they are having to pay where they previously have not, however the PIP mobility component is provided for this purpose and the payment is a contribution.

Proposal Four

The removal of automatic eligibility to travel assistance in an educational establishment for Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs.

What the situation is now

The current policy states that transport will be provided to a child or young person who attends a specialist placement and has an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) due to SEMH needs.

What the situation might be like in the future

Children and young people with SEMH needs will receive a personalised assessment and be able to access the same wider travel offer that other children and young people can benefit from.

What are the possible positive and negative impacts?

This proposal would provide clarity and consistency across the policy.

Outcomes for pupils with SEMH in relation to other people eligible for support may change – this will be monitored to make sure the system is working fairly.

There is a risk that there may be disruption to the routine of this group of children and young people, some of whom may be at high risk of disengaging from the education system.

Proposal Five

To provide transport only from a single address unless there are exceptional circumstances (see page 15).

What the situation is now

The policy states that the address from which transport is given is the home address at which the individual normally lives unless there are exceptional circumstances which have been agreed in relation to a different address. In any case, an accepted second address should be within reasonable travelling distance of Wolverhampton.

What the situation might be like in the future

Travel assistance arrangements will be based on the address where the individual normally resides. Council provided transport will usually be to and from a designated pick up point, near the individual's home; unless a home pick up and drop off is essential due to the individual's significant needs.

What are the possible positive and negative impacts?

This proposal could lead to more efficient use of council owned vehicles, decreased journey times and reduced emissions through more efficient route planning.

This could disproportionately impact on individuals who are living or being cared for at multiple addresses.



Proposal Six

To amend and clarify the application and appeals process for Home to School Travel Assistance.

What the situation is now

Currently, second stage appeals for home to school travel are considered by a panel of councillors who read copies of all the paperwork submitted by the parents and hear from an officer involved in the original decision who explains how the original decision was made.

Complaints concerning travel assistance for children or adults receiving care and support are made through the council's complaints procedure.

What the situation might be like in the future

The new policy proposes that second stage appeals for home to school transport would be considered by a panel independent of the original decision. It is proposed that this would consist of a Councillor, the appropriate Head of Service or their representative, a senior transport officer and an appointed parent representative.

The new policy proposes a change in line with statutory guidance which recommends that parents be given the opportunity to attend the panel hearing to explain their circumstances to the panel. If parents did not want to attend, the panel would still read all the parents' paperwork before making a decision.

What are the possible positive and negative impacts?

A wholly independent and transparent appeals process would provide parental confidence that the process is fair. It also presents the opportunity for individuals and their parents/carers process to be fully involved in the application and appeals process.

This reflects good practice nationally.

There may be a higher cost to the council to administer the proposed appeals process.

Proposal Seven

To reaffirm that travel assistance is only provided to the nearest appropriate educational establishment or social care venue unless there are exceptional circumstances (see page 15).

What the situation is now

Our current policy/protocol states that we provide transport for pupils of statutory school age to the nearest qualifying school and for adults to the nearest social care venue. However, this is not consistently enforced.

A qualifying school is the nearest school at which the council can make arrangements for a place which provides education for the age and ability of an individual, taking account of any special educational needs they may have.

What the situation might be like in the future

Where an educational placement is agreed on the grounds of parental preference and this school is not the nearest qualifying school, the individual would not be entitled to receive travel assistance. The parents would be responsible for the individual's attendance. Where this happens the EHCP would make the position regarding travel assistance clear.

The council will only provide travel assistance to the nearest qualifying school. If another school is chosen which is not the nearest the individual would not be eligible for any council travel assistance and the parents would be responsible for the person's attendance.

What are the possible positive and negative impacts?

This proposal could lead to more efficient use of council owned vehicles, decreased journey times and reduced emissions through more efficient route planning.

It will also allow the most effective use of public money to ensure sustainability of statutory services.

Due to transport issues children and young people may not be able to access a school of preference.

Proposal Eight

To reaffirm that where individuals are eligible for transport, pick up points will be used unless there are exceptional circumstances (see page 15).

What the situation is now

Our current policy states that:

Transport will normally be to and from bus stops or pick-up points. It will only be provided from door-to-door if exceptional circumstances prevail, which result in it being unreasonable for the individual to walk (accompanied if necessary) to a designated stop. No pupil under eight years of age should be expected to make his/her own way, unaccompanied, to the nearest pick-up point. Parents are responsible for making suitable arrangements in this respect.

This is not always consistently applied currently which can lead to an inequality of provision.

What the situation might be like in the future

This statements in the current policy will be more consistently applied.

What are the possible positive and negative impacts?

This proposal would:

- provide a greater equality of provision.
- promote readiness for independent travel.

The application of this proposal would allow routes to be as efficient as possible and reduce the time individuals spend on transport resulting in better outcomes for individuals regarding readiness to learn.

Proposal Nine

The new policy aims to explain more clearly that parents are expected to accompany their children to school unless there are exceptional circumstances (see page 15).

What the situation is now

By law parents are required to ensure that their child receives a suitable education. Children and young people who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school, and require accompaniment, because of their SEN, disability or mobility problems should be accompanied to and from school by their parents unless there is a good reason why that is not possible.

The council's current policy does not make these expectations as clear as it could. The council considers that it is important that parents understand what is expected of them and what it is possible to offer to families.

Any changes made to the accompaniment requirements of children will be subject to a risk assessment.

What the situation might be like in the future

The law requires parents to make sure that their child receives a suitable education and accompanying their child to school is part of this. The council's new policy will make it clear what is expected of parents and what the council offers.

In most cases where the council decides that a child needs to be accompanied on their journey to school, this should be by their parent unless there is a good reason why that is not possible.

What are the possible positive and negative impacts?

The application of this proposal would allow routes to be as efficient as possible and reduce the time individuals spend on transport, resulting in better outcomes for individuals regarding readiness to learn.



Exceptional Circumstances

There are no 'fixed' set of exceptional circumstances which will lead the council to grant travel assistance to non-eligible children or young people. In cases of individuals whose education may be severely disrupted, for example, because of the effect of being taken into the care of the council, or if their home life has been very severely disrupted or if the non-provision of travel assistance will place the continuity of education in jeopardy. The council will consider each case individually, considering the special circumstances involved. Parental work or care commitments would not normally be considered exceptional circumstances. Families who can drop their child off and pick them up at the end of the school day would normally be expected to do so.

Next steps and decision making after the consultation has ended

This consultation exercise is being undertaken so that the council receives stakeholders' views on the proposed new policy and the responses to the consultation will help to inform the council when making any decisions in relation to the policy.

Following the conclusion of the consultation period all comments received will be presented to the council's cabinet board, on 19 February 2020, and all views expressed will be considered when the Cabinet Board Members make any decision.

If approved by Cabinet, the policy will be published by 23 March 2020 and will come into effect from the start of the academic year in September 2020. This change would take effect for any applications received after the new policy is approved and published. This change would also apply to annual reviews and for changes of circumstances (e.g. changes of school) after the new policy is approved and published.

Independent travel training will be available to families in Wolverhampton from September 2019 and would be promoted through the new policy from September 2020.

We want your views

Online

By completing the consultation survey and leaving comments at <https://consultation.wolverhampton.gov.uk/cwc/all-age-travel-policy-consultation>

In person

Consultation events will take place during the consultation period, details of which are available at www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/traveloffer or on request from the email address above.

By post

SEND Team, Wolverhampton Civic Centre
St Peter's Square, Wolverhampton WV1 1RR

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By phone: [01902 554302](tel:01902554302)

Privacy Notice

The information provided as part of this consultation will be collected and processed in accordance with UK data protection law. Where applicable the information entered will be forwarded to the relevant officers and councillors for action or for a reply to be given. Information contained within responses will inform reports to cabinet members and will be anonymised so that no individual can be identified. Information provided will not be used for any other purpose and will be stored securely in accordance with the Council Records Management Policy and Records Retention and Disposal schedule.

Should you at any point wish to withdraw your responses from the consultation, please contact the City of Wolverhampton Council at:
SENDTeam@wolverhampton.gov.uk.

Further details of how the council collects and uses information can be found on the council's full privacy notice www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/privacy-policy

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