

**What are we consulting on and why?**

The SEND Home to School Transport Policy was last reviewed and updated in 2014. Since this time the demand for the service has increased significantly. The council faces considerable financial challenges and is having to review all services to ensure that they remain cost effective and sustainable as well as enabling the council to fulfill its statutory obligations. It is therefore timely to review the approach to the delivery of SEND home to school transport services and consult with those affected by any proposed changes.

The council has a statutory responsibility to provide transport from home to school for children and young people of school age (5-16) if they cannot reasonably be expected to ***walk*** there because of their ***special educational needs****,* ***disability,*** *or* ***a******mobility problem.***

Local Authorities have discretionary powers to make travel arrangements for pupils post 16, although transport does not need to be free.

St Helens Borough Council currently exceeds above and beyond its statutory obligations to provide home to school transport for post 16 students. There is no charge applied to transport post 16 students to school or college, this is something that we are reviewing through consultation.

We are mindful that children and young people are now required to stay in education or training until their 18th birthday and therefore any change in the provision of transport must take this into consideration.

As a council we are sensitive to the cost-of-living crisis and the ongoing effects of this on families in St Helens and will therefore look to mitigate any of the changes to home to school transport for those families who are experiencing difficult economic circumstances.

National policy for children and young people with SEND states that earlier intervention and prevention should be the bedrock of services, and children and young people should be given opportunities to be independent where appropriate.

In updating the SEND Home to School Transport Policy, and making changes to what is provided we will be guided by the following principles:

* Participation in education, training and other activities for children and young people with SEND
* Supporting and encouraging independence and the journey to independence for children and young people with SEND
* An increase in sustainable transport
* Efficient use of public resources

The changes we are proposing to make include:

1. Encouraging more young people to travel independently, where safe to do so.
2. To review the provision of free transport for post 16 students.
3. To review the provision of free transport for post 19 students.
4. Different ways of providing transport, including the development of centralised pick-up points and personal transport budgets to give parents/carers more choice on how their children and young people get to school or college.

**Who are we consulting?**

We are consulting with the public on our proposals, specifically the following groups:

* Parents, carers, children, and young people with SEND.
* Professionals in schools and further education and services for children and young people with SEND, including voluntary and community sector organisations.
* Adult’s and children’s social care.
* Parent and carer groups.
* Members of the public.
* Elected members.
* Members of Parliament.
* Neighboring local authorities.

During the consultation period, there will be engagement with children and young people with SEND and their parents and carers to understand their experiences of travel to educational settings, and to hear their views on the proposals.

**How are we consulting?**

There will be a series of face-to-face meetings held, which will take place in schools and colleges, and in St Helens Town Hall.

* Monday 20 November, Mill Green Special School (time to be confirmed).
* Wednesday 22 November, Lansbury Bridge Special School (time to be confirmed).
* Thursday 23 November, St Helens Town Hall, Pilkington Room, 5pm – 7.30pm

We have produced a survey setting out our proposals and we are especially interested in obtaining ideas, feedback and suggestions people may have as to how the council can effectively meet the travel needs of children and young people with SEND.

We will provide paper copies and an ‘easy to read’ version. The public events will be an opportunity to discuss the proposals.

Once we have analysed the results of the survey, we will update our Equalities Impact Assessment.

**What is the timescale?**

Once the consultation has closed, we will review all the responses received and prepare a report for elected members (councillors) who will decide on any changes to the existing policy.