

Draft Policy – Main Changes

The following list summarises the main changes proposed in the new draft policy:

- **Combining the two existing, and one draft, policies into a single 0 – 25 policy:**

Currently the Council has a policy for its eligible compulsory school aged children, another for young people of sixth form age and a draft policy for young adults aged over 19. The new policy will be a single point of reference for applicants of all ages and stages of education.

- **Explaining the Council's policy relating to applications from children below compulsory school age**

The Local Authority does not have, and is not legally required to have, a policy or offer travel assistance to pupils who are below compulsory school age. However, due to the increased number of applications from pupils in this age group who are being placed at special nurseries named in Education, Health and Care Plans, it has become necessary to explain that the Local Authority will not routinely provide transport assistance to this group and will charge parents where transport is provided.

- **Set out the Council's policy in relation to travel assistance for young people over the age of 19**

The Council is legally obliged to have a written policy explaining the approach it will take to provide travel assistance to education for young people over the age of 19, and currently the policy only exists in draft.

- **Increasing the contribution made by families**

Where travel assistance is awarded on a discretionary basis, e.g. the child is 4 or under or over 16 and the family's circumstances are exceptional, parents are required to make a contribution towards the cost of the travel assistance awarded. This charge has not been increased since 2013. It is proposed that the charge is raised to the same level as Warwickshire County Council, which charges £780 unless the family is in receipt of income related benefits, in which case the charge is £390. In either case, the charge can be paid in up to eight monthly instalments.

- **The second stage of the appeals process will now be before a panel of officers, rather than members.**

If parents are unhappy with a decision not to award their child travel assistance, or with the type of assistance offered, the first stage of the appeals process is a review of the decision by another Travel Assist Officer. If parents remain dissatisfied, they can request a second stage appeal which is heard by a panel of elected members but it is proposed that this would be changed to a panel of officers who were independent of the original decision and the stage 1 appeal. Further detail is required about how those officers would be identified to ensure that the process was fair and transparent.

- **An increased emphasis on Independent Travel Training**

There is a presumption that all children who are awarded travel assistance will undertake ITT, unless there is a good reason why this would not be appropriate. The Local Authority has always had the power to offer ITT but there will be a change in emphasis in the draft policy.

- **An increased emphasis on the use of Personal Transport Budgets**

There is currently a limited use of PTBs, but it is proposed that they will be offered to the majority of families who apply under the new policy, giving them greater independence over decisions relating to transport. This is not a change as the Local Authority has always had the power to use PTBs, but a change in emphasis in the new policy.

- **Making clear that the Local Authority expects parents to accompany their children to school wherever possible.**

Parents must volunteer to accompany their child to and from school if they are of compulsory school age and are eligible for transport assistance, under section 508B of the Education Act 1996. However, the current policy does not emphasise that the general expectation, as explained in the statutory guidance, is that parents will accompany their child to school unless there is a good reason why they are unable to and the new policy aims to make this expectation clearer.

- **Explains that how the child travels on other journeys will be a relevant consideration**

The previous policy did not explain that the child's ability to travel on other journeys would be considered, whereas the new policy and application forms state that parents must explain how a child travels outside of school so that, for example, if the family of a post-16 student have a Motability car and do not work they will be expected to transport the young person to and from school, unless there is good reason why they cannot.