

CABINET- 26 April 2022

Cabinet Response to the Home to School Travel Assistance Policy (Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee)

Recommendations to Cabinet:

The Select Committee agreed the following recommendations:

1. The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning ensure the Home to School Travel Assistance Policy reflects the following recommendations before it is referred to Cabinet for agreement:
 - a) The 45-minute maximum intended journey time for primary-aged pupils contained in statutory guidance be maintained and only exceeded in exceptional circumstances, such as journeys which enable a child to attend the setting which best meets their needs or where it would be impractical or disproportionately expensive for a journey to be shorter than 45-minutes – journeys should always enable children to arrive at school ready for a day of study and be suitable, safe and reasonably stress free.
 - b) Collection points be situated in locations which protect the safety and wellbeing of children.
 - c) In the case of an appeal against a withdrawal of travel assistance, assistance not be withdrawn until the appeal is complete.
 - d) There be no change to the appeals panel membership; and that steps be taken promote member attendance at appeals panel meetings.

2. That Cabinet agree the reported changes to the Home to School Travel Assistance Policy subject to the changes recommended in recommendation 1.

Chris Townsend, Vice-Chairman of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee (on the behalf of the Chairman of the Committee)

Cabinet Response:

I'd like to thank the Chairman and members of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee for their time in considering our proposals for changing Surrey's Home to School Transport Assistance (H2STA) Policy which is being considered by the Cabinet today for a decision. I welcome the feedback and debate about the changes proposed and consulted on.

The H2STA Policy sets out the way in which the Council discharges its statutory and discretionary powers and responsibilities in relation to school and college transport assistance available for pupils aged up to 25 years of age, both with and without additional needs. The changes proposed will ensure that the County Council continues to support those who most need help, manage increasing costs and demand within the overall resources available and increase the options for children and young people who qualify for H2STA, encouraging environmentally friendly travel and support independent travel as a means of preparing young people for adulthood.

The recommendations from the Select Committee have been considered carefully as the Cabinet report has been drafted. With regards to each recommendation the following action has been taken:

- a. The Cabinet report has been updated following reflection on the consultation and feedback at Select Committee. The proposal is now that:

The size and characteristics of Surrey means that it can be challenging to adhere to the statutory guidelines on journey time limits in practice. Surrey is geographically one of the largest local authorities in England covering an area of 648 square miles with close to 500 schools and colleges and other alternative provisions, including 25 specialist schools. Surrey has a distinctive character with large rural areas and conversely, in its larger conurbations, traffic density and congestion very similar to inner London. Surrey's current policy (updated in 2020) provides flexibility to make a decision to depart from the statutory guidance on recommended travel times following a careful assessment of the needs of every individual child, giving consideration to age and additional needs.

The proposal is that for some journeys, the upper limit on journey times may be varied in order to make suitable and sufficient arrangements for all children. This means that in planning routes, the maximum time guidance of 45 minutes for primary school children and 75 minutes for secondary school children would not override all other considerations. The Council will also take into account the benefits of allowing children and young people who could potentially share transport to do so in appropriate circumstances, the promotion of independent travel, more environmentally friendly travel, and the economic use of resources. Parents will have the right to appeal.

If the Council departs from the statutory guidelines on journey times, this decision must ensure the planned route is not of such duration that the pupil is unable, because of stress and strain, to learn properly (whether at school or at home). We will take into consideration the child's age and stage of development. The 45-minute maximum planned journey time for primary-aged pupils contained in statutory guidance will be maintained and only exceeded in certain circumstances, such as journeys which enable a child to attend the setting which best meets their needs.

- b. Collections points. Having considered the feedback from Select Committee, the following is being proposed. The safety of a collection point will be critical to the decision making on where the collection points will be situated.

It is proposed that where a route has been identified as suitable for collection points to be introduced, a further 4 week consultation will be undertaken with the families, children and young people on that route to ensure that the proposed arrangements are appropriate, for example the location of the collection point. Before the 4 week consultation, the Council will also assess the individual circumstances or needs which may mean that a collection point is not appropriate for an individual pupil to use. Following a decision to introduce a collection point, the Council will provide not less than 6 weeks notification to families (which includes any school holidays that fall in the 6 week period) before the collection point is established. It is proposed

that once a collection point route has been established, that route will remain a collection point route and no further specific consultation will be undertaken. This means that any pupils joining the route will be informed that it is a collection point route, and they will be expected to use the collection point. Parents will have the right to appeal.

- c. Withdrawal of assistance. Having considered this recommendation, it is not proposed to make any changes to this currently as it would represent a change in the current practice. Currently we notify the parent of the proposal to withdraw transport with a notice period and advise that there is a right of appeal. However, we do not continue to provide assistance beyond the end of the notice period if the appeal has not yet taken place.
- d. It is proposed to continue with a two-stage process and that the stage two panel will be independent of the first, but the membership of the stage two panel will now include council officers in the future. This is in line with the DfE national guidance and will strengthen the experience and knowledge of the panel. The DfE's recommended appeals process is set out here: [Department for Education \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/department-for-education-publishing-service) This will also allow appeals to be heard more rapidly and regularly than is currently the case. Ensuring a wider pool of panel members will mean that appeals can be quorate and proceed in cases of ill health or lack of availability of councillors. However, it is still the intention to ensure that councillors remain a key component of appeal hearings and this change is not proposing to withdraw councillors from the appeals process. Taking account of the public consultation, in which the majority of respondents were either neutral or in favour of the proposal, it is recommended that this proposal is agreed.

Denise Turner-Stewart
Cabinet Member for Education and Learning
26 April 2022

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