

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 13th November 2025

REPORTING OFFICER: Executive Director of Children's Services

PORTFOLIO: Children, Young People and Families

SUBJECT: Home to School and Post 16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy 2026-2027 recommendations.

WARD(S) Borough Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 Local Authorities are required to publish a Home to School Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) each year to support assistance with transport eligibility decision making. In addition, they must also prepare and publish an annual Post-16 Transport Policy Statement, that outlines the arrangements the authority considers necessary to facilitate access to education or training for students of sixth form age. Key within this responsibility, is that both are governed by compliance with statutory responsibilities, and consideration of other related DfE guidance.
- 1.2 On 25 February 2025, Executive Board granted permission to consult on proposals to support delivery of a revised policy for home to school transport for children and young people with SEND. The consultation ran from 2 April to 6 May 2025. The purpose of this report is to provide an update following the consultation and make recommendations for the Home to School & Post 16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) 2026-2027. All aspects of this policy will be implemented from 1st September 2026 for all new applicants for travel support.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That the Board

- 1. note the content of the report; and**
- 2. agree the 2026-2027 Home to School & Post 16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People**

with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3.1 Home to School & Post 16 Travel and Transport for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) expenditure has increased significantly in recent years. Net departmental expenditure is £0.359m over budget at the end of July, based on available information. The forecast outturn for 2025/26 is currently an overspend against budget of £1.184m.
- 3.2 The position in Halton reflects a national trend of rising pressure. Key drivers include growth in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) since 2014; increasing complexity of need (resulting in more solo transport); provider price inflation; and insufficient local specialist places resulting in longer journeys. Halton Borough Council also currently provides some discretionary transport above statutory requirements.

3.3 Consultation

Following the Executive Board report agreed on 25th February a two-part consultation was launched comprising:

- Part A: Flexible travel arrangements and increasing independence
- Part B: Reviewing discretionary transport

The consultation took place between 2nd April, and 6th May

It was supported by a wide-ranging communications campaign to capture the views of families, parents, carers, schools and other stakeholders on proposals for the future Home to School & Post 16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

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 part¹.

¹ **Social Media:** 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, with 29 comments and 43 shares.

Local Offer: Push notifications were 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 (April and May issues) The newsletter is reached 564 professionals working across the SEND partnership including Council staff, 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 (multiple mentions): 309 colleagues across Children's Services

Halton Borough Schools and Early Years Settings : the consultation and link was sent multiple times to all primary, secondary, special, and Early Years settings through distribution channels capturing all

Consultation Engagement

Parent Carer and Young Person Responses

The consultation generated 137 responses from parent/carers and young people.

- 96% were completed by parents
- 4% by young people
- 61% are currently receiving transport
- 17% not currently in receipt of any transport
- 12% reported they/their children were post 16 students
- 3% reported their children were under 5 years of age
- 7% responded they have or are currently receiving a personal budget
- 3% reporting they have engaged in Independent Travel Training (ITT) in the last 2 years

Other Stakeholders Responses

This consultation generated 76 responses from other stakeholders.

- 59% identified as Halton residents
- 29% reported they worked in education settings
- 7% reported they were transportation providers
- 5% recorded as “other”

Consultation Responses- Part A: Flexible travel arrangements and increasing independence

3.4 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. At present a local authority can put in place a personal transport budget, for those of statutory school age, with the agreement of the parent. In Halton, we currently refer to this as “Parental Mileage” and this is currently offered at 45p per round trip from home to school (to those who qualify).

Consultation proposal: - To increase the take up of personal budgets

Consultation Themes

- Awareness gap

education settings across Halton. It was also promoted through the Head teachers briefing (April & May).

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 Cavendish High School).

- Many respondents were unaware of personal travel budgets (PTBs) or how they work.
- Interest increased when flexibility is explained (e.g., ability to use funds for wraparound childcare).
- Positive perception of flexibility
 - Some respondents appreciated the ability to tailor solutions, especially when it supports family logistics (e.g., siblings' care).
- Barriers to uptake
 - Practical constraints: Work commitments, multiple drop-offs, and disruption to established routines.
 - Preference for current system: Some simply stated a preference for existing transport arrangements.
- Financial Concerns acting as a disincentive
 - Current rate (45p per mile) perceived as insufficient to cover:
 - Fuel
 - Vehicle wear and tear
 - Insurance
 - Occasional taxi use

Recommendation:

A: Promote personal travel budgets

Personal travel budgets are the fastest-growing form of SEND transport assistance; some local authorities now offer them as the first option². Locally our current uptake is 6.79%. The consultation findings suggest that 13% of parents would consider PTBs which is in line with national benchmarking³. Through the consultation it was reported that some would value flexibility, especially when linked to wraparound care. PTB's could therefore empower families to manage transport in ways that suit their circumstances which indicates there is strong potential for growth with improved awareness and communication.

B: Increase the rate of reimbursement

Following both local and national benchmarking it is also recommended that the reimbursement rate be increased from 45p to 60p per mile to:

- Reflect real costs (fuel, wear and tear, insurance).
- Align with other LA's
- Further incentivise uptake of PTB's

Even at the proposed increased rate of 60p, PTBs remain less costly than council-arranged transport. For calculations, we have identified a cohort of children based on the following criteria:

- From reception to year 11.

² Bryant, B., Parish, N., & Bunyan, A. (2025). The future of Home to School Transport

³ Bryant, B., Parish, N., & Bunyan, A. (2025). The future of Home to School Transport

- Children receiving transport but not an escort.

Based on the above criteria, the transport for current school year is forecast to cost £1.6 million. During the consultation 13% of parent, carers and young people indicated that they would consider taking a personal budget in the future. We have used this measure as a median line to evaluate potential impact. Due to the high number of complex variables, it is difficult to identify actual savings, however the table below outlines potential reduction on spend based on future uptake of personal budgets ranging from 5% to 25%.

Potential PTB Saving - £	% of Cohort Take Up
£302, 315.71	25%
£241,852.57	20%
£181, 389.43	15%
£157, 204.17	13%
£120, 926.29	10%
£60.463.14	5%

It is difficult to fully quantify any comparisons, given the individual nature of each transport package. Please note this calculation is based on known cohort of children and does not calculate mitigated costs of new application moving directly onto personal budgets from September 2026. While data is not available to forecast any cost avoidance for the next academic year, there will be monitoring of new in-year demand from September 2026.

3.5

Escalation of Independent Travel Training

Independent travel training (ITT) is a program designed to teach individuals, particularly those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), how to travel safely and independently on public transport. Independent travel training offers several benefits:

- Supports the SEND transport model by promoting independence and social inclusion.
- Aligns with the Preparation for Adulthood agenda.
- Cost-effective compared to traditional transport.
- Builds life skills and confidence for young people.

The current Home to School & Post 16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) 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, however anecdotal evidence suggests that uptake was not strong and Halton was missing opportunities to

identify and complete independent travel training with some children.

Consultation Proposal Independent Travel Training be a formal part of the annual review conversation with children and families as a commitment to promoting and supporting independence.

Consultation themes

- **Safety Concerns:** Parents and young people highlighted risks linked to age, developmental delays, and complex SEND needs. Fears included vulnerability, anxiety, and risk of harm if children travel alone.
- **Practical Barriers:** Distance to school and poor transport links limit feasibility for some families.
- **Conditional Support:** ITT was seen as valuable for promoting independence and social inclusion, but it must be delivered transparently, with parental involvement and individual needs at the forefront.
- **Stakeholder Feedback:** Professionals agreed ITT supports the Preparation for Adulthood agenda but stress a person-centred approach. Positive evidence of this is already happening via annual reviews.

Recommendation

It is proposed that Independent Travel Training should continue to progress to be an embedded formal part of the annual Education Health and Care Plan review conversation with children and families. ITT would remain a targeted intervention based on a robust assessment of needs, not a blanket expectation. This will require clear communication, robust safeguarding, and collaboration with families.

In 2024 there were 18 referrals for ITT from schools for children accessing home to school transport. The actual uptake of ITT was low⁴. If all 18 had engaged and were deemed suitable, a potential saving of £143,136 could have been achieved. To date in 2025 there have been 9 ITT referrals for those access H2ST; if all 9 were suitable and took up ITT, this would indicate a potential reduction in current spend of £71,568.

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. Special consideration would need to be given to those with the most complex needs and the use of centralised pick-up points would be based on robust risk

⁴ 2024- 54 referrals-18 for children receiving transport. 2024 calculations highlight the rate of move from transport to independent travel based on these referrals was approximately 30-35%.

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. For young people of secondary age with SEND, independent travel training could be provided to facilitate independent travel to a centralised pick-up point

Consultation proposal - Centralised pick-up points to be offered to capable pupils.

Consultation Themes

- Strong concerns: Majority of parents and carers reported some concerns, citing:
 - Safety concerns: Risk of bullying, abuse, and lack of supervision.
 - Practical issues: Disruption to routines, employment, and siblings' schedules.
 - Emotional impact: Potential stress and anxiety for children with complex needs.
 - Environmental factors: Bad weather and chaotic gatherings of children with diverse needs.
- Definition Concerns: Questions raised about how “capable pupils” would be assessed.
- Conditional Support. Some acknowledged benefits for capable students:
 - Promotes independence, responsibility, and social interaction.
 - Strong emphasis on individual needs, parental involvement, and robust safeguarding.

Recommendation

Local authorities across the UK have increasingly explored the use of centralised pick-up points as part of their SEND transport strategies⁵. This has largely been driven by rising demand for SEND transport and increased budgetary pressures; driver shortages and route efficiencies; environmental benefits and promoting independence, responsibility and social interaction. Nevertheless, given the feedback gained through the consultation, it is recommended that centralised pick-ups are introduced but not as a blanket policy and would be subject to individual risk assessments and clear safeguarding protocols.

Adopting this recommendation will require further work to identify suitable pick-up points, engagement with parents and geographical mapping to identify suitable options. It is therefore difficult at this juncture to quantify savings, however as an illustrative example an internal review identified 15 pupils from two neighbouring areas who might use a single minibus from a centralised point (subject to assessment). The current cost for this

⁵ Bryant, B., Parish, N., & Bunyan, A. (2025). The future of Home to School Transport

transport is collectively c. £486.65/day (£92,340/year multiple vehicles). Moving to a centralised pick up would allow all 15 pupils to be transported in one vehicle in a timely manner. An annual minibus contract is estimated at c. £34,200/year, indicating a c. £58,000 reduction in spend by using this approach.

3.6 **Part B: Reviewing discretionary transport**

Statutory framework for home to school transport and travel

Parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school, including arranging travel in most cases. Local authorities must provide free transport for eligible children of compulsory school age (5–16) who:

- Attend their nearest suitable school, and:
 - Live beyond statutory walking distance:
 - Under 8 years: more than 2 miles.
 - 8 years and over: more than 3 miles.
 - Cannot reasonably walk because of SEND, disability, or mobility issues, even if accompanied.
 - Cannot walk in reasonable safety, even if accompanied.
- There are extended rights for low-income families:
- For Pre-5 and Post 16 (non-statutory children):
 - No automatic entitlement.
 - Local authorities decide what is reasonable and suitable, considering individual needs.

3.7

Distance Criteria after 8 years of age

Currently in Halton, there is no review of travel assistance once a child reaches 8 years of age. In some cases, children continue to receive transport that they may no longer be eligible for under the statutory guidance.

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

Consultation themes

- Age Threshold: Strong opposition to the current legislation that changes statutory walking distance at age 8. Parents felt this age is arbitrary and does not reflect the needs of children with SEND.
- Safety Risks: Concerns about 8-year-olds with SEND walking or using public transport alone, citing lack of road safety awareness, communication difficulties, and vulnerability.
- Family Impact: Sudden withdrawal of transport support at age 8 creates logistical challenges for families, especially those with complex home circumstances.

- Support for Regular Reviews. Respondents supported regular reviews of transport assistance, advocating for:
 - Person-centred approach prioritising safety, well-being, and access to education.
 - Reviews through annual review processes or triggered by significant changes (e.g., educational setting, family circumstances, child's needs).

Recommendation

It is recommended that Halton Borough Council's Home to School & Post 16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) reflect statutory duties, which would mean a review of eligibility when a child turns 8. This would reflect statutory duties without any presumption of ineligibility and would apply the full suite of statutory considerations (safe routes; individual SEND needs).

3.8 Records indicate that there are 37 primary school children over the age of 8 that currently live under the three-mile distance criteria. This equates to total spend of £189,889. Actual saving will be dependent on a holistic review, as some children may remain eligible due to SEND needs. It is anticipated that a significant number may continue to be eligible upon review, however a modest reduction of 10% would realise a £18,988.98 reduction in current spend. The 10% figure equates to 10% of current spend; actual pupil-level reductions may not map 1:1 due to variable individual costs (e.g., escorts, specialist vehicles).

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. However, Halton Borough Council does currently provide home to school transport for pupils under the age of 5 and there is currently no charge to parents and carers for providing this service.

Consultation Proposals:

- 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.

Consultation themes

- Strong Opposition: Majority of respondents opposed restricting transport for SEND children under 5.
- Early Intervention: Removing transport could undermine access to specialist provision, negatively impacting development and equity of opportunity.
- Vulnerability: Under-5s are among the most vulnerable; limiting transport may increase isolation, especially in deprived areas.
- Financial Hardship: It was cited that younger children can lack DLA mobility component, reducing mitigation options and increasing risk of hardship.
- Acknowledged Pressures: Some respondents recognised the Council's financial challenges and supported limiting transport for families already receiving mobility benefits, most felt withdrawal or charging would be counterintuitive to early intervention priorities.

Recommendation

Our calculations estimate that non-statutory cost for under 5's is less than £14,000 this year⁶. Given the limited financial benefits but the high risk to children with SEND missing crucial early education, it is proposed that Halton keep the current offer for children under the age of 5 and they would continue to be considered eligible children under the revised Home to School & Post 16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

3.9

Post 16 Transport

Local authorities have a duty to prepare and publish an annual transport policy statement specifying the arrangements for the provision of transport, or otherwise that the authority considers necessary, to make to facilitate the attendance of all persons of sixth form age receiving education or training. The legislation therefore gives local authorities the discretion to determine what transport and financial support are necessary to facilitate young people's attendance. The local authority must exercise its power to provide transport or financial support reasonably, taking into account all relevant matters.

⁶ 2024/25- nine applications; six children were under-5 at the beginning of the school terms with an annual cost of c. £43,000—around one-third relates to the under-5 period (non-statutory cost estimated to be <£14,200)

Halton Borough Council currently provides home to school transport for pupils between the age of 16-19. There is a charge for this service, currently this is £370 per academic year per child (£250 for low-income families).

Consultation proposals

- No change to the current offer
- Pupils' over-16 continue to receive home to school transport.
- Keep the current offer with restrictions. This means that pupils would 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 contribution of £750 per child, per academic year (£375 for low income) to the costs- charge
- 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.

Consultation themes

- Strong Opposition: Majority of respondents opposed any reduction in availability or increase in cost for post-16 SEND transport.
- Impact on Access: Parents stressed that withdrawal or charging could make it extremely difficult for young people to attend sixth form or further education.
- Well-being Risks: Anticipated negative effects on mental health, confidence, and future opportunities.
- Family Impact: Increased burden on parents could affect employment and lead to financial hardship.
- Equity & Inclusion: Concerns that changes could exacerbate isolation and disadvantage.
- Acknowledged Factors
 - Some recognition of LA financial pressures and potential for increased independence in certain cases.
- Environmental considerations raised by stakeholders through increased traffic

Recommendation

Post-16 transport costs are estimated to be £643,123.40 this academic year. This represents a significant proportion of overall SEND transport expenditure. Unlike compulsory school age (5–16), councils are not legally required to provide free transport for post-16 learners, and this is one of the few areas where savings

can be made to manage the severe budget constraints that the Council is currently experiencing. It is recognised that the Council cannot continue to provide travel assistance in its current form and there needs to be consideration of other options to support post - 16 children, young people and families to access different solutions.

It is recommended that if a student aged 16-18 is assessed as being eligible for travel support, there would be an automatic expectation that the offer would be the most effective means available by applying a graduated least-cost suitable option hierarchy (public transport pass → Personal Travel Budget → contract vehicle seat). It would therefore be anticipated that bus passes and PTB's would be the likely offer to Post 16 students in Halton.

Dedicated personal contracted transport would only be considered on a discretionary basis, in extreme circumstances, acknowledging the recent ruling that local authorities *"should not have a blanket policy of never providing discretionary travel and must properly consider and engage with the reasons given by a parent as to why they consider that their child's particular circumstances are exceptional and justify an award of travel support to school"*⁷. In circumstances where transport is agreed or has previously been agreed, it is recommended that a contribution charge for this service remains in place and that this is increased to the proposed annual contribution charge towards post-16 transport (£750 per pupil, reduced to £375 for low income families). This aligns with comparator authorities and is a small proportion of actual cost of providing transport (average c. £8,352 per pupil; range £1,723–£46,854).

Current records indicate that there will be 49 pupils receiving transport in year 11 in academic year 26/27. The estimated cost for providing transport for this cohort is £309,221. Looking at the previous three years our analysis highlights that approximately 45% of previous year 11 children continued to receive transport post-16. If this trend continued, this would equate to approximately 24 children applying for post6 transport in the 2026-2027 academic year at an estimated cost of £139,149.

The table below shows the potential cost mitigation based from 100% to 0% of applying personal transport budgets⁸ as the most cost effective travel offer to this cohort.

⁷ (TYC, R (On the Application Of) v Birmingham City Council | [2025] EWHC 623 (Admin) | England and Wales High Court (Administrative Court) | Judgment | Law | CaseMine)

⁸ While the recommendation is the offer of the most cost effective travel means, it could be that the offer of a bus pass is not suitable for any of the identified children. Where a bus pass is unsuitable, a PTB is estimated at c. £2,000 per year per young person. This includes an anticipated increase in mileage for increased travel distance to further education settings.

Cost Mitigation - £	% Mitigation
£95,049.54	100%
£76,039.63	80%
£57,029.72	60%
£38,019.82	40%
£19,009.91	20%
£0	0%

3.10

Any increase in uptake in Independent Travel Training, would increase cost mitigation through a higher take up of bus pass offers. There are several mitigations to support Post-16 young people and families including recent recruitment into our in-house Independent Travel Training team, enabling them to support more young people who are eligible. In addition, eligible students would have access to 16-19 bursary (direct from education providers) worth up to £1200 which can be used to support travel to education.

Motability Vehicles

Department for Education guidance states that Motability cars cannot be considered 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.

Consultation Proposals: - Withdraw the current offer to over 18's 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.

Consultation themes

- **Tension Identified:** Stakeholders acknowledged the need to manage public funds but stressed the importance of ensuring continued access to education for vulnerable young adults with SEND.
- **Motability Concerns:** Respondents highlighted that having a Motability vehicle does not guarantee the ability to operate it. Many young people cannot drive or travel independently, meaning the car alone does not resolve transport needs.
- **Fears that withdrawing transport for those with Motability** could lead families to give up their vehicle to access school transport, negatively impacting quality of life.

- **Equity Risks:** Proposal may disproportionately affect families in receipt of Motability, creating unintended hardship and reducing access to education.

Recommendation

Over 18's would be considered under the proposed revised Post-16 recommendations. As with Post-16's the most cost-effective option (including the use of a PTB) for over 18's with a mobility car will be explored.

3.11

Other findings from consultation

The comments from the consultation painted a picture of a valued transport service, with praise for the support they are providing for children across the borough. Any comments around suggested improvements to the current service have been passed to the relevant department.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 All the recommendations above will require an amendment to the current Home to School and Post-16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Any changes to the policy subsequently approved following consultation, would be phased in so that the new criteria would apply to new and existing users from September 2026. Any changes to those who currently receive transport would be reviewed and come into full effect over several years as cohorts are reviewed as they move through the education system as part of their annual review process.

Following the Executive Board decision around recommendations in this report, a finalised Home to School and Post 16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) will be drafted and published in line with Council duties.

It is worth noting that there is a current national call for a reform of the SEND system, including home to school transport. While the Council will continue to implement and provide recommendations about it, it will also consider both regional and national changes.

5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 Potential financial implications for each area have been identified throughout the report. Estimating potential savings from each of these elements is complex; it is impossible to precisely predict, for example, how many parents might be willing to subscribe to a personal travel budget and the specific routes or contracts that

could be reduced or cease as a result. The report, therefore, is an indication of what might be realised.

5.2 All aspects of this policy will be implemented from 1st September 2026 for all new applicants for travel support. Over time all children would be brought in line with the revised policy, maximizing the opportunities for both savings and cost mitigations. Cost mitigation will therefore be realised for new cohorts making an application for the 2026/2027 academic year. Further savings and cost avoidance could be realised over several terms/academic years as individual cases are reviewed.

5.3 It is also noted that in line with previous years, it is anticipated that demand for home to school transport will remain high, in line with national trends. As a result of this, increasing demand for service may offset any savings from the overall budget.

6.0 **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES** ([click here for list of 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. 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**

No direct impact.

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.

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

No direct impact.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 Failure to implement the proposed recommendations will have a negative impact on the Council's budget for provision of home to school transport for children with SEND. Ongoing budgetary pressures in this area will affect the Council's ability to agree a balanced budget overall.

Proposing changes to assistance for Post-16 learners may result in them not engaging in further education, increasing Halton's NEET cohort. If changes were made, this risk is mitigated to some extent by the 16 to 19 Bursary, (available through education providers) which provides financial support to help young people overcome specific barriers to participation so they can remain in education. In addition, there will be a continued offer of assistance through the local authority's Independent Travel Training (ITT) offer.

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.

Changes to the Home to School & Post-16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) may result in an increase in appealed decisions. It is essential that any proposed changes include a robust appeals process that can respond in an efficient and timely manner to prevent any delays to children and young people receiving travel support.

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 will consider environmental impacts and sustainable methods of travel will be considered as a priority.

KEY DECISIONS ON THE FORWARD PLAN

10.0 **REASON(S) FOR DECISION**

To agree changes to the Home to School and Post-16 Travel and Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Policy 2026-2027.

11.0 **ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED**

To continue with the current policy

Given the current financial position of the Council and the significant pressure on this current Home to School Transport budget, to do nothing would impact the local authority's ability to set a balanced and sustainable budget.

12.0 **IMPLEMENTATION DATE**

All aspects of this policy will be implemented from 1st September 2026 for all new applicants for travel support.

13.0 **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.

Education Act 1996

DfE Travel to school for children of compulsory age statutory guidance January 2024

DfE Post-16 transport and travel support to education and training statutory guidance January 2019.