

REPORT TO: Children, Young People & Families Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 9th June 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director of Children's Services

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People and Families

SUBJECT: Home to School Transport for Pupils with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities

WARD(S) Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update to members and officers around the Home to School Transport consultation.
- 1.2 Local Authorities are required to publish a Home to School Transport policy each year when deciding which schools to apply for during the normal admissions round. Key within this responsibility, is that the policy is governed by statutory guidelines.
- 1.3 Under section 508A of the Education Act 1996 a general duty is imposed on local authorities to assess the school travel needs of their area and to promote the use of sustainable modes of travel. Section 508B of the Act provides a statutory duty on LAs to provide home to school travel arrangements for "eligible children". Eligible children are defined in Schedule 35B of the Act, to qualify as an "eligible child", the child must be of compulsory school age (5-16).
- 1.4 Following agreement by Executive Board on 25th February a Home to School Transport consultation was launched on proposed changes to the delivery of Home to School Transport services for children and young people. The consultation opened on 2nd April 2025 and closed on 6th May 2025. It is proposed that any changes following the consultation would be effective for in year school applications from the start of 2025/2026 academic year (this is the earliest possible change).

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That members and officers:

- 1. **Note the content of the report; and**
- 3. **Confirm that they support the overall process.**

3.0 **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 Halton Borough Council has been changing the way it works to respond to continuing pressures on local budgets. The council has estimated a budget deficit of 29.385 million in 2025/26. It is imperative the Council seeks to set out how it will aim to balance the budget in future. This can only be done through growing income receipts or looking to rationalise current levels of expenditure. In order to address this huge funding gap, work has been undertaken to address the significant financial challenges the council is facing.

3.2 The Home to School Transport budget has significantly increased over the past number of years. This is a trend that appears to be replicated in other Local Authorities across the country with overall spending being under increasing pressure. A key factor associated with the increase in the cost of delivering Home to School Transport (HtST) services is the national growth of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) following a change in legislation in 2014. Transport eligibility rules mean that the growing numbers of children with EHCPs results in increased demand for transport and, on occasions, more complex travel services. EHCP growth, combined with increasing charging from transport organisations, and a limited number of local specialist school places are cited as key factors leading to increased costs. The council also currently provides a level of discretionary transport, above the statutory requirements.

3.3 Halton Borough Council has recently sought residents' views on several proposals regarding the current Home to School Transport Policy.

3.4 **Consultation**

Following Executive Report agreed on 25th February a consultation was published on 2nd April until the 6th May.

3.5 Two separate consultations were launched, one for parent carer and young people which incorporated all the proposals across the different areas. A separate consultation was provided for stakeholders and residents of Halton asking only the relevant experiential questions, alongside their views on the proposals.

3.6 The consultation comprised of two parts:

Part A: Flexible travel arrangements and increasing independence

Part B: Reviewing discretionary transport

3.7 **Part A: Flexible travel arrangements and increasing independence**

3.8 **Personal Travel Budgets (PTB)**

Under our existing travel and transport policies, the Council can provide funding directly to parents and carers to make their own travel arrangements for their eligible child or young person. Personal travel budgets provide financial assistance to parents or carers to enable them to take responsibility for

transporting their child to school. In Halton, we currently call this “Parental Mileage” and this is currently offered at 45p per round trip from home to school (to those who qualify).

What is the change being considered?

To promote the take up of personal budgets

3.9 Escalation of Independent Travel Training

The current Home to School policy references the expectation of travel training to be considered for children and young people of year 8 onwards who are assessed through Education, Health and Care Annual Reviews. “As part of the review process, young people in Year 8 onwards identified as being suitable, will be expected to be considered for Independent Travel Training”. Independent travel training provides a cost-effective way of supporting the SEND transport model and helps to promote social inclusion and independence in line with the preparation for adulthood agenda.

What is the change being considered?

That Independent Travel Training should be a formal part of the annual review conversation with children and families, where applicable, as a commitment to promoting and supporting independence.

3.10 Centralised Pick ups

In Halton, all transport is arranged from home addresses. A centralised pick-up point would be a nominated identified safe area where pupils would meet to access arranged transport, either with or without parental support. This would mean that the child or young person would not be collected from the home address but from the alternative pick up point. The use of centralised points would be based on robust risk assessments and be used for pupils only where it is deemed safe. This is permitted by the Department for Education statutory guidance for capable pupils.

What change is being considered?

Centralised pick up points to be offered to capable pupils.

3.11 Motability Vehicles

Department for Education guidance states that mobility cars can't be taken into account when assessing a young person's transport eligibility. However, where a young person has a mobility car assigned for their purpose, in law on the young person's 18th birthday the vehicle officially becomes theirs and can be taken into consideration when assessing the need for transport.

Halton Borough Council currently offers transport to those aged 18 and above who have a Motability vehicle.

What change is being considered?

Withdraw the current offer to over 18 with a Motability vehicle. This would mean that no home to school transport would be provided for pupils over the age of 18 with a Motability Vehicle.

3.12 **Part B: Reviewing discretionary transport**

3.13 **Distance Criteria after 8 years of age**

To qualify for travel assistance, a pupil's distance from home to school should be;

A: More than two miles if under 8 or if meeting the low-income criteria.

B: More than three miles if over eight years of age.

Currently there is no review of travel assistance once a child reaches 8 years of age. In some cases, children continue to receive transport.

What change is being considered?

Reaching 8 years of age will trigger a review of travel assistance.

3.14 **Provision of transport for pupils under the age of 5 years**

There is no statutory requirement to provide transport for pupils under the age of 5. Halton Borough Council does currently provide home to school transport for pupils under the age of 5 and there is currently no charge for providing this service.

What changes are being considered?

No change to the current offer

Pupils under the age of 5 will continue to receive home to school transport.

Keep the current offer with restrictions

This means that pupils will be expected to travel by the most cost-effective means available: travel pass, Personal Travel Budgets, a seat on a contract vehicle (coach, minibus or taxi). The use of a contracted vehicle would only be agreed where it is the least expensive option.

Keep the Current Offer with the introduction of an annual contribution

Charge towards costs. This cost is proposed to be £750 per child, per academic year (£500 for qualifying low income).

Withdraw the current offer

This would mean that no home to school transport would be provided for pupils under the age of 5.

3.15 **Post 16 Transport**

There is no statutory requirement to provide transport for pupils over the age of 16. Halton Borough Council currently provides home to school transport for pupils between the age of 16-19.

There is a charge for this service, this is £370 per academic year per child (£250 for low income families).

What changes are being considered?

No change to the current offer

Pupils over the age of 16 will continue to receive home to school transport.

Keep the current offer with restrictions

This means that pupils will be expected to travel by the most cost effective means available: travel pass, Personal Travel Budgets, a seat on a contract vehicle (coach, minibus or taxi). The use of a contracted vehicle would only be agreed where it is the least expensive option.

Keep the current offer with an increase of the annual contribution charge towards costs

Charge to rise to £750 per child, per academic year (£500 for low income).

Withdraw the home to school transport offer

This would mean that no home to school transport would be provided for pupils over the age of 16

3.16 Promotion of Consultation

Information around the consultation and the link were promoted through a variety of channels encouraging young people, parents, carers and residents of Halton to take part.

Social Media Campaign: The consultation and link was promoted several times during the consultation period. Analytics highlight that the posts reached 20, 945 people through the social media campaign, 12,000 people interacted with the post with 100 people interacting, 29 comments and 43 shares.

Local Offer: Push notifications sent to 252 people who had registered their interest in SEND related matters on family Hub online and the local offer. During the time of the consultation, the local offer received 2,669 visitors.

Inclusion matters newsletter: The consultation was promoted through both the April and more recently, the May Inclusion Matters newsletter. This newsletter was sent to 564 recipients across the SEND partnership including HBC colleagues, schools, partners and stakeholders. At the time of writing the newsletter had been read by 207 people (37.5% of the recipients).

Director of Children's Services' Newsletter: The consultation was promoted internally to 309 colleagues through the weekly children services newsletter.

Halton Borough Schools: The consultation and link was sent multiple times to all primary, secondary and Early Years settings through distribution channels capturing all education settings across Halton.

Face to face sessions: Parents were invited to face to face sessions on 24th April (Halton Parent Carer Forum), 29th April (Ashley High School) and 30th April (Brookvale Children's Centre, hosted by Cavandish High School). Through those events we have spoken in person to around 50 people including parents, carers, teachers and young people about the consultation so far. This allowed those who attended the events to discuss the consultation, ask questions, clarify information, make suggestions and raise any concerns.

3.17 Consultation Engagement

Parent Carer and Young Person Responses

At the time of writing the consultation has generated 137 responses to the parent and young person consultation. Of the 112 responses 96% was completed by parents, 4% by young people, 61% of those responded are currently receiving transport with a further 17% responding they are not currently in receipt of any transport.

12% of respondents reported they/their children were post 16 student with 3% reporting their children were under 5 years of age. 7% of respondents currently receive a personal budget with a further 3% reporting they have engaged in ITT in the last 2 years.

Other Stakeholders Responses

This consultation has generated 76 responses from the stakeholder consultation with 59% of respondents identifying at Halton residents, 29% from education setting and 7% being transportation providers and 5% recorded as “other”.

3.18 Next Steps

The next steps are for responses from the consultation to be collated and analysed. Following this the key findings and any recommendations for future amendments to the Home to School Transport Policy will be shared with Children’s Leadership Team, Council Management Team and full Council Executive board.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 All of the above will require an amendment to the current “Home to School and College Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)”

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The report “Permission to Consult- Home to School Transport for Pupils with Special Educational Needs Disabilities” was discussed at Halton’s Executive Board on 25th March 2025. This report detailed the considerable potential budgetary savings from the identified proposals. This may be through one or a combination of the above proposals.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL’S PRIORITIES

6.1 Improving Health, Promoting Wellbeing and Supporting Greater Independence

Changes in this policy will encourage an increase in promoting wellbeing though encouraging a reduction in overreliance on transport and promote the use of walking and cycling to school, where applicable. For example, a personal budget could be used to buy bikes for children and carers to travel to

school. Where children can use active travel options including public transport, walking and cycling key health benefits are achieved.

In addition, a key feature of the policy change will be to encourage greater independence both in childhood and into adulthood by increasing focus on independent travel training.

6.2 Building a Strong, Sustainable Local Economy

None.

6.3 Supporting Children, Young People and Families

Provision of assisted home to school transport enables children and young people with SEND to travel to appropriate schools where they have been placed and where their specialist needs are catered for.

6.4 Tackling Inequality and Helping Those Who Are Most In Need

Halton's current charging structure for post 16 contributions offers a reduction for those on a low income. A universal increase in charges would disproportionately impact on lower income families. Other mitigations against increased charges also exist such as 16-19 bursary which is accessible to students on a low income. Halton currently have a lower contribution rate for low income families.

6.5 Working Towards a Greener Future

Where children can use active travel options including walking and cycling key environmental benefits are achieved. Public transport and active travel modes provide alternative sustainable options to private forms of transport which is conducive to lowering harmful emissions.

6.6 Valuing and Appreciating Halton and Our Community

N/A.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 Failure to achieve any of the above will have a negative impact on the Council budget for provision of home to school transport for children with SEND.

Failure to engage fully with parents and stakeholders and work with them through any period of change may result in legal challenges, reputational damage and loss of trust.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity,

race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Given the nature of the proposed changes, there is an impact to those defined by both age and disability.

9.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 The council is committed to creating sustainable environments for current and future generations. Any recommendations made following consultation with consider environmental impacts and sustainable methods of travel will be considered as a priority.

10.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

Permission to Consult- Home to School Transport for Pupils with Special Educational Needs Disabilities- 25.02.2025