

Richmond upon Thames Home to School (5 to 16) Travel Assistance Policy

Travel assistance policy for mainstream and SEND children and young people of compulsory school age (5 to 16 years)

“Empowering children and young people
to live happy and fulfilling lives”

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Introduction

This document sets out the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames Council's Home to School, College Travel Assistance Policy and describes how the Council fulfils its duties and exercises its discretionary powers under the Education Act 1996. Home to School travel assistance is delivered on behalf of the Council by Achieving for Children (AfC).

This policy:

- explains the criteria for eligibility for travel assistance for pupils to their school for children and young people of compulsory school age (5 to 16 years old)
- how parents and carer can apply for travel assistance and how decisions are made
- sets out how parents and carers may appeal against decisions that they believe do not comply with this policy

Policy statement

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames (the Council) and Achieving for Children (AfC) are committed to ensuring that all pupils have a great start to life, are safe and healthy and have access to high quality education so that they are able to achieve their full potential. The Children and Families Act 2014 commits partners to work together to develop services which strengthen the abilities, resilience and increase the independence of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and their families.

The Council is also committed to meeting the educational needs of as many children and young people as possible within local schools. In many cases, this will mean a child or young person can travel to school with their parent or carer. This policy sets out how we will help the small number of pupils who find it difficult to travel to school without some support.

The Council will continue to deliver its statutory responsibilities to meet the travel needs of children and young people, enabling them to access their place of education. This support will be targeted at those children and young people who have significant additional needs or are deemed extremely vulnerable.

We will continue to provide advice and guidance to support parents and carers) to fulfil their responsibility to ensure their school-aged child and young people attend school regularly and to make any necessary arrangements to ensure that they attend school. Those children and young people not in receipt of travel assistance from AfC can use a wide range of forms of travel in Richmond, accompanied as necessary. This includes bus, train, concessionary fares, walking and cycling. We also want to support schools to promote safe routes to school and safe travel skills through their regular curriculum.

This policy applies only to home to school travel arrangements only. Under normal circumstance travel will not be provided for the following purpose:

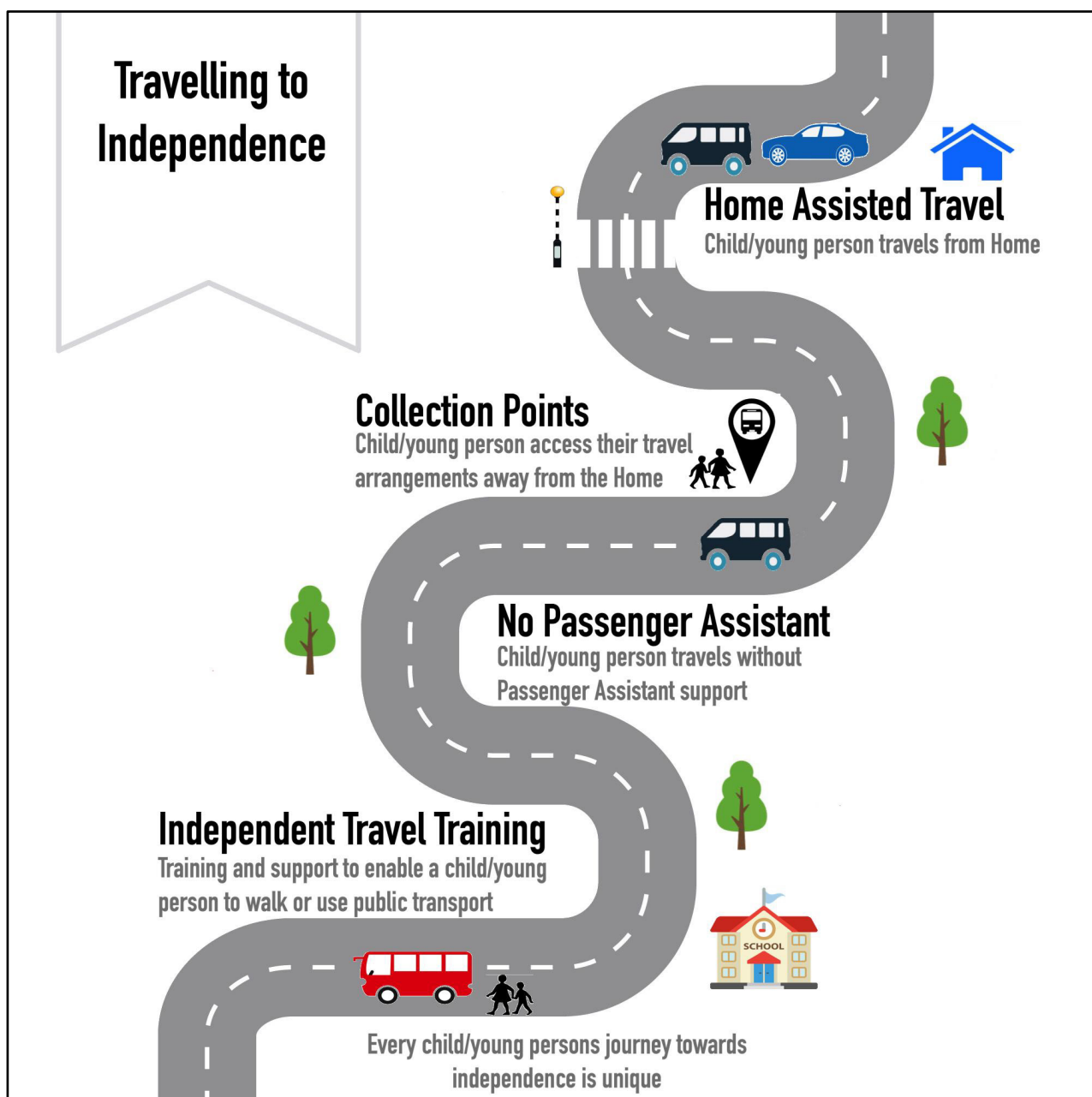
- exams
- extended hours school clubs
- medical appointments
- sports facilities or churches
- school trips
- work experience or work placements
- apprenticeships, traineeships or internships
- respite provision
- visits to other schools or locations
- transport to support parental attendance at meetings
- collection from school due to illness

AfC, on behalf of the Council, has a duty under s.508A of the Education Act 1996 to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport. This requires the Council to have a strategy to develop sustainable travel and transport infrastructure and to promote these modes of travel.

This policy has been developed in consultation with parents and carers, taking into account the AfC Local Offer, and is based on the statutory requirements placed on local authorities in the Education Act 1996, and the travel to school for children of compulsory school age guidance issued by the Department for Education June 2023.

Aims and objectives

Where appropriate the policy will enable the service to promote the development of travel independence, supporting children and young people to develop and access travel arrangements where they are less dependent on others and increasing opportunities as they progress into adulthood.



This aligns with the SEND Futures Plan, which aims to ensure that...

“Every child and young person with SEND belongs to a local, inclusive community that provides the education, health and social care support they need to develop their talents and skills, and that empowers them to live a happy and fulfilling life.”

Through delivery the service will contribute to the overarching vision for children and young people of Richmond. This vision underpins this policy in relation to the assessment of travel needs and necessary travel assistance that is subsequently provided.

- **Co-production:** Ensures children and young people and families are engaged about their support and what they want to achieve.
- **Personalisation:** Provides education, health and care provision locally through high quality services that are focussed on achieving the best possible outcomes for children and young people with SEND, promoting their independence and supporting them to live their lives with confidence and resilience.
- **Integration:** Makes sure the whole system, with education, health services and social care at the core, works together and with families to understand and respond to children and young people’s needs in a coherent way, with each partner contributing to robust assessments, plans and funding arrangements, and monitoring the impact of their services and support.
- **Quality:** Ensures provision is high quality and delivered by well trained and supported professionals who work effectively together and use evidence to inform their work, promote resilience and achieve positive outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- **Inclusion:** Support the community to meet the needs of all children and young people by embracing diversity and inclusion, so that all children and young people with SEND have the same opportunity as their peers to play, learn and grow up all together.

The policy will also contribute towards the delivery of the Council’s Climate Action Plan, aiming to make the Council's operations carbon neutral by 2030.

Eligibility

All pupils

This policy applies to those who are live in the Richmond borough or where children and young people are in the care of Richmond upon Thames Council, including those who would normally live in Richmond (and attend a nearest suitable school) but have either been housed by the Council (on a temporary basis) outside of Richmond or are under the care of Richmond upon Thames Council.

If you live outside of Richmond, but your child or young person attends a Richmond school, you must apply to the local authority where you live to request assistance with travel.

Parents and carers have a legal duty to ensure that their statutory school-aged child or young person (age 5 to 16 years) attends school regularly and to make any necessary arrangements to ensure that they attend school.

A child or young person is of compulsory school age from the start of term after their fifth birthday until the last day of the academic year in which they are in Year 11. This applies to children and young people with and without an education health and care plan (EHCP).

There are four core categories of eligible children or young people:

- statutory walking distances
- unsafe walking routes
- extended rights
- special educational needs, disability and mobility problems

Children below the age of 5 years will not normally be eligible for free travel assistance between their home and school.

For pupils in year 12 and above (post-16 year olds), there is a [separate policy](#).

Statutory walking distances

The Council will provide free home to school travel assistance for children and young people of compulsory school age to the nearest suitable school from their home address who meet the 'qualifying distance' criteria which is:

- two miles or more for children below the age of 8, measured by the shortest walking distance between the home and the school
- three miles or more for children and young people aged 8 and above, measured by the shortest walking distance between the home and the school

Children and young people who live between two and three miles from their school will cease to be entitled to free travel from the start of the term following their eighth birthday. Any family who believes circumstances exist that require the Council to provide travel assistance must reapply well in advance of the child's 8th birthday.

If the child, young person or family qualifies for free school meals or they are in receipt of maximum Working Tax Credit, please refer to the extended rights section below.

Further detail on eligibility is dealt with in the application section below.

Home address

A child's or young person's home is the place where they are habitually and normally resident. When assessing eligibility and making travel arrangements, this will be the primary home address recorded with the school (when securing the school place) and in accordance with any benefits received on behalf of the child or young person.

Where a child or young person lives between addresses an equal amount of time, the residence located closest to the school that the child attends will be considered the primary residence.

If a child or young person is eligible for support, then the Council is not expected to provide travel to and from two separate addresses.

Unsafe walking routes

The Council will provide travel assistance if it determines that a child or young person cannot reasonably be expected to walk to the nearest suitable school because the nature of the route is deemed unsafe to walk, even if accompanied. The Council regularly assesses walking routes in conjunction with local context and knowledge, and using the Road Safety GB 'Guidelines on assessment of walked routes to school'. Routes that have been determined to be unsafe will be kept under review and support will be withdrawn when the walking route is no longer deemed to be unsafe. The Council will expect a parent or carer to accompany the child along a route which would otherwise be classified as being unsafe and will not provide travel assistance if this accompaniment will make the route safe.

Extended rights eligibility

Children and young people from low-income families are entitled to additional support in certain circumstances. This applies to pupils who are entitled to free school meals, or those families who are in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit (WTC).

Children and young people above the age of 8, but under the age of 11, from low-income families will be entitled to travel assistance to their nearest suitable school if the shortest walking distance between their home and the school is more than two miles.

Children and young people aged 11 and over (years 7 to 11) from low-income families will be entitled to travel assistance if they attend one of their three nearest suitable schools where they live between two miles (measured by the shortest walking distance) and 6 miles (measured by the shortest road route) from their school.

Children and young people aged 11 and over (years 7 to 11) from low-income families who are attending their nearest designated faith school preferred on the grounds of religion or belief will also be entitled to travel assistance if their school is more than two miles (measured by the shortest walking distance) but not more than 15 miles (measured by the shortest road route) from their home.

Special educational needs, disability and mobility problems

Where a child or young person with special educational needs, a disability and mobility problems does not meet the other three eligibility criteria, but has identified specific needs or circumstances that may mean it is unreasonable to expect the child or young person to walk to school (accompanied by an adult as necessary). In this instance, an assessment based on their individual needs and circumstances will be undertaken to identify if support with travel is necessary to access their education setting. On the basis the education setting is the nearest suitable school, and not to a setting that is further away based on parental preference.

Application process

How to apply

All requests for travel assistance for children with SEND must be made by parent and carers through submission of an [online application form](#) via the [Main SEND Transport page on the Local Offer website](#). All other requests must be made through the submission of an application via the Pupil and Student Finance, and School Travel Grant webpages on the Council website.

Alternative formats of this policy and application form are also available in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and the Council's equality and diversity policy.

Where a child or young person has an education, health and care plan (EHCP), the SEND Service is required to provide a separate referral to the SEND Transport Service to confirm the basis of the child's or young person's school placement and that it is the nearest suitable school identified by the Council to meet the child's or young person's educational needs.

The Council will look to complete the assessment of applications in a timely fashion, aiming to put in place travel arrangements for those entitled at the earliest opportunity. However, it may take up to 12 working days to process and families should be prepared to make their own interim travel arrangements if necessary.

While an application is being processed, parents and carers will be responsible for making their own travel arrangements. The Council will not compensate parents or carers during the assessment process for any costs incurred.

During periods of high demand, such as the build-up to the new academic year, timescales for processing applications may be extended. Families are advised to apply for support with travel before any published deadline and at the earliest possible opportunity to ensure arrangements are in place when they are required.

The SEND Transport Service will try to ensure travel arrangements are in place as quickly as possible. However there may be instances where the setting up of travel arrangements may take longer to establish due to the specific complex needs and circumstances of a child or young person and the specialist support they require whilst travelling. Circumstances that may cause a delay include: where a child or young person has a wheelchair that hasn't been crash-tested or specific medical needs that require very specialist or skilled support.

To try and reduce any disruption to the service and inform effective planning, the Council is implementing cut off dates for applications to guarantee travel for September.

Applications received after the cut off dates will still be processed, and travel assistance put in place as quickly as possible, however there is no guarantee it will be ready for the start of the academic year. These arrangements may be interim or temporary solutions and will be subject to review or change.

Cut-off or deadline dates will be published well in advance via the Council's Local Offer, which is available on the Council's website. SEND will communicate with parents and carers directly via mail or email informing them of the exact dates.

Applicants will be informed of the outcome of their application with explanation of the reasoning of the decision in accordance with this policy.

Assessing travel support entitlement for compulsory school age children and young people

In all cases, a child or young person must be attending the nearest suitable school (or one of the three nearest suitable schools under the extended rights eligibility). The nearest suitable school, for the purpose of school travel, will be measured by shortest walking distance. This school is defined as one that has spaces available that provides education appropriate to the age, gender, ability and aptitude of the child or young person, and appropriate to the child's or young person's EHCP where one exists. It should be noted that a child's nearest school for school travel purposes may not be their nearest suitable school for admissions purposes.

Types of suitable schools considered under this policy are:

- community schools, foundation schools, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools
- academies or alternative provision academies
- alternative provision academies
- community or foundation special schools
- non-maintained special schools
- pupil referral units
- maintained nursery schools
- city technology colleges and city colleges for the technology of the arts
- independent schools where this is named on a child's or young person's EHCP or is the nearest of two schools named

For mainstream applications processed during the normal school admissions round, a school will be determined as having a vacancy if a place would have been offered according to the allocations made on the national offer day, assuming the parents or carers made, or could reasonably have made, an application. For applications made after the normal admissions round and those made during the school year, a school will be determined as having a vacancy if, at the point of processing the child's or young person's school application, a place could have been allocated to the child or young person.

When a child or young person cannot be offered a place at the nearest school to the home address, the Council will, subject to the criteria set within this policy and the qualifying distance being met, provide support with travel to the next nearest school with space to admit. For travel arrangements to be provided in this instance the parents or carers must provide evidence that they have applied for and been refused a place at the school which is the nearest school for their home address and any other schools closer than the school offering admission.

Where a school operates on multiple or split sites, the assessment of nearest qualifying school will take account of the sites used to prioritise admissions (as defined in each school's admission arrangements), regardless of which year groups are educated at which site or which site a child or young person might attend.

If a school makes arrangements independently to enable a child or young person to be on dual roll or has commissioned an alternative location or setting (without consultation with the Council) to provide elements of the individual's education, the school will be responsible for ensuring suitable travel arrangements are in place.

Named school in an education, health and care plan

This section refers to how the SEND Service (distinct from the SEND Transport Service) will name a school in a child's or young person's education, health and care plan (EHCP) and what they will take into consideration.

In most cases the nearest suitable school will be identified and named by the Council in a child's or young person's EHCP.

But where a child or young person with special educational needs, disability and/or mobility problems, has an active EHCP, the parents or carers have a right to ask for a particular school to be named in their child's or young person's plan.

During the process of naming the school and finalising the plan, the Council will consider whether the child may be eligible for school travel and how travel arrangements may be provided. Formal Travel Assistance Eligibility will be undertaken by the SEN Transport Service after the EHCP is finalised and an application for travel has been submitted.

The Council will also consider the impact of the journey and the child's or young person's ability to learn upon arrival. If the journey may cause a negative impact on the child or young person, the Council will need to consider mitigations to minimise impact and whether the school remains appropriate for the child or young person due to the potential impact.

The Council will also take into account the cost of travel when determining whether naming a particular school would be compatible with the most efficient use of council resources in accordance with the need identified in the government's SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time (March 2023) to ensure long-term financial sustainability of the Council's finances.

If it is identified that providing travel to the parents' or carers' preferred school would be either unsuitable for the child (age, ability, aptitude or special educational needs) or incompatible with efficient education of others or the efficient use of resources, the Council may name the nearer school (that can also meet the child's or young person's educational needs).

If, as above, the naming of the parents' or carers' preferred school is identified as an inefficient use of resources, the Council may still name the parents' or carers' preferred school, but on condition that parents are responsible for arranging and funding all transport to and from the school placement for the child's career at that placement.

How walking distance is measured

Walking distances are calculated using the shortest available walking route from the home address to school. If families believe that the walking route measured is not available to walk they should request a review of the route.

The legal definition of an 'available walking route' is a route along which a child or young person, accompanied as necessary, can walk with reasonable safety to school.

Where a school operates on a temporary site and that school's permanent or current site is deemed to be a child's or young person's nearest qualifying school, the home to school walking distance will be measured to the school's temporary site to determine if the child or young person lives over the statutory walking distance and is eligible for travel support.

Eligibility will be reassessed at the point a child or young person ceases to be educated at the temporary site.

Distances will be measured from the address point of the pupil's house to the nearest school gate available for pupils to use.

Accompanied as necessary

Parents or carer(s) are expected to accompany their child or young person to school. Assessments of routes will be undertaken on this basis. Parents or carer(s) will be expected to make suitable arrangements to accompany their child or young person or make alternative travel arrangements if a route is deemed available.

A child or young person will not automatically be eligible for home to school travel solely because of parental/carer work, caring commitments, or family circumstances that mean they are unable to accompany their child or young person themselves.

Where there are circumstances that may impact a parent's or carer(s) ability to accompany their child/young person to school then the Council will consider these on a case-by-case basis (see extenuating circumstances). This may include the parent or carer having a disability or mobility problem that would make it difficult to accompany their child or young person.

Route safety assessment

Where a parent or carer believes the proposed walking route to school is unsafe or unavailable, they should notify the SEND Transport (SENDT Service) when submitting their application for travel assistance. Parents or carers should outline the aspect of the route they believe to be unsafe.

The identified aspects of the route will then be reviewed by the team. Review of the routes will use the 'Road safety GB guidelines on assessment of walked routes to school' in conjunction with local context and knowledge to assess the suitability of the route.

If parents or carers identify that the expected walking route is unsafe or unavailable after their application for travel assistance has been completed, then they should identify this through the appeals process for consideration and review.

Assessment of extended rights

Parents or carers who believe they meet the extended rights criteria and are therefore eligible for support with travel to school must include evidence of the child's or young person's entitlement to free school meals or the family's receipt of maximum level of Working Tax Credit (WTC) with their application form. Parents or carer must evidence this by including a copy of all six pages of their most recent TC602, Tax Credit Award Notice, with their application.

A child or young person who has been assessed as eligible for travel support by meeting the extended rights criteria will have their entitlement reviewed each academic year to ensure that the child or young person continues to meet the necessary criteria.

If a child or young person ceases to be eligible for free school meals or a family ceases to be entitled to the maximum level of Working Tax Credit during the academic year for which travel support has been awarded, travel support will continue until the end of that academic year.

If the child or young person is applying for travel support to a school of faith under extended rights eligibility, then the parents or carers must also provide supporting evidence regarding their genuine adherence to their religion or belief and this will normally be confirmed by asking their religious leader to sign the denomination form.

Special educational needs, disability and mobility problems

Where a child or young person with special education needs, a disability and/or mobility problems does not meet the other three eligibility criteria, but has identified specific needs/circumstances that may mean it is unreasonable to expect the child or young person to walk to school (accompanied by an adult as necessary), then an assessment based on their individual needs and circumstances will be undertaken.

In determining whether a child or young person cannot reasonably be expected to walk between home and school, the Council will consider whether the child or young person could reasonably be expected to walk if accompanied and, if so, whether child's or young person parents or carers can reasonably be expected to accompany their child or young person. The expectation is that a child or young person will be accompanied by a parent or carer.

When assessing entitlement for travel support for a child or young person with SEND or mobility problems, the Council will consider the individual needs of each child or young person. This may include taking professional advice from educational psychologists, medical professionals and teachers and consulting with parent or carer(s) before arriving at a final decision. The Council may request supporting evidence be provided by the parent/carer in relation to medical, health or safety needs.

Consideration will also be given to the child's or young person physical and medical requirements including any disabilities they may have. The findings and decision will be shared with the parents or carers.

The following factors will be taken into consideration when assessing travel support entitlement:

- the age of the child or young person
- the distance of the child or young person from school to home
- whether the child or young person is physically able to walk the journey to school
- whether the walking route is appropriate for the pupil and their specific needs and allows them to arrive in a fit state to be educated
- whether a child's or young person emotional and behavioural difficulties will create a clear health and safety hazard to themselves or others on the journey to school
- the SEND of the child or young person
- the efficient use of resources
- any other individual circumstance

Whilst distance will be considered during the assessment process it will not be exclusively used to make decisions around eligibility to travel assistance.

This is not an exhaustive list. It is not presented in any particular order and is for guidance only. Meeting one or more of the criteria does not automatically entitle a child or young person with SEND to travel support.

The fact that a child or young person has an EHCP or attends a special school does not automatically entitle them to travel support.

Eligibility for travel support is related to the child's or young person needs. Assessment may take into account the need for travel support due to some family circumstances. Factors identified in an application will be considered when determining eligibility for home to school travel support and deciding on the type of travel support to be provided.

Other family circumstances, such as parents or carers attending work or looking after other children or young people will not normally be considered when determining eligibility.

Parents and carers are expected to identify key needs, circumstances, and provide evidence where necessary that support their application for travel support.

Shared custody arrangements

A child's or young person's home is the place where they normally live with a parent or an adult who has parental responsibility for them. This will usually be the address recorded with the child's or young person's school and where the child is registered for benefits, such as Disability Living Allowance. This primary address will usually be used to assess the child's or young person's eligibility for home to school transport because it is the address where they normally and habitually live on school days during school term times.

There may be occasions when a child or young person is cared for by parents (or adults with parental responsibility) who live at different addresses, but have established shared custody or shared care arrangements for them. In these circumstances, home to school transport may be provided from two separate addresses where the child is assessed to normally and habitually live between these two homes in an established, regular and consistent pattern of shared parental care. This excludes short-term, ad hoc and childcare arrangements.

The primary address for the child must be within Richmond upon Thames and the secondary address, if not within the same local authority area, must be within 45 minutes travel time to and from the child's school for primary-aged pupils and 75 minutes travel time to and from the young person's school for secondary-aged pupils. These timings reflect the statutory guidance on home to school travel and will be determined by officers in the home to school travel assistance service.

Temporary (housing) local authority accommodation

Where a family has been moved to temporary local authority accommodation, assistance will only be considered where the Council's Housing service has provided the family with an official 'return by' date in writing (a date by which the family must be rehomed within their original borough).

Where a 'return by' date has not been provided, we have to conclude that living arrangements are not temporary (and rather that they are ongoing), and therefore families will need to;

- make their own travel arrangements to support their child or young person attending their named education setting
- arrange for either their child's or young person's EHCP to be transferred to the new Council they live in and apply for a new transport arrangement from their new borough
- facilitate a change in education placement to enable appropriate attendance

The Council will consider extenuating circumstances if these apply, on a case-by-case basis.

Support for children who are in the care of the Council

Children and young people in care of the Council (children looked after) and children and young people who were looked after, but ceased to be so because they were adopted (or became subject to child arrangements order or special guardianship order), will be assessed against the eligibility criteria details in this policy.

- If the child or young person is not entitled to free travel support, it is the carer's responsibility to ensure that they are able to get to and from school.
- Where exceptional circumstances exist, the professionals working with the individual child or young person would review the child's or young person needs and, if appropriate, make a case for travel support, which would be considered by social service in discussion with the SEND transport service.

Independent fostering agency placements

In line with page 84 of the current national framework contract for independent fostering agency (IFA) placements:

'The provider or their carers are expected to fund the day-to-day travel needs for children and young people placed within a 20 mile radius. This agreement shall be specified in the individual placement agreement (IPA).'

It is important to note that radius will differ from the journey measured postcode to post code.

Where the journey exceeds the 20 mile radius the SEND Transport service will reimburse the additional mileage. This will be discussed and agreed on a case-by-case basis.

The SEND service is not responsible for the administration relating to other local authorities and IFA travel arrangements.

Extenuating circumstances

Recognising that the Council's discretionary powers should not be restricted by its general policy, the Council will consider and may agree requests for home to school travel support where there are considered to be extenuating circumstances that prevent a child or young person accessing their school unless travel support is put in place.

If the parents or carers believe extenuating circumstances exist and support with travel is necessary, then information and evidence must be provided when applying for support for this to be considered, or when appealing a transport decision.

The overriding expectation is that parents or carer should undertake their legal responsibility to get their children or young people to and from school and as such the Council will need to be satisfied that the parents or carers have demonstrated why they, for social, medical, financial or personal reasons cannot undertake this duty.

A decision will be based on evidence received to support the case as to whether travel support is necessary in order for the child or young person to receive an education. Consideration will be given as to whether the circumstances could have reasonably been foreseen by the parent or carer. For example, moving to temporary accommodation owing to flood damage cannot be foreseen, or a child with an EHCP where their placement has broken down and a temporary alternative provision is being accessed whilst a permanent place is being finalised.

Whereas, choosing a school other than a child's or young person's nearest school and realising following this decision that support with travel is not available could be foreseen. Travel support will not be provided as an extension or replacement for private childcare arrangements.

Where it is decided that a child or young person does not qualify for support with travel based on the presented needs or circumstances then it remains the parents' or carers' responsibility to ensure school attendance or consider transferring the child or young person to a more local school.

In all cases the decision whether to exercise discretion will be taken on a case-by-case basis.

Special consideration and appeals

Parents or carers of children or young people who live in Richmond may wish to appeal a decision about one of the following,

- their child's or young person's eligibility
- the travel arrangements offered
- the distance measurement in relation to statutory walking distances
- the safety of the route

On receipt of the assessment outcome letter parents and carers are invited to email the SEND Transport service to submit their stage one appeal (request review of decision by a senior officer).

During the appeal process about an application for travel support, travel arrangements will not be provided to the child or young person. Where the appeal concerns a change to existing travel arrangements, then the previously agreed travel arrangements will continue until the review is complete.

The Council operates a two-stage appeal process as detailed below (and the following flow diagram).

Stage one: Review by a senior officer

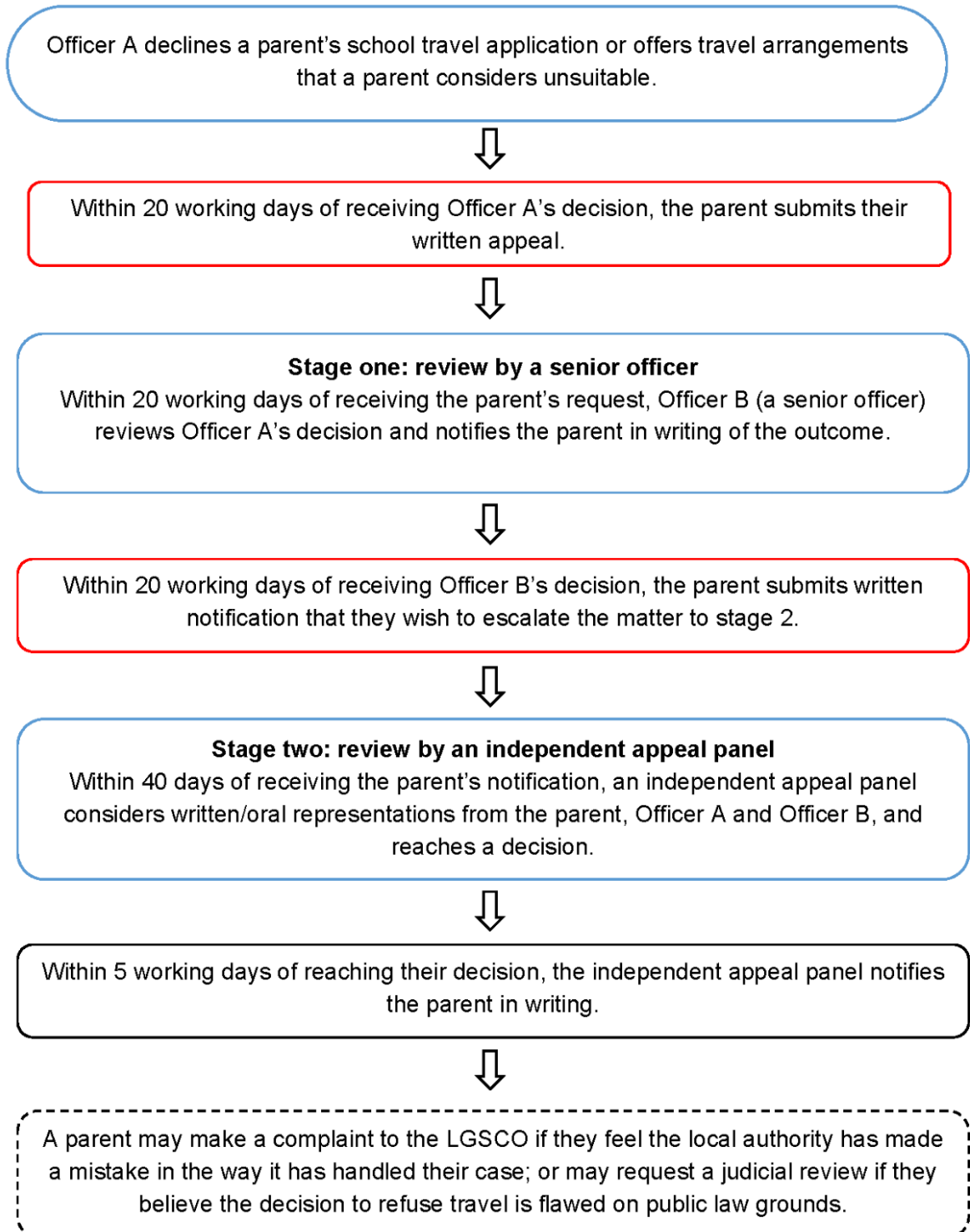
- Parents or carer have 20 working days from receipt of the local authority's home to school travel support decision to make a written request asking for a review of the decision.
- The written request should detail why the parents or carers believe the decision should be reviewed and give details of any personal and family circumstances the parents or carers believe should be considered when the decision is reviewed.
- Within 20 working days of receipt of the parents or carers written request, a senior officer should complete a review of the original decision and send the parent or carer a detailed written notification of the outcome of their review, the senior officer may request supporting evidence to be able to review your case fully.

Stage two: Review by an independent appeal panel

- Parents or carers have 20 working days from receipt of the local authority's stage one written decision notification to make a written request to escalate the matter to stage two.
- Within 40 working days of receipt of the parents' or carers' request an independent appeal panel considers written and verbal representations from parents or carers and officers involved in the case and gives a detailed written notification of the outcome (within five working days).

The stage 2 appeal panel will include Council members. Members are currently appointed each year by annual Council to the home to school travel appeals panel.

Flowchart of the Appeals Process



Change of child's or young person's circumstances

It is the responsibility of parents or carers to inform the SEND Transport Service immediately of any changes in circumstances which the original application was based on. Failure to do so may result in existing travel support being suspended or terminated.

The Council will also perform routine checks throughout the year and if it is identified circumstances have changed without parents or carers informing the Council then any existing support may be stopped immediately if the change in circumstances mean that the child or young person no longer meets the agreed eligibility criteria.

Change in circumstances in regard to extended rights and family financial situation will not normally result in an instant removal of support, at the point of change in relation to the family's financial circumstance and no longer meeting the eligibility threshold then assistance will only remain until the end of the current school year.

If a family moves home, a new assessment will be undertaken to establish if eligibility criteria continues to be met. The outcome of the assessment will come into immediate effect.

Re-applying for assistance

In addition to parents or carers having to reapply for travel assistance in the event of moving home, school or school site, a re-application will also be necessary when a child or young person transitions between key education stages, such as moving from primary education to secondary. This requirement to reapply at the end of year 6 will exist even if the child or young person continues to be educated at the same school or site. Re-applications will be required as follows:

Education stage
End of year 3
End of year 6
End of year 11*

*see the current Richmond upon Thames post-16 travel assistance policy statement for more details.

Parents or carers may also be requested to reapply at different times throughout the duration of their child's education. Parents or carers will be notified in advance of the requirement to reapply, with the purpose of the reassessment being to ensure any travel arrangements continue to support the child's or young person's development towards adulthood and independent travel (where appropriate).

Review of child's or young person's needs and ongoing support suitability

The Council will undertake regular reviews of support and individual eligibility to ensure any provision continues to be appropriate for the individual passengers, is financially sustainable for the Council, eligibility thresholds continue to be met, and any provision continues to support the development of independence. There is no guarantee that travel support will continue to be provided in the future as it will continue to reflect the needs and circumstances of the individual and whether assistance continues to be necessary.

Guidance provided by AfC to schools states that they should review each pupil's transport needs at least once a year and advises that this could be completed as part of the annual review process for pupils with EHCPs.

Where a change to existing travel arrangements is identified by the school and the SEND Transport Service, and as necessary the Council will inform parents or carers of any proposed changes and timescales as well as the reasons for the decision. The Council will aim to provide a suitable time frame to support individual transition to the new travel arrangements for each child and young person. Each transition period will reflect the individual needs, circumstances of the child or young person, and the significance of the change.

Travel support may also be reviewed and changed to reflect any changes in government guidance and or legislation.

Provision of false or inaccurate information

When submitting an application, the parents or carers will sign a declaration confirming the accuracy of the information. The parents or carers) are also under a duty to notify the Council of any changes in circumstances. If it later transpired that the information is incorrect or updated information has not been provided, then notice will be given and the travel support will cease immediately. The Council will also take steps to recover the cost of travel support provided as a result of this inaccurate information. If the information has been provided fraudulently, the Council's corporate anti-fraud team will investigate to determine whether a criminal prosecution should be commenced.

Discretionary travel support

Children below the age of 5 (statutory school age)

Children who become statutory school age during the academic year will be identified as 'rising 5'. Rising 5s will be classed, for the purpose of travel support as statutory school age at the start of the academic year in which they turn 5 years of age.

A child who does not turn 5 years of age during the academic year will not be classed as statutory school age and therefore will be deemed not entitled, in accordance with the Council's statutory duty.

Where a child is below statutory school age and parents or carers believe that there are extenuating circumstances that warrant a child being provided with support with travel before they turn 5 years of age, they should complete the appropriate application form and provide supporting evidence of the extenuating circumstances for their request to be considered on a case by case basis.

A child becomes of compulsory school age at the start of term after their 5th birthday.

Pre-school children with SEND

Local authorities do not have a duty to provide or arrange free travel for children who have not yet reached compulsory school age and who are attending a pre-school setting. However, the Council will consider travel support applications for children below statutory school age, with an active EHCP. In extenuating circumstances, and where the Council is satisfied that without such assistance, the child would be prevented from attending an appropriate nursery or early years education placement that is essential for their SEND development.

The general expectation is that a pre-school age child will be transported by a parent or carer, unless this is an unreasonable expectation. Where this is the case and the parents or carers believe that there are extenuating circumstances that warrant a child being provided with support for their travel to school (before they become compulsory school age), they should complete the appropriate application form and provide supporting evidence of the case.

When assessing eligibility of pre-school children, particular attention will be paid to the following:

- age of the child
- distance between home and the education placement
- the SEND of the child
- the reason for the pre-school education placement
- whether the child has other sibling of primary age where it is not reasonable to expect them to travel alone to attend school, and a significant distance away from the provision for the child requesting travel support

If the Council agrees to provide travel support, it may request a contribution towards costs with travel arrangements subsidised by the Council.

Pre-School children with SEND - spare seats

Where the Council has determined that a child is not eligible for assistance with travel, parents and carers may be offered the option of using a space or seat on existing transport. If this is offered then parents and carers will be required to contribute towards the cost of the assistance.

Contributions will be dependent on the schools' distance from the home address. For families on low income, where parents are in receipt of the maximum Working Tax Credit, a reduced contribution will apply.

Contributions will be paid in advance on a termly basis. In many cases children will turn 5 years old during the academic year. Compulsory school age begins the term after a child turns 5 and, in most cases, this will mean they are then eligible for SEND travel assistance.

Distance - Single journey	Contribution - Academic year
Less than 8 miles	£700
8 to 16 miles	£933
17 to 25 miles	£1,166
More than 25 miles	£1,400

Contribution Refunds

If a child's or young person's contribution has been agreed and, for whatever reason, they do not complete the nursery or reception year, any refund for transport will be applied at the end of the academic term in which they leave that provision. The same will apply if they are subject to an extended period of non-attendance due to ill health. However, day-to-day non-attendance would not be subject to a refund. This will only be agreed in the event that the child leaves the provision or for an extended period of non-attendance due to ill health.

Travel support options

Forms of travel support

The Council will assess the travel needs of all eligible children and young people and decide the most appropriate form of support that will be provided. In accordance with the Council's strategic aims and objectives outlined earlier in this policy.

In accordance with national guidance, a journey to school for eligible children and young people should be suitable, safe and reasonably stress free to enable a child or young person to arrive at school ready for a day of study. To this end travel arrangements will aim to ensure journey times are no longer than 75 minutes per journey.

It is recognised that adhering to this journey time may not always be possible due to the distances travelled and complexities of specific journeys. It may be deemed acceptable for a trip to exceed this journey time if it is considered that the additional time does not place undue stress, strain or difficulty on the child or young person, which would prevent them from benefiting from the education.

Where children and young people with special educational needs, disability or mobility problems are present, then journey times may sometimes need to be longer and more complex. The Council will ensure that it does not extend routes for such children and young people unnecessarily with appropriate measures in place to address any implications for doing so.

Subject to meeting the eligibility criteria of this policy, the following support will be considered (in the following order):

- use of free travel provided by TfL using an Oyster photo-card
- TfL travel-card for the pupil (including the parent or carer where necessary)
- provision of a home to school travel grant
- payment of car mileage or travel reimbursement for the pupil's parents or carer
- provision of a travel buddy
- independent travel training
- training to cycle independently (reimbursement of bicycle and safety equipment)
- provision of a cycling allowance
- provision of a personal travel budget (PTB)
- provision of shared transport (using collection point if appropriate)
- Individual transport

The provision of individual transport, such as a taxi, with or without a passenger assistant should be exceptional and only where it has been demonstrated that other modes of support are not suitable. Pupils must expect to travel to and from school with other pupils unless there are existing circumstances where it would not be reasonable or safe to expect a pupil to do so.

Where a child is initially provided with individual transport, they may be required to share with others in the future.

Other travel options may be considered and offered where individual needs enable travel, and the development of travel skills and independence.

Provision of passenger assistants

A passenger assistant (PA) will only be provided following the outcome of an assessment of the child's or young person's special educational and medical needs. This determination will be made by the SEND Transport Service taking into account.

- Whether an individual child's or young person's needs create a clear danger or health and safety risk to themselves or other passengers on the vehicle.
- Whether a group of children or young people travelling on a shared journey represent a clear danger or health and safety risk.

The need for a passenger assistants will be made based on evidence received from all relevant parties and will be reviewed regularly, where appropriate and whenever a contract is re-tendered. Passenger assistants will not be allocated to a route based solely on a child's or young person's age.

Where a child or young person travels on their own, the Council seeks to encourage parents and carers to act as their passenger assistant. Payment is not made in such cases.

Provision of a passenger assistant at any one time does not guarantee that this will be an ongoing arrangement and the requirement will be re-assessed regularly.

A passenger assistant is trained in first aid which is sufficient for the majority of the children or young people who are provided with travel assistance.

A passenger assistant is not permitted to administer any medication, with the express exception of pre-loaded EpiPens® or pre-loaded buccal midazolam devices. They are also trained in how to use vagus nerve stimulation (VNS) magnets, which are used by some for control of epileptic seizures.

If a child or young person requires a higher level of oversight or monitoring, an early accurate identification of symptoms, or personal care management, then a medically trained professional, such as a nurse or health care worker may be required to accompany the child or young person on the vehicle. Conditions may include: severe epilepsy, glucose gel for diabetes, administration of oxygen, adrenal crisis, gastrostomy or tracheotomy tubing, shunts, suctioning, or stoma bags.

In this case, the needs of the child or young person will be reviewed to identify the associated risk and possible options for travel, this will be conducted by health officers, SEND Transport Service, the SEND Service and Social Care professionals. See Medical needs and assistance section for more details.

Medical needs and assistance

Some children or young people have conditions that require specialist support whilst travelling that is unique to the individual. This is necessary to maintain their safety and wellbeing throughout the journey.

To identify the appropriate level of support and identify the level of expertise required of the staff accompanying the child or young person, then a further risk assessment may be necessary.

This risk assessment will consider the medical needs of the individual, the nature of the route, and consider the resources and expertise that is available in order to identify the necessary arrangements required for travel.

The production of a risk assessment will be led by health officers with contribution from the SEND Transport Service, the SEND Service, and Social Care professionals to ensure all needs are considered correctly, and any existing support plans are understood and considered for extension. Officers from all services will then work together to identify an appropriate support plan and to secure any necessary additional funding or resources. This will be overseen by a designated clinical officer.

Due to the likely nature of needs and associated risks during travel, it may not be possible to provide any travel assistance until the risk assessment and any follow up actions are completed.

It is generally expected that passenger assistants working on home to school routes will not administer any medication or perform any medical procedures on the journey to and from school. In the event of an emergency it is expected that emergency services are called to provide the necessary assistance.

Pick-up and drop-off arrangements

Pick-up and drop-off of children and young people will be at authorised locations only. The location of a child's or young person's pick-up or drop-off location will reflect the individual needs and circumstances assessed by the SEND Transport Service, are will be either:

- home address
- school location
- allocated bus stop or collection point

Parents and carers should provide one alternative address (in borough) which may be used in an emergency if the parent or carer is unable to meet the child during drop-off. Any changes to this address, whether permanent or temporary, must be communicated in advance via the parent's preferred email address to the SEND Transport Service.

If no alternative address is provided by the parent or carer, in the event of the parent or carer being unavailable at the drop-off, then the child or young person will be taken to the nearest place of safety. Children's social care services may be notified and transport assistance withdrawn if this happens frequently. Parents, carers or schools should contact the controller or SEND Transport Service if there are any emergency changes.

The timings for pick-up and drop-off will be specified by the appropriate transport provider, who will ensure parents and carers are aware of the correct times. Times are subject to change, such as in the event that a child or young person joins or leaves a route.

Pick-up and drop-off times reflect the operation of the shortest and most efficient route, to ensure children and young people spend the shortest time possible travelling. Therefore, times cannot be adjusted to reflect individual family circumstances or commitments.

To minimise journey times for every pupil on the transport, pupils are required to be available within three minutes of the specified time of pick-up, and parents or carers are required to be available within three minutes of the specified time of drop-off.

Parents should also be advised that our service must not be seen as an extension of, or a replacement for, private childcare arrangements. This means if the journey can reasonably be completed in a particular amount of time, the transport crew will not collect or drop off children earlier or later than needed to facilitate parents getting other children to or from school, or to facilitate parents' working arrangements.

Parents and carers must ensure their child or young person is ready to board at the agreed collection time, and also collected when being dropped-off from school. Travel support will be reviewed and may be removed if there are ongoing delays or parent or carers are not available during collection and drop-off.

Where pupils are picked up or dropped-off at home, the parent or carer is responsible for accompanying the pupil to and from their door to the vehicle.

In some cases, it may not be legal or safe for the transport to stop directly outside a pupil's home. In these cases, parents and carers are required to walk with their child to the safest nominated collection point, as specified by the transport provider.

Times of travel (school times)

In accordance with DfE guidance, schools are responsible for deciding when their school day will start and end. The Council will make necessary travel arrangements for eligible children and young people to enable them to attend at the beginning and end of the 'normal' school day.

Where particular classes, year groups or pupils have a start or finish time that is different from most pupils at the school, it will not normally be possible for the Council to make separate travel arrangements. In this event, schools may be required to make their own travel arrangements to accommodate these pupils.

Where a child or young person is attending on a part time or reduced timetables to support transition to a new setting, the school must contact the SEND Transport Service in advance and it will be considered on a case-by-case basis. This is normally only possible where a child or young person is not travelling on a shared route.

Non-attendance

Where a child or young person cannot attend school on any particular day (for example, due to illness), it is the parent's or carer's responsibility to contact the transport company immediately. For long-term absences, or where parents would like to place transport assistance on hold, parents or carers should contact the SEND Transport Service.

All transport which is not cancelled before the vehicle arrives at the home address must be paid for by the council whether or not the pupil boards the vehicle. Where parents or carers repeatedly fail to cancel transport provision for their child before it arrives at the home address, or where a pupil suddenly refuses to travel in transport which has arrived on any given day (without any prior notice having been given to the transport company), the pupil's transport provision will be reviewed.

Where, without notice to the SEND Transport Service, a child has not accessed their transport assistance for 10 consecutive planned school days, we will switch them to an 'on-demand' service, meaning that parents will need to call to book in the transport if their child intends to travel.

'On demand' transport assistance still meets our statutory duty, and the decision to switch to this type of provision is only taken where a child has not travelled, with AfC still funding their place on the journey.

If, after ten further consecutive planned school days 'on-demand' the child has still not travelled, their transport assistance will come to an end. In these cases, parents would need to restart the application process if they later wanted their child to receive transport assistance again.

Learning at alternative sites, locations or link placements

Where a child or young person is educated on multiple or split sites (operated by the school), the assessment of eligibility and any subsequent travel arrangements will be based on the address used to secure the school place (to prioritise admissions and as defined in each school's admission arrangements), regardless of which year groups are educated at which site or which site a child or young person might attend.

Schools organising education at alternative locations (including link placements) or away from the location used to secure a school place will be responsible for making any additional or alternative travel arrangements to accommodate the alternative location (for learning) for the child or young person. This also applies to Pupil Referral Units.

If the alternative provision is named in the pupil's education, health and care plan as the nearest suitable provision (including where a child or young person is 'dual registered') to meet needs (section i), travel support will be considered in the same way as any other child and in accordance with the Council's statutory obligations

Respite travel

Providing travel between respite and school is not a statutory duty of the Council, however it is recognised that it provides valuable and necessary support to parents, carers and children/young people.

The Council will consider the following when determining whether support will facilitate travel between respite placement and school, instead of the child's or young person's home address.

- Whether the respite location inside the child's or young person's home borough.
- Whether changes to existing travel arrangements (to or from respite) will incur any additional cost.
- Whether changes to existing travel arrangements will adversely affect the pick-up and drop off times, and journey times for other children or young people sharing the travel arrangements.

Where the answer to any of the listed considerations is no, or where provision of transport is no longer working, parents and carers will need to discuss alternative travel options with the child's or young person's social care team.

Passenger code of conduct

It is expected that all children and young people using the service display appropriate behaviour whilst using the services provided by the Council, as poor behaviour can affect the attention of the driver.

Children and young people with special educational needs, disability or mobility problems may demonstrate behaviours as part of their additional needs, for example it may be a consequence of frustration as a result of communication difficulties. These needs and circumstances will be taken into consideration in the event of an incident taking place and as part of any investigation or review.

In the first instance it is expected that the Council, school, parents and carers would work together to identify suitable strategies of support to effectively manage any challenging behaviour that may be presented whilst children and young people travel to school.

This includes the use of closed-circuit television (CCTV) with audio recording or global positioning systems (GPS) which may be used on some vehicles. CCTV footage will not be shared or circulated with anyone outside the Council or AfC, but, along with GPS, can help to improve the speed and accuracy of incident resolution, and also supports transport crew training.

If the behaviour of a child or young person becomes unmanageable or presents significant safety risks, it may be necessary to issue fixed periods of exclusion or permanent exclusion from transport. This decision would only be taken as a last resort and we may consult with schools, transport providers and parents or carers.

Parents and carers will be responsible for transporting their own children during any period of exclusion from transport. Non-provision of transport during these periods does not mean that the council is not fulfilling their statutory duties, merely that transport arrangements were made but, as a result of behavioural issues, had to be suspended or removed. If an incident occurs then a personal travel budget (PTB) may be offered, which would be decided on a case by case basis.

To mitigate potential triggers that may influence changes in behaviour, the Council will aim to provide consistent travel arrangements, and if any change can be identified in advance, it will try to inform everyone affected at the earliest opportunity. It is important to acknowledge that some changes are unavoidable and may take effect with minimal advance notification.

The types of behaviours typically identified as unacceptable include (but not limited to):

- being rude, offensive or abusive to the crew, other passengers, or members of the public
- pushing and kicking
- bullying
- distracting the driver
- refusing to wear a seatbelt or remain seated
- endangering the safety and wellbeing of themselves and others
- using a mobile device or tablet to record other individuals within the vehicle without permission or consent
- exhibiting inappropriate behaviour

- absconding from the vehicle
- smoking (to include vaping or e-cigarettes)

The Council will work with schools, transport providers, children, young people and their families to ensure appropriate measures are in place to manage unacceptable behaviour where it occurs. This may include the introduction of seating plans or other support strategies for the child or young person.

In some cases it may be necessary to take appropriate action. This will depend on the special educational needs or disabilities of the child or young person, the circumstances of the behaviour issue and will reflect consultation with the school and other parties. The procedure will be as follows.

Stage 1	First Incident	First written warning
Stage 2	Second Incident	Final written warning
Stage 3	Third Incident	Permanent exclusion from transport services
At any stage	Physical abuse	Instant exclusion from transport services pending investigation

Independent travel training

Local authorities have a duty to encourage, enable and assist the participation of young people with learning difficulties or disabilities up to the age of 25 in education and training. Independent travel training aims to achieve this.

Independent travel training teaches children and young people a valuable skill to prepare for adulthood, an essential employability skill, and provides greater opportunities for young people, not least increasing confidence in their abilities and reducing their sense of reliance on family members.

The Council will work in partnership with education establishments and other individuals to identify young people who could benefit from independent travel training (ITT) and contact their families to invite them to take part in ITT. Parents of eligible children can also make a request.

[Further information on independent travel training](#), how it is assessed, delivered, and the benefits it provides children and young people.

Travel bursaries and travel reimbursement

A personal travel budget (PTB) can take one of two forms: a bursary (upfront payment) or mileage reimbursement (claimed in arrears). These are payments can be offered in some cases from the Council to parents and carer of children and young people who are eligible for travel assistance. A PTB gives some families the choice and control to make their own travel arrangements for the child or young person to access education.

A **bursary** is usually paid in advance at the start of each month (11 payments per academic year) into the bank account of the parent or carer.

The bursary is based on the child's or young person's attendance and adjustments may be made to monthly payments if a child or young person does not physically attend every day during the previous months. Parents and carers will be notified of any payment adjustment for bursary payments,

Travel reimbursement claims are made in arrears, these will be adjusted to reflect any days of non-attendance.

For a bursary or travel reimbursement, where two or more children or young people live at the same address and attend the same school and the bursary or travel reimbursement has been agreed for one child or young person, additional bursary or travel reimbursement payments will not normally be provided for the other children or young people, as all children or young people would be expected to travel together (absences will only be taken off if all eligible children or young people are absent).

Any arrangements made by the parents or carers using a bursary or travel reimbursement are the responsibility of the parents or carers

Information on bursary or travel reimbursement, including how to apply for one, and how they work, can be found on the local offer

If the Council becomes aware of a change to the child's or young person's circumstances that affect the individual's eligibility or value of the bursary or travel reimbursement, the Council will claim back any overpayment from the date the change in circumstances took effect.

Collection points

The Council will identify pick-up and drop-off locations for pupils to meet the bus or taxi rather than offering a door-to-door service. This reduces the time needed for the route to pick up the pupils and supports them to become more independent and better prepares them for adulthood.

Using a collection point will not be possible for some children and young people with the most complex SEND needs, and in some cases, parents or carers own mobility or disability may impact on them being able to accompany their child or young person to a collection point. An assessment will be conducted to determine if the use of a collection point is a reasonable expectation.

Where the introduction of collection points is being considered, the Council will consult with parents and carers affected by this change in service.

Where a collection point is allocated, it is the parents or carers responsibility to make sure that their child or young person travels to and from the collection point and transfers to and from the vehicle safely.

For parents or carers who are temporarily unable to take their child or young person to a collection point, temporary support will be considered on a case-by-case basis.

All collection points will reflect the specific needs of the individual. Each collection point will be assessed in advanced for their suitability.

- Wherever a bus stop can be legally used as a collection point, it will be.
- Minibuses can stop to collect and drop off on yellow and double yellow lines.
- Vehicles cannot stop on white zig zags (near a zebra crossing) or school keep-clear hatchings.
- The driver always plans not to cause obstructions to other road users while making a drop off or collection and will try to stop in parking areas or bays.
- Collections or drop-off are always made kerb side.
- Each collection point is physically assessed before being used in service; a driver will go out and access to see if the location is safe (for example, a well-lit public location, not too close to a junction or on the brow of a hill).
- The drivers complete dynamic risk assessments at the time of collections or drop offs in the eventuality of any changes (new road layouts, another road user in the stopping space) and will slightly adjust the collection point if it is unsafe to stop.

Residential placements

Travel assistance will normally only be provided to help the child or young person attend their education placement, in accordance with the funding number of days residing at the school. The SEND Transport Service will not provide travel assistance to parents, carers or family members who wish to visit residential schools for any reason. Travel arrangements for parents or carers for this purpose must be agreed directly with the school.

Parents or carers who wish to accompany their child on the first day at school will also be expected to make their own transport arrangements. Where a school stipulates that a parent or carer should attend on the first day, private transport must be arranged.

In exceptional cases, parents or carers may be provided with transport assistance to school a maximum of once a year to attend their child's annual review.

Weekly or fortnightly residential placements

Travel assistance will be provided to take children and young people to school at the beginning and end of the school week, usually on a Monday and Friday, but occasionally this can be Sunday and Friday.

Termly residential placements

Twelve single journeys from home to school and school to home will be provided each academic year. This will consist of trips required at the start and end of each term, and at other school closure times such as half term breaks. Additional journeys will not be provided if the school is closed on either a weekly or fortnightly basis, unless this is reflected in the fees paid by the council for the school placement.

Fifty two week residential placements

Placements where children or young people reside at their placement for 52 weeks a year will not be eligible for travel assistance, as they are already residing at the school and would only be returning home for social visits.