



## HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL ASSISTANCE POLICY:

### Proposed Changes Guide

#### Introduction

This document summarises proposed changes to Surrey County Council's Home to School Travel Assistance Policy (H2S TA). This policy explains the eligibility criteria for travel assistance for children, with and without special educational needs, of statutory school age (5-16 years old), for children under 5 and for young people aged 16-19 and 19-25, and describes how the Council fulfils its duties and exercises its discretionary powers as set out in the Education Act 1996 and subsequent legislation and guidance.

The Council is refreshing the Home to School Travel Assistance (H2S TA) policy in a number of key areas. In doing so we will proactively engage with parents, carers, schools and colleges and other stakeholders. The policy will help align the Authority's commitment to moving away from an offer of school transport to a travel assistance model, with an increased focus on sustainability and Surrey's green agenda. Moving forward, the Council wants to focus on:

- Enhancement of the independent travel training (ITT) offer
- Further promotion of collection points rather than home pick-up arrangements
- A review of the process for the provision of individual transport
- Not providing H2S TA when the school attended is one of parental choice rather than the closest school to meet need
- The adoption of a more sustainable approach with greater use of public transport options where appropriate, reducing reliance on taxis and private cars

To complement the new policy, we are developing a parent guide that will sit alongside the agreed policy document. The parent guide will simplify guidance outlined in the new policy and explain the council's processes in greater detail.

The consultation uses the term 'additional needs' and 'SEND' to refer to children, young people and adults with special educational needs and disabilities. We have agreed to use identify-first language (eg "additional needs" rather than SEND unless it refers to legislation or a policy as this was the preference of young people we spoke to.

The main areas the Council is proposing to change are as follows:

#### **1. The Council plans to offer a broader range of Travel Assistance options, aligned with Surrey's commitment to its climate policy agenda, promoting more sustainable modes of travel assistance.**

Our engagement with children and young people tells us that working towards and supporting their independence is important. These options will help empower them, prepare them for adulthood and as a result contribute to improving their quality of life.

- The Council will introduce options such as bikeability (cycling safely and with confidence), driving lessons and access to TfL Oyster Card (in some areas of the county).
- We will no longer require children and young people to undertake individual travel training assessment in the home. The assessment will be undertaken in an agreed location.
- We will be encouraging the use of collection points, the designated pick-up and drop-off locations for pupils to meet the bus or taxi. Where children and young people with complex additional needs or the parents or carers' own mobility or disability may impact on them being able to use the collection points, we will assess individual needs to determine suitability. Where the introduction of collection points is being considered, the Council will consult with the parents and carers already on those routes affected by this potential change in service.

#### **2. We propose to clarify the Council's position on transport journey times**

The Council currently aims to comply with national recommendations on the maximum length of journey time for a child to get to and from school. This is 45 minutes for a primary aged child and 75 minutes for a secondary aged child attending placements both within and outside the County.

The Council is proposing that the recommended journey times will not apply to pupils travelling to out of county schools, where distances and the frequency of journeys may vary. We are also proposing to change the maximum journey times for primary aged children to 75 minutes.

### **3. We propose to change the measuring system for determining Independent Travel Allowance (ITA) from Straight Lines to Road Routes.**

The policy currently says that the calculation of independent travel allowance is based on a straight-line (as the crow flies) calculation between a home address and school. The Council proposes to change this to a calculation that measures distances via road route. This is a better and more accurate reflection of the journey distance undertaken.

### **4. We are proposing to introduce a simplified mileage reimbursement system which replaces the original tiered system with the aim of increasing the take-up of this offer.**

At the moment, the policy provides two modes of mileage reimbursement:

- A tiered mileage allowance based on average distance between a home address and school. This tiered allowance is broken down into 3 bands (0-5.99 miles, 6-10 miles and 11+ miles) and there are corresponding allowance rates next to each band.
- A standard mileage rate.

The Council proposes to introduce a simpler scheme to enable a more unified reimbursement process for parents and carers (including how and when they are reimbursed). The mileage rates to be used will still be set in line with Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC). Distances will be calculated using the shortest road route. In conjunction with this, the Council proposes to introduce flexibility to agree reimbursement rates on an individual basis with parents and carers where the alternative would be high-cost transport.

### **5. The Council proposes to change the notice period for the removal of travel assistance in certain circumstances.**

The current policy requires travel assistance to remain in place until the end of the academic year in instances where low-income status of a child ends, and in instances where a walking route previously deemed unsafe becomes safe after review. The Council proposes to write to parents and carers when a walking route becomes safe with the explanation of the change and continue to provide assistance for four weeks at which point transport will be withdrawn.

If a family's low-income status has ended, applicants who have been entitled to travel assistance will be written to with the explanation that assistance will end. Travel assistance will be provided until the end of the academic year. The Council will also connect with families and offer support such as signposting to specific services if this would prove helpful to them.

### **6. The Council proposes to clarify the reasons for the withdrawal of transport and include the removal of assistance if an application approved for H2S TA has been done in error.**

The current policy states in what circumstances transport will be withdrawn. The reasons include where fraud has taken place or a submission made included misleading information.

This part of the policy will be expanded to include the withdrawal of assistance if there are errors with the initial assessment. Parents and carers will have the right of appeal if assistance is withdrawn for this reason in the usual way.

### **7. The Council proposes to clarify its position regarding the provision of travel assistance for under 5s.**

The current policy states that the council may provide travel assistance to children aged Under 5 if it feels that extenuating circumstances have been demonstrated.

It is proposed that this discretionary assistance will only be provided to reception aged children. The Council may provide assistance to children who are aged four and entering into the reception year at primary school if extenuating circumstances have been demonstrated.

### **8. The Council proposes to add information on Medical and Health Interventions in the Travel Assistance Policy.**

The current policy outlines in what circumstances a Passenger Assistant may be approved to support a child during travel to school, and one of these circumstances may be a child who has specific health and/or medical needs. It does not outline the operational standards or processes linked to the provision of medically trained transport staff.

It is proposed that the new policy will provide guidance on the operational standards and processes which the Council follows if there is a requirement for a medically trained Passenger Assistant to support children during their journey to school.

#### **9. The Council proposes to reduce the reliance on one- child- per-vehicle transport.**

The current policy outlines in what circumstances individualised transport would be agreed. This is mainly taxis taking children and young people to and from school and settings.

The refreshed policy develops a focus on enabling independence and preparing for adulthood such as employment or shared living away from home. The proposed change to individual transport will be that it will only be agreed in extenuating circumstances. Travel assistance options other than bespoke transport will be explored in the first instance. Where transport is needed, it would normally be in a vehicle shared with other students or pupils such as a taxi or minibus. Provision of individualised transport would normally be linked to medical needs or where child or young person is receiving one-to-one support in their educational training venues.

#### **10. The council proposes to clarify the conditions in which transport may be withdrawn based on instances of dangerous behaviour and a more detailed process.**

The policy advises in some detail that the Council may look to withdrawing assistance in instances of unacceptable behaviour. The Council understands its duty to provide travel assistance to children who are eligible.

However, in circumstances where a child's behaviour has been dangerous and or potentially risks harm to themselves and others in a vehicle (including the driver), a review of the arrangements will be undertaken. It is proposed that parents and carers will be written to. If the occurrences are repeated, then a parent/carers will be asked to accept a mileage allowance instead of transport being provided.

#### **11. The Council proposes to create an updated version of its statement for post-16 young people in-line with national guidance.**

The Council's current policy states that transport will be provided in exceptional circumstances only.

National guidance states that the council does not have to provide free transport for students aged 16-19. The proposed change to the policy will be that the Council in the exercise of its discretion as to what travel assistance is necessary for learners of sixth form age may provide travel assistance for young people aged 16 to 19 who have additional needs in order to help them transition into adulthood and explore independent travel. It will also provide signposting to transport services for those young people who are not provided with H2S TA. Offers of travel assistance will now focus on independent travel, including the use of public transport and not on the provision of private hire vehicles such as minibuses or taxis.

#### **12. The Council proposes to introduce bursaries for young people post 16 years of age.**

The current policy outlines the types of travel assistance available if the Council deems a young person aged 16 to 19 eligible for travel assistance. It is proposed that where the Council assesses a young person aged 16 to 19 as eligible for travel assistance under its policy the assistance offered may be in the form of a post-16 transport bursary to support families and young people to make their own transport arrangements to develop independence and prepare for adulthood.

#### **13. The Council is proposing to introduce changes to its travel assistance appeals process.**

There is national guidance that sets out how appeals against decisions made on H2S TA are conducted. This includes a two-stage process. Stage two must be independent of the stage one decision-making process. At present the stage two panel can be made up of members of the local authority.

It is proposed to continue with a two-stage process and that the stage two panel will be independent of the first but that the membership will include Council Officers in the future.

For any questions regarding the survey, please contact [research@surreycc.gov.uk](mailto:research@surreycc.gov.uk)