

FREEDOM TO TRAVEL

A strategy to modernise travel assistance
services for Surrey

July 2023

Executive Summary

- i. Travel is an important enabler to securing good life outcomes. Surrey County Council plays an important role in the planning, commissioning and delivery of travel and transport services in Surrey, with around £70m a year spent on these services, such as the bus network, home to school travel assistance (H2STA) and commissioned transport for some Adult Social Care (ASC) clients.
- ii. This strategy sets out a medium-term roadmap to deliver a new model of travel assistance services for residents who require support from the council and partners to travel to destinations across Surrey. Financial pressures for these services are acute and worsening. Factors such as the highest levels of inflation for decades, national driver shortages and rising demand for services are all compounding this pressure. The council also needs to consider how to capitalise on emerging new technologies that are changing the shape of the transport sector, such as Digital Demand Responsive Transport, and commission while observing the need to cut carbon emissions from transport.
- iii. To respond to these challenges and opportunities, this strategy, called Freedom to Travel, has ambitious plans to develop and implement a new model of travel assistance services so that by 2030, all Surrey residents requiring travel assistance will have the freedom to travel to access opportunities to make their lives better so no-one is left behind.
- iv. This model will emphasise self-sufficient travel, equipping residents with the information, skills and tools to be able to travel independently, where possible, across Surrey. Through this new model, organisations and communities will work together on solutions to avoid the need for residents to travel in the first place.
- v. Where transport is the only feasible solution, the council's commissioning model will have changed so collaborative working between the organisation, partners and suppliers is business-as-usual, and all travel and transport services in the council adopt an organisation-wide approach to commissioning that is systematic and consistent. Transport asset sharing is normalised, and the focus of commissioning is to secure transport solutions that support the county's carbon emissions reductions targets.
- vi. Activities will be implemented via two delivery areas – reducing demand for commissioned transport and shaping a more competitive transport market. This strategy will be delivered over a five-year time horizon as the changes required for this programme to be successful are complex and will take time to embed across the wider Surrey system.

Introduction

1. Being able to travel is fundamental to having good life outcomes. It is how we all access formal education and learning, employment, social and leisure activities and enables us to spend time with friends and family. The transport options available to people affects access to opportunities that have a major impact on their life chances, such as work, learning and healthcare¹.
2. Surrey County Council has an important role in the planning, commissioning and delivery of transport and travel assistance services in Surrey. The council spends around £70m in revenue per year on these services, including commissioning of bus services for routes which are not served by the commercial market, concessionary travel passes, such as the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) for older and disabled passengers, home to school travel assistance (H2STA) and commissioned transport for some clients using Adult Social Care (ASC) services.
3. The council also works in partnership with other travel commissioners and providers across Surrey, including NHS patient transport services, community transport operators, district and borough councils and voluntary, community and faith groups. Each of these organisations separately commission and provide transport for specific purposes, but there are opportunities for working more closely with these partners for mutual benefit to enhance residents' experiences as well as strengthen each organisation's financial sustainability.
4. The purpose of this strategy is to create a roadmap for the design and development of a future model of travel assistance services for Surrey, branded as Freedom to Travel. Travel assistance is defined as bespoke travel services that are arranged and provided on an individual basis with clients who need support to travel. All users will be eligible for support either because they qualify according to statutory guidelines (for example, if a child is unable to walk to school because there is no safe walking route) or their needs mean they require some form of travel assistance to reach their destination.
5. The financial pressures that these services are experiencing is acute and is worsening. The focus of this strategy must be on ensuring that these services will be financially sustainable for the medium-term, while continuing to support all residents who need travel assistance to continue to have the freedom to make the journeys crucial to obtaining good life outcomes. Supporting people to travel independently where possible is a key part of this, as well as thinking about how travel assistance can also contribute to Surrey's net zero ambitions.

¹ NatCen (2019), Access to Transport and Life Opportunities, [Access to Transport and Life Opportunities \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/814117/Access_to_Transport_and_Life_Opportunities.pdf)

Strategic context

6. Surrey County Council supports around 12,500 residents with travel assistance, with over 11,800 of them (94%) supported by the H2STA service and 6% in ASC. These services are mainly funded from council tax.
7. This section sets out how the council currently supports these residents and the key challenges and opportunities that face these services. This forms a backdrop to, and provides a strong rationale for, adopting a new model of travel assistance services that is financially sustainable and ensures all travel assistance clients can get to where they need to so they can live their lives to their full potential.

Home to school travel assistance (H2STA)

8. The H2STA service helps children and young people get to and from their education setting. This comes in several different forms including independent travel training (ITT), mileage reimbursement, bikeability, driving lessons and taxi, coach and minibus services. The service primarily supports children of statutory school age (5-16 years old), children under 5 by exception, children in post-16 education by exception and young adults aged 19 to 25 where they continue to attend an education or training provision setting and have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
9. The Education Act 1996 (as amended) sets out the council's statutory duties and powers to provide transport from home to school/college and must have regard to Department for Education statutory guidance. Eligible children of statutory school age must be provided with free H2STA and must be provided with travel assistance if they live beyond the statutory walking distance from the nearest suitable school, cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school due to special educational needs, a disability or mobility problems, or due to the nature of the route. This eligibility is extended to low-income families.
10. As of summer term 2022/23, the H2STA service were providing transport to 6,730 children and young people (CYP) of statutory school age (5 – 15), 159 pupils aged 0-4, 405 pupils aged 16-18 and 160 young people aged 19-25. 6,915 CYP are attending mainstream education settings and 4,934 CYP with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) were accessing services.
11. The service also supported 970 vulnerable learners who are supported by social workers as of May 2023, including 105 Looked After Children, 70 children with a Child Protection Plan, 776 Children in Need and 18 Care Leavers.
12. The H2STA service has been experiencing significant financial pressures and strains on resource levels:
 - a. Since 2019, the number of children and young people accessing the service has increased by 3%. While this appears modest, this masks a significant change in the profile of service users. Use by CYP in mainstream education has dropped by 9%, but the number of CYP with SEND has increased by

21%.

- b. This shift in service user demographics is set to continue over the medium to long-term. By the 2031/32 financial year, CYP using the H2STA service will have increased by a further 7.8%. Of this, the council is projecting a further reduction in the number of CYP mainstream service users of 6.6%, but an increase of a further 27.9% in CYP with SEND being supported.
 - c. The average cost of a travel arrangement for CYP with SEND is currently eight times that of providing travel assistance for mainstream CYP (£9,215 v £1,180). An increase of 856 pupils with SEND since 2019/20 has increased annual expenditure by close to £8m.
 - d. By the end of the 2022/23 financial year, the H2STA budget overspent by £12m against a £39m budget. Expenditure increased by 12% since the previous financial year and 18% since 2019/20, where the service reported an overspend of £4m at outturn.
 - e. Financial pressures in 2022/23 arose due to significant demand in SEND pupils returning to the system following reduced routes during the Covid pandemic as well as supplementary Covid-19 grant funding falling away, increased demand from CYP with SEND who have fewer options for independent travel, specific vehicle needs and longer journey times, and higher inflation than the 5% built into the base budget.
13. Much has been done by the H2STA service in 2023 to reduce solo taxi use and to promote independent travel with service users. However, significant risks remain that will need mitigating by the service, such as a national issue with supplier and driver shortages, affecting many local authorities, and complex demand challenges, such as an increase in SEND pupils requiring travel assistance that are not bound by the start of the academic year meaning volatility in route planning and increased dependency on solo route provision.
14. If no action is taken to contain costs and manage demand, the total cost of H2STA services for the council would be nearly £80m per year – over double the amount budgeted for H2STA services in 2022/23. This poses a clear risk to the council's financial position and is unsustainable.

Adult social care (ASC)

- 15. The ASC Directorate commissions travel assistance and transport for service users who require transport between venues as part of their agreed care plan. Under the Care Act 2014, local authorities have a duty to provide support for adults assessed as needing transport for social care activities.
- 16. The transport that is commissioned may be to access day care services or medical appointments. Some services can be commissioned directly by the council, either through a spot purchase arrangement or the Transport Coordination Centre in the H2STA service, or cash sums may be made available as Direct Payments to service

users.

17. As of March 2023, 646 ASC service users were supported with travel assistance. 209 clients (32.4%) were accessing the learning disabilities and autism (LDA) service, 97 (15%) were in the transitions service, moving across from children’s social care to ASC, 67 (10.4%) were supported by the older people’s (OP) service and 21 (3.3%) were supported for physical and sensory disabilities (PSD). 250 service users access transport supplied by Surrey Choices.

18. ASC spends around £3.7m a year on commissioned transport. This represents a reduction on £3.9m spent on transport in 2019/20. While spend on ASC transport is significantly lower than in H2STA, an analysis of spend suggests there are significant variations in costs:

- a. There are some care packages where spend is significantly above median expenditure. For LDA service users, the median spend was £7,615 a year, however the maximum spend on a transport package for a year was £55,056 and for service users with physical disabilities, median spend was £4,430 a year, with maximum spend being £27,353 a year.
- b. While each client has a care package unique to their needs, spend for some transport arrangements may potentially be in excess of need. Higher cost packages may be the result of long distances, greater trip frequencies and/or includes costs such as specialist vehicle hire, or the service user being accompanied by someone in addition to the driver.
- c. The mean costs of providing transport for transitions service users are 50% higher than those funded by the central learning disability service (£15,641 per year v £10,453 per year). This may be due to the distances required to travel to specialist schools or colleges for those in transition.
- d. Numbers of users in the OP and PSD teams are small (around 22 in total), however, there are clear differences in provision costs as set out by the tables below. This data is a snapshot taken as of October 2022 and presents information on clients with long-term travel arrangements.:

Funding team	No. of service users	Annual cost	Average (mean) cost per person
Elmbridge PSD	4	£16,952.08	£4,238.02
Epsom and Ewell PSD	2	£31,954.41	£15,977.21
Guildford PSD	1	£4,734.99	£4,734.99
Runnymede PSD	1	£888.86	£888.86
Spelthorne PSD	2	£12,996.86	£6,483.43
Surrey Heath PSD	1	£3,660	£3,660
Waverley PSD	2	£6,378.86	£3,189.43
Woking PSD	2	£9,312.09	£4,656.05
PSD TOTAL	15	£86,848.15	£5,789.88

Funding team	No. of service users	Cost	Average (mean) cost per person
Elmbridge OP	4	£4,559.31	£1,139.83
Epsom and Ewell OP	2	£2,738.20	£1,369.10
Tandridge OP	1	£1,725.43	£1,725.43
OP TOTAL	7	£9,022.94	£1,288.99

- e. If no action is taken to contain demand and costs for transport in ASC, the costs of spot purchased transport are projected to increase by around £900,000 over the next five years (37% increase). This is based on an 8% a year increase in the number of LDA, OP and Transitions clients requiring transport as part of their social care package.

19. While each client's needs are unique, there are opportunities to enhance the support to ASC staff to arrange travel assistance that supports these needs while also realising better value for money for the council. A survey carried out by Impower with ASC staff in 2022 found that 77% of respondents would welcome more guidance on supporting decision making and access to the information required to help residents access transport. They also indicated that they would opt for taxi or private hire solutions if clients live in remote areas with poor transport links, have complex needs and require an escort, ease of arranging transport or if community transport and other alternatives were in short supply.

20. Inconsistency in the costs of travel assistance, as well as a clear demand from staff for further help in this area, provides an opportunity to put in place policy, practice and guidance in place to give greater clarity for residents and staff. There are also opportunities to join up with other travel and transport teams across the council and wider system to support a more consistent approach to travel assistance commissioning to support the Directorate's aspirations to help people to stay independent, safe and well so they can live the lives they want to.

Public transport expenditure

21. Surrey County Council has a crucial role in the effective operation of Surrey's public transport network. Local bus services, for example, are vital in supporting residents to access essential services such as employment, education and training, helping the local economy to thrive and encourage more sustainable travel solutions to reduce carbon emissions.

22. In recent years, as well as the council increasing its commitment to providing revenue support for local services, and supporting the bus sector through the Covid-19 pandemic, subsidy of bus services has increased by 40% from £8.3m in the 2018/19 financial year to £11.7m in 2022/23.

23. The spend profile for bus subsidies has changed over the past three years. Covid grants that were introduced to cover bus operator losses during lockdown in 2020/21 accounted for over 20% of subsidy spend in that year. The council also provided additional support payments in 2022/23 to cover increased operating costs, such as fuel and broader inflation. This demonstrates the council's commitment to these

services and the importance attached to the sector's role in encouraging residents to travel differently and independently.

24. Covid has impacted on bus patronage. Before 2020/21, the average number of passenger journeys in Surrey was just over 27 million per year. For older and disabled passengers, the average was around 7.7 million journeys a year – 28% of all journeys. Part of the impact of the pandemic was that passenger numbers have fallen and struggled to recover to pre-pandemic journey numbers. As of 2021/22, Surrey saw around 16 million bus journeys, with 3.8 million of them undertaken by older and disabled passengers – a 49% drop against the historical average. This suggests that more work is needed to restore passenger confidence to travel on the bus network.
25. As a condition to accessing Covid bus recovery funding, the Government required Local Transport Authorities to carry out a review of the financial sustainability of bus networks in their local areas. In mid-2022, the council completed this review with bus operators, which included information on services that were recovering and performing well, those getting close to pre-Covid levels, and those that were unlikely to ever return to pre-Covid patronage and financial levels.
26. As part of this review, the council consulted with residents and other stakeholders between November 2022 and February 2023 to get their views on bus network infrastructure investment, maintaining or changing bus services to better reflect use and the expansion of Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) services.
27. Stakeholders were very supportive of the need for more infrastructure investment in the bus network, particularly if it leads to more frequent bus services than those currently offered. Capital spend, which should be used to maximise patronage growth, is less likely to be targeted at rural communities, so access challenges for residents living in those communities will need to be addressed through initiatives, such as by expanding the DDRT scheme.
28. Stakeholders were also keen to see more online information for people to use prior to and during their journey. Bus data is open source, meaning that timetables and route maps are available across a range of digital platforms. While this means this information can be accessed from multiple websites and apps, there is a case for rationalising and simplifying how this information can be accessed so improve the resident experience and make it easier for staff responsible for providing travel assistance to obtain this information in one place.
29. DDRT services will be particularly important for living in more rural and isolated communities with challenges accessing the broader public transport network. They will offer many more residents enhanced travel opportunities and provide an alternative to the private car. These services are not intended to support direct transport solutions from residents' homes to their destinations, such as school runs, but they will be important for enhancing connectivity and opening up more options for residents who require travel assistance from the council and will require substantial promotion and marketing to position them as viable options to help them travel to their destinations.

30. Changes to the bus network will have consequences for the council's aspirations to support travel assistance clients to change how they travel to school. Some children and families affected by the withdrawal of routes will reduce options for the H2STA service to be able to support service users to access the bus network. People with mobility issues have also been identified as less likely to get to an alternative bus stop and clients with learning disabilities and/or autism are less able to amend travel habits to deal with changes to or withdrawal of services.
31. These changes mean it strengthens the importance of services involved in the planning and commissioning of travel and transport to collaborate, particularly where there may be unintended consequences impacting the council's operations. For example, there is a risk that withdrawing bus services will mean alternative transport will need to be commissioned for some service users, adding to the council's budget pressures, and appropriate mitigations will need to be developed.
32. The council facilitates delivery of the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) to support older and disabled people to use off-peak bus services free of charge. Since the 2018/19 financial year, the council has reduced its budget for concessionary fares by 16%. Budgeted expenditure for the scheme in 2022/23 was around £6.9m, down from £8.2m in 2018/19. This links to damaged passenger confidence arising from the pandemic, and reducing applicability of bus passes from all times to the statutory minimum in 2019 (9.30am to 11pm, Monday to Friday).
33. If there are good levels of access to the bus network, and clients using ASC services can be supported to travel independently, the ENCTS will be an important enabling service for reducing costs incurred by the ASC Directorate. Close collaboration between the ASC Directorate and Strategic Transport service will be essential for identifying who will benefit the most from having an ENCTS bus pass.
34. Community transport (CT) is another sector that will have a central part to play in shaping a more vibrant transport market in Surrey. These services are for people who are unable to use conventional public transport either due to lack of access or are unable to use them due to sensory and/or mobility problems.
35. CT schemes are designed around users' needs including community buses, Dial-a-ride, voluntary car schemes and demand responsive transport. The council's aspiration for CT is for all residents in communities that need them to access them. There are at least six operators working in Surrey, comprised of a mix of services run by district and borough councils and stand-alone independent organisations.
36. The council provides some funding to the sector each year to support a volunteer car scheme run by Surrey CommunityAction and to cover between 5% and 10% of operator overheads for Dial-a-ride services. Average annual spend with the CT sector is around £403,000, not including commissioned spend for travel assistance services.
37. If the council has ambitions to do more business with the CT sector, it needs to create the conditions for it to compete more effectively within the local transport economy. This may include working with the sector to reform organisational models

and reviewing the council's commissioning approaches to strengthen the fairness and security of the contracts awarded.

Why is a new model of travel assistance needed?

38. The context facing travel assistance services in Surrey is challenging. The previous section identified key challenges that threaten the council's medium-term financial sustainability, such as inflation, driver shortages and growing demand.
39. In addition, there are five strategic drivers over the medium-term that have been identified that are most important and will have the greatest impact in how travel assistance is provided:
 - a. Surrey's transport market is non-competitive – Supplier shortages, lack of vehicles and Passenger Assistants and operators passing on the costs of green compliance to the council are driving up costs. In addition, the challenges around public transport connectivity in some parts of the county means the council faces limited options for commissioning alternative travel assistance solutions to taxis and private hire. The council will need to develop a more strategic relationship with suppliers to support existing ones as well as incentivising new entrants to the market to increase competition and drive down prices.
 - b. Greener Futures agenda – The Surrey Climate Change Strategy aspires to deliver and promote an integrated, accessible, affordable and reliable public and active transport system across Surrey, reducing journeys and improving local air quality for improved health and wellbeing of residents. The Strategy commits the county to reducing carbon emissions from the transport sector by 60% by 2035. The council's travel assistance model needs to contribute to this and will affect the procurement and commissioning approaches used, how demand and behaviour change tactics with clients are implemented and how decisions are made on any infrastructure solutions.
 - c. Growth in technologically-enabled transport solutions – over the medium-term, growth is anticipated in new modes of transport, with digital technology at their heart, as well as growth in digital resources to enable residents to plan, book and pay for their journeys. The council will need to monitor trends, such as the development of autonomous vehicles, to assess how this will impact people's travel habits, how the market will change and what the potential is for these vehicles to support more efficient, effective service delivery. Developments in the servitisation of transport, such as the growth in ride-share services such as Uber, means people will increasingly turn to Mobility-as-a-Service technologies to access a single payment channel and interface to access multiple travel options.
 - d. Demand continues to evolve – this includes growing complexity of need for travel assistance clients, increasing numbers of residents wanting to access services and high expectations of what travel assistance services should provide. For example, Surrey has a large population of children and young

people with special educational needs (SEN) statement or EHCP compared to statistical neighbours, the South-East and nationally. This population will grow against a backdrop of growing needs for autism, social, emotional, and mental health needs and moderate learning difficulties over the past five years². A proportion of these CYP will require travel assistance by virtue of their needs. These conditions necessitate the need to strengthen the council's strategies for managing demand for these services in creative ways that enable solutions that meet needs, strengthen independence, deliver value for money and reduce carbon emissions.

- e. Place-based working – the council is leading development of several projects that look at the planning, commissioning and delivery of services through a place-focused framework. Such projects include the key neighbourhoods work for areas of Surrey with the greatest health and wellbeing deprivation and the towns partnership work to bring local partners in Surrey's towns together to work on each place's unique priorities. Travel and transport issues are likely to feature as part of these priorities, so there are opportunities to engage and innovate by working with local communities to reform how travel assistance is provided in those places.

- 40. These challenges and opportunities suggest that a model of travel assistance is needed that is more effective at targeting travel assistance and transport support for residents with the greatest needs. The levels of individual needs are important determinants of the type of travel assistance that should be offered to clients, whether it is providing funding to enable residents to make their own travel arrangements, skills training for independence or commissioning a vehicle.
- 41. A future model should also prioritise local engagement that seeks opportunities to deliver tailored local solutions with people across Surrey's communities. It will also be important for residents, council staff and partners to have easy access to high quality information to support travel planning and clarity on available options, as well as regular communications and promotion of these options and services. These are critical for driving down demand for high-cost transport solutions.
- 42. The council's approach to engaging Surrey's transport market needs strengthening. Suppliers have said they want a clear vision for the future of travel assistance services, for communications to be strengthened and for greater certainty and security on contracts. Work has started on this in the H2STA service and should be expanded to cover all council services with a role in travel assistance commissioning. As a key transport commissioner, the council needs a travel assistance model that is proactive in working with suppliers to respond to issues that impact their operational viability and delivery as well increasing cost and affecting service quality, such as driver shortages. A future travel assistance model also needs to be dynamic and flexible to changes to new market developments in the environmental and technological spaces.

² Surrey Inclusion and Additional Needs Partnership Strategy 2023 - 2026

Freedom to Travel - vision and strategic alignment

Vision

43. Below is the council's long-term vision for a future model of travel assistance for 2030:

By 2030, all Surrey residents requiring travel assistance will have the freedom to travel to access opportunities that make their lives better so no-one is left behind.

No-one who needs support to travel will worry about how they can get to where they want to be, whether it's school, college, leisure, social activities or employment. Surrey County Council's (SCC) services will offer residents the predictability, tools and skills they need to travel around Surrey independently.

Our services will be financially sustainable, offering great outcomes for residents that use them, and value for money for the residents that fund them. We will achieve this by finding solutions to support residents to travel that does not rely on expensive private vehicles as the first port of call.

Residents will have access to high quality information and advice on travel assistance. They will self-serve to choose the travel options that work best for them and their families or carers. The emphasis is on methods that support self-sufficient travel, such as active travel schemes and public transport, to prevent the need for more vehicles on Surrey's roads where possible. Our support will help overcome practical barriers that prevent this where possible. Our services will be accessed in one place, supported by processes that minimise form filling, waiting times and hand overs.

More local opportunities within communities will have been developed to minimise the need for residents to travel in the first place. Activity to design and develop a new travel assistance model will work closely with other initiatives designed to support more local provision in Surrey, such as school place sufficiency in Surrey and 15-minute neighbourhoods.

For residents that still need SCC to arrange transport, we will approach the planning, commissioning and delivery of these services differently and shaped the market in our favour.

Surrey's transport market is competitive, where providers from different sectors have opportunities to thrive and offer improved value for residents. Collaborative working with partners and suppliers is business-as-usual, underpinned by strong trusting relationships, focused on delivering a transport offer that delivers high quality, efficient and effective services.

Transport commissioning approaches are consistent and systematic across all SCC Directorates and partners with an emphasis on long-term planning, evidence-based decision making and supplier and resident involvement in service design. This

enables an environment for innovation and cross-cutting opportunities for joint working between services and with partners.

We will have capitalised on, and will continue to exploit, the potential of technological innovations, such as digital on-demand transport (DDRT) and artificial intelligence in route planning, to deliver services that align with modern expectations, open up new possibilities for residents to travel and for SCC and partners to use transport resources smartly.

Where organisations operate their own fleets, asset sharing is normal practice to maximise use of vehicles by serving a range of different resident groups across multiple organisations, not just their own clients. Transport and travel assistance providers are incentivised to work together to create and sustain a well-connected transport network that residents value.

Commissioning organisations prioritise green transport and travel modes to support the county's aspirations for a net zero future. Priority is given to commissioning shared use transport that minimises carbon emissions, such as electric minibuses, and accessible walking and cycling routes. We will have put the right infrastructure in place to make this possible and we will aim to take more vehicles off Surrey's roads to reduce congestion.

44. If this vision is delivered successfully, a future is anticipated where:

- a. Residents are confident in arranging travel within Surrey and know how to get the information they need on their travel options to better plan their journeys. Council staff responsible for arranging travel for clients will also benefit.
- b. More residents will use active travel solutions that support better physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- c. Service users associate travel assistance with a wider range of options for travel that emphasises active travel and greener transport solutions, and less association with using taxis to reach their destinations.
- d. Costs to the council of commissioning and providing these services will come down as lower cost travel assistance solutions are provided, and fewer people require services.
- e. Residents and services collaborate routinely to design and develop tailored travel solutions based on the needs of local places.
- f. Council partners and services work together on joint planning and commissioning of travel assistance, including shared use of vehicles to maximise and make the most efficient use of these assets.
- g. Travel assistance clients in more rural and isolated communities will be better supported to connect to the wider transport network.
- h. Carbon emissions from commissioned transport will be lower.

45. Successful achievement of this vision is contingent on the council and partners observing these five working principles:
- a. Changing stakeholders' behaviours and expectations over the long-term.
 - b. Taking an evidence-based approach, enabled by strong data, insights and performance management.
 - c. Services are designed with communities.
 - d. Delivery is supported by efficient and effective processes and back-office systems.
 - e. Enter new, and strengthen existing, partnerships focused on outcomes and benefits.

Strategic alignment

46. Freedom to Travel will act as a supporting programme for broader strategic priorities and initiatives Surrey County Council is pursuing.

47. Supporting delivery of the [Community Vision for Surrey in 2030](#). The vision's aspirations include:

- a. **Children and young people are safe and feel safe and confident** – Safeguarding CYP is a top priority for travel assistance services, making sure that service users are supported and are able to travel safely, particularly if they have SEND or complex medical requirements. We will maintain the highest possible standards to ensure the suppliers we work with have service user safety at the forefront of their minds.
- b. **Everyone benefits from education, skills and employment opportunities that help them succeed in life** – Freedom to Travel is about developing more inclusive, sustainable solutions for people to travel to be able to learn, work and earn and ensuring that any barriers that prevent this are overcome. The new travel assistance model will support service users to find travel arrangements that work best for them to make sure no-one is excluded and risks being left behind.
- c. **Everyone lives active, healthy and fulfilling lives, and makes good choices about their wellbeing** – Surrey's future model of travel assistance will, where possible, encourage use of walking and cycling routes to education, employment, social and leisure destinations. Residents using these services regularly will benefit from enhanced physical and mental health and wellbeing by being more active and subsequent impacts on wider determinants of health, such as obesity and isolation.
- d. **Everyone gets the health and social care support and information they need at the right time and place** – the new travel assistance model will continue to support ASC clients to access services, while seeking to strengthen their independent travel skills and providing the information they

need for them and their families and/or carers to make informed choices. Where transport is needed, the council will prioritise finding solutions that meet these needs while being financially and environmentally responsible.

- e. **Communities are welcoming and supportive, especially of those most in need, and people feel able to contribute to community life** – community participation in the design and delivery of local projects to support people to travel to access opportunities will be a major component of the new model. Residents’ knowledge and expertise are crucial in identifying how to reduce the need for public sector commissioned services and subsequently reduce travel assistance demand. Local participation will encourage more trusting, productive relationships between residents and travel assistance services.
 - f. **Residents live in clean, safe and green communities, where people and organisations embrace their environmental responsibilities** – Reforms to travel assistance commissioning will prioritise finding greener travel options for service users, ranging from increasing the use of providers using EVs to encouraging client uptake of active travel schemes. Doing this will cut the overall carbon emissions levels of these services.
 - g. **Journeys across the county are easier, more predictable and safer** – Strengthening the local transport provider market to increase competition and choice in the supply of travel assistance. In addition, reform the council’s approach to route planning to maximise the efficiency of routes, including reducing travel time from home locations to destinations where possible.
 - h. **Well-connected communities, with effective infrastructure, that grow sustainably** – Freedom to Travel will influence development of active travel schemes that are accessible for all and identify opportunities to make more walking routes safe.
48. Supporting delivery of priority objectives in [Surrey County Council's Organisation Strategy 2023 to 2028](#):
- a. **Growing a sustainable economy so everyone can benefit** – Developing a new travel assistance model presents opportunities to work more closely with local suppliers to facilitate a more competitive transport market and investment in a sector of Surrey’s economy. The impacts the Covid pandemic has had on the transport sector increases its importance. Travel assistance is also important for CYP to progress in their education and minimise inequality of access that could impact future outcomes and prospects for employment.
 - b. **Tackling health inequality** – a central aim of Freedom to Travel is to reduce inequality of access to transport and travel. Addressing this is vital for travel assistance clients to attain as good life outcomes as the wider population. There will also be additional benefits to prevent further health inequalities developing in Surrey’s population, such as obesity through active travel schemes and social isolation, which increase the chances of needing to access acute response services later in life.

- c. **Enabling a greener future** – Travel assistance services have a responsibility to contribute to responding to the climate emergency and accelerate reductions of transport carbon emissions. Encouraging behaviour change among residents and staff as well as reforming our commissioning approaches to build this in will be important tactics to support this.
- d. **Empowered and thriving communities** – The new travel assistance model will enable more participative engagement between residents, the council and wider stakeholders to design and develop bespoke solutions tailored to local travel and transport issues. Services will also work closely with travel assistance clients to give them as much information and choice as possible to identify arrangements that work best for both clients and providers.
- e. **Service effectiveness** – Core Directorates and services with responsibilities for travel assistance will collaborate routinely to deliver interventions that enable prevention to address health and environmental risks and reduce demand for commissioned transport, capitalise on using digital technology and find new ways of working with partners for mutual benefit. This is important in supporting continued improvement in the statutory travel assistance we provide for residents.

49. Alignment with the [Surrey Health and Wellbeing Strategy](#):

- a. **Supporting people to lead healthy lives by preventing physical ill health and promoting physical wellbeing** – Measures to encourage use of walking and cycling schemes will support increased physical activity and support prevention of disease in later life.
- b. **Supporting people’s mental health and emotional well-being by preventing mental ill-health and promoting emotional well-being** – Central to Freedom to Travel’s success is to increase access to a wider range of travel assistance options to support residents to travel and tackle social isolation.
- c. **Supporting people to reach their potential by addressing the wider determinants of health** – Travel assistance is a key enabler for building social connections in communities and increasing the chances of residents securing the outcomes they need to flourish and succeed in life.

50. Enhancing the impact of [Surrey’s Local Transport Plan \(LTP4\)](#) by contributing to delivery of the plan’s objectives:

- a. **Rapidly reduce carbon emissions, ensuring Surrey in on track for net zero emissions by 2050** – closely monitoring the impact of travel assistance services on carbon emissions and using commissioning levers and behaviour change techniques to increase the use of greener travel solutions.
- b. **Support Surrey’s growth ambitions and enable businesses and people to prosper sustainably** – For some CYP, travel assistance is vital for them to access education to improve their employment prospects. Adults will also require travel assistance in some cases to undertake training or to seek

employment.

- c. **Provide well connected communities that encourage equal access to travel to ensure no-one is left behind** – this is a key principle that Freedom to Travel aims to achieve by making sure all travel assistance clients are able to access the travel solution that works best for them while ensuring the council provides value for money for these services.
- d. **Create thriving communities with clean air, excellent health, wellbeing and quality of life** – the new model of travel assistance will prioritise for travel assistance clients to use walking, cycling or public transport as travel solutions. Where this is not possible, the council will work with suppliers to prioritise solutions that do not compromise work to meet Surrey's carbon emissions reduction targets.

51. Managing dependencies with the [Children and Young People with Additional Needs and Disabilities: 2022 – 2030 Sufficiency Plan](#). Part of the vision in this Plan is to support CYP with additional needs and disabilities to access help and support they need to thrive in their local communities and go to education provision close to where they live. If this plan is delivered successfully, and more education provision is made available locally in Surrey, this will reduce demand for H2STA services and costs of commissioned transport.

Implementation and progress reporting

52. The Freedom to Travel Strategy is predicated on two areas of delivery to respond to the challenges and opportunities facing travel assistance services:

- a. **Reducing demand for commissioned transport** – For some residents, travel assistance does not have to take the form of a commissioned vehicle. A future model of travel assistance prioritises helping residents to travel independently where they can do so. This is important for giving people lifelong skills and confidence to navigate around Surrey and other places to get to where they want to go. Activities for this delivery area will focus on diversifying the travel assistance options on offer to residents. This includes strengthening the council's Independent Travel Training offer, simplifying public information for travel planning, reviewing where infrastructure solutions could reduce demand and providing financial and other resources to enable residents to make their own travel arrangements. The council will also work with residents and partner organisations to trial new place-based approaches that seek to respond to travel and transport challenges and find new ways to reduce demand further.
- b. **Shaping a competitive transport market** – Activities in this delivery area are focused on generating better value for money for the transport we have to commission. The council will focus on reforming its procurement and commissioning approaches so all services with roles in travel planning, commissioning and provision follow a systematic, consistent approach. A

more strategic relationship with transport suppliers is essential for navigating some of the challenges facing the transport sector to enable them to thrive, generate healthy competition in the market and drive down prices. The council will also work with partners from other sectors, such as the NHS and community transport operators, to identify and develop cross-cutting collaborative opportunities to deliver innovation and secure mutually beneficial outcomes for the residents they collectively serve. This includes capitalising on transport innovations, such as DDRT, to enhance connectivity, contribute to more diverse travel options and enhance market competitiveness.

53. These activities will be delivered over a medium-term time horizon of around five years. Oversight and progress monitoring will be led by the Freedom to Travel Board and reported regularly to Surrey County Council's Cabinet. They will also be required at key intervals to take decisions on individual projects within the programme as specific milestones are met. General progress, as well as individual projects that require a further Cabinet decision, will also be reported to Select Committees so the programme can be scrutinised.
54. To assess our progress, a performance management approach will be developed aligned to the success statements set out in paragraph 44. Quantitative and qualitative evidence, gathered via robust evaluation and data collection mechanisms, will support the council to gauge what is being achieved and where there may be challenges and risks hindering progress.