



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Post 16 Transport Consultation 2024

This document provides background and further information to the key areas and proposals that the council is consulting on.

You may wish to keep this document open when considering your responses.

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Introduction

West Northamptonshire Council is consulting on proposals that make certain changes to its Post 16 Transport policy. These proposals relate to the discretionary provisions currently provided by the council.

The Councils statutory duty

There are a range of statutory obligations which the council must meet in relation to the provision of Home to School transport, anything above these obligations is discretionary and included within the Council's Home to School Transport Policy and Post 16 Education Transport Policy.

Key statistics 2022/23

Based on the latest data available, for the academic year 2022/2023:

- The number of students receiving home to school travel assistance, including Post 16 is approximately 5,850.
- The number of Post 16 students who receive support from the Council is approximately 1290.
- Approximately 360 attend school FE settings and 930 attend colleges.
- 410 are students with a special educational need (SEN) and 880 are mainstream students.
- 257 Post 16 students with a special educational need (SEN) receive free transport
- 202 Post 16 mainstream students receive a 50% discount.

What is the current situation?

Although students are now required to continue in education or training until the age of 18 years, the statutory leaving age remains unchanged at 16 and therefore Local Authorities have no statutory duty to provide transport for Post 16 students. Local Authorities have instead a duty to publish a "transport policy statement" each year, setting out how they will support young adults to access education and training.

The duty applies to young people of sixth form age and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC) up to age 25. The overarching intention is to ensure that learners of sixth form age are able to access education and training.

In summary, the eligibility criteria for support under the existing policy is outlined below:

1. The student resides more than 3 miles from their nearest suitable educational establishment or training provider or for students living under this distance, transport support is required due to the students' learning needs and/or disabilities.
2. The students is attending their nearest suitable school, further education college or training provider.
3. The student lives below the statutory walking distance to the nearest suitable school and cannot reasonably be expected to walk due to their special educational needs or disability (SEND).

This criteria remains unchanged under the proposed Post 16 Transport Policy Statement.

What is being proposed?

The proposals will continue to support access to education or training for Post 16 Students and entitlement will remain the same as the current policy. The Council is however reviewing the level of contribution required by parents or carers towards the cost of their child's travel assistance.

It is important that the views of parents, carers, and children and young people who may be affected by the proposals are carefully considered to ensure that the service continues to meet the needs of its users. Feedback is also sought from West Northamptonshire schools, colleges, other educational and training establishments as well as residents and other interested stakeholders.

The changes we are proposing will not come into effect until September 2024, and we are consulting now so that parents and carers are aware of their entitlement to support when their child starts their Post 16 education or training.

The consultation focuses on the following key areas of Post 16 transport:

1. Increase in the parent/carer contribution towards the cost of Post 16 Transport

This proposal seeks to increase the level of contribution required by parents/carers towards the costs of their child's transport from £600 to £1,000 per academic year. This better reflects the actual cost to the Council for providing a seat to a mainstream student and will therefore help meet the costs of providing the service. The original cost was introduced over 10 years ago and hasn't been reviewed until now.

The increased cost will apply to both SEND and Mainstream students however the following discounts will apply:

- Where the family qualify on grounds of low income, the contribution will be reduced by 50% (£500).
- Where the student has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHC), and the family qualify on grounds of low income, transport will be provided free of charge.

2. Increase the use of Personal Travel Budgets (PTB)

The Council currently provides a PTB where this is requested by a parent or carer and where it represents a more efficient use of Council resources. Many parents and carers are not aware that the Council can offer a tailored PTB which meets the cost of their child's transport arrangements and gives greater flexibility compared with the fixed transport arrangements provided by the Council.

The proposal is to promote the use of PTB's and to make this the first offering where this is suitable for the family and represents the most efficient use of Council resources.

3. Personal Travel Budget (PTB) for Sole Transport

The Council currently provides a PTB when this is requested by the parent or carer and where it represents a more efficient use of Council resources.

Under this proposal travel assistance for students who require sole transport will be limited to a Personal Travel Budget unless in exceptional circumstances. This is because sole transport is often the most expensive transport for the Council to arrange and can often be sourced by parents or carers at a lower cost.

In exceptional circumstances where it is not possible for parents or carers to provide transport themselves or source suitable arrangements, then transport will be provided by the Council.

4. Young Adults Undertaking Apprenticeships

The Council's current policy makes no provision for travel assistance for young adults aged 16-19 undertaking an apprenticeship and the proposal is to offer support by way of a Personal Travel Budget to their nearest suitable educational setting only where this is named in the young adults EHCP. In exceptional circumstances the Council may provide transport and each case will be considered on its own merits. Travel assistance will not be provided to the workplace setting.

5. Transport at Normal Start and Finish Times

Under the current policy, transport is provided at the normal start and finish times of the education or training setting. This allows the Council to plan and co-ordinate transport efficiently and the proposal is to keep this arrangement. The Council will review the timings at the start of each academic year.

Why is this being proposed?

The current Home to School and Post 16 Education Transport policies have recently been reviewed and concluded that the way in which we provide travel assistance has changed and we are currently providing transport for a high number of sole occupancy journeys, many of which require the support of a passenger assistance. We also have a lower take up of personal travel budgets which can enable families to make their own transport choices for their child which can sometimes lead to the best outcomes.

The review also identified that for some of the home to school transport and Post 16 services, we currently provide more than our legal requirement (statutory duty). For example, the cost of transport has increased significantly and the contribution from parents has not been reviewed for more than 10 years which has impacted on our budget, and we

are therefore having to carefully consider what discretionary provision we can continue to offer.

The council is forecast to spend over £15 million on providing home to school transport this financial year. The current overspend is £2.1 million more than was originally budgeted. This pressure is expected to continue into the next financial year and whilst additional funding has been made available, by acting now we can avoid making more significant changes in the support we can offer. The changes we are seeking to make will ensure we can continue to support our vulnerable children and young people during their statutory and Post 16 education.

This is a national issue, and many other local authorities are facing the same pressures. Our increase in costs is due to several reasons, such as:

- Population growth and an increased need for home to school transport, especially for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) and other special transport requirements.
- An increase in transport operation costs caused by rising fuel prices, wages, and inflation.

A review of the home to school transport and Post 16 Transport Policy has identified opportunities to alter the service which will help to make it more flexible and efficient, whilst also ensuring the needs of children and young people are maintained in a safe, effective, and sustainable way.