

# Children and Young People’s Travel Service

## Frequently Asked Questions (last updated Tuesday, 29 August 2023)

The Children and Young People’s Travel Service is working with Birmingham Parent Carer Forum to respond to the questions that families have around travel assistance for children and young people.

This document provides responses to the questions that have been sent through, grouped into themes as shown below.

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## **How applications for travel support are assessed**

All applications for travel assistance are assessed against the council's travel assistance policy. This was approved by the council's Cabinet in 2019 and is available on the Local Offer website at <https://www.localofferbirmingham.co.uk/home-to-school-transport/travel-assist-policy-documents/>

### **Why are you following your policy over the law on SEN transport?**

The travel assistance policy was approved in 2019, and independent legal advice was taken while it was drafted to ensure it complied with all the relevant laws and statutory guidance. [The Department for Education's statutory guidance on home to school transport](#) was updated in June 2023. We are seeking independent legal advice on whether this requires changes to Birmingham's travel assistance policy. Our current legal advice confirms that our policy is compliant with the law.

### **Why has transport been offered that doesn't support my child's needs?**

Children's and young people's needs are always paramount when making decisions. Decisions are made by a panel within the Children and Young People's Travel Service concerning the travel assistance policy and with consideration of each student's individual needs. Information from the application and supporting documents, such as EHCPs, are considered part of the decision-making process.

Any families who are unhappy with the decision made on their application for support have the right to appeal. The travel assistance policy and the Local Offer website set out the two-stage appeal process.

### **Do you actually read the evidence of each individual? Why is it professionals, the school, everyone that supports my child for transport and the fact they need transport however you don't?**

All applications for travel support are considered by a panel within the Children and Young People's Travel Service. When making a decision, the panel considers the application and all the supporting evidence provided by the family against the travel assistance policy. We also consider information from EHCPs and annual reviews, with the support of SENAR colleagues. Additional supporting information can also be provided for consideration at the appeals stage.

### **Would a decision be made that a 5 year old child should travel on public transport alone? Many children with SEND have understanding of this level and have been deemed fit to travel alone.**

A decision would never be made that a five year old child should travel to school alone. Children's SEND and levels of understanding are considered when decisions are made around what support is in the best needs of each child and young person. No child who was not able to safely travel independently would be expected to travel alone.

## **Communication**

### **When will we know our children's transport arrangements (who the drivers and guides are and when they will be collected)?**

Each year the Children and Young People's Travel Service provides families with details of their child's travel arrangements over the summer holidays, ensuring there is time for families to arrange meet and greets with drivers and passenger assistants before the start of the school year.

As at 21st August 2023, over 98% of families had been sent details of their child's travel support for the new academic year, with the remainder due to be sent imminently.

### **Why does it take the service so long to respond?**

We recognise that communication could have been better. We are working hard to improve this to ensure that families receive communication about their child's travel support that is clear, easy to understand and sent in a timely way. August and September are a particularly busy time of the year for the transport service as we confirm students' transport arrangements. Still, we are committed to responding to any queries as soon as possible.

We welcome feedback from families on our communication as we continue to improve.

### **As guides and routes seem to change frequently, how is this communicated to parents?**

We try to keep changes to students' travel arrangements to a minimum but sometimes changes are required due to circumstances out of our control. This may be due to staff absence, changes in circumstances, or change of the students needing transport support.

We will communicate any changes with families at the earliest opportunity by e-mail and/or telephone to ensure that they have the information with as much notice as possible, to help prepare their child if necessary.

## **Safety and risk assessments**

### **Why are my child's needs not taken seriously regarding safety?**

The safety of students is our highest priority and the council's travel assistance policy sets out that safety considerations will be taken into account when decisions are made on what support is appropriate for each child and young person.

We ensure that the needs of our students are considered when making decisions and multiple sources of supporting information are considered. We also look to

continually review students' needs throughout the year and make changes to provision where necessary.

**How can parents be assured regarding guides if they do not carry their ID or if they show it a photo of it on their phones?**

ID badges are part of our robust safeguarding procedures and passenger assistants must carry their ID badges at all times whilst working on transport.

If a passenger assistant cannot show you their badge, parents should not hand over their child and must contact the Children and Young People's Travel Service on 0121 303 4955, who will deal with the case immediately.

**How are students kept safe on public transport? Families are concerned about their children becoming overwhelmed and the risk of criminal activity, including grooming.**

Students should only be travelling alone on public transport if they are able to do so safely.

Staying safe on public transport is a vital part of the independent travel training programme and students do not complete the programme until/unless they are able to travel safely.

**What training do drivers and passenger assistants receive?**

Passenger assistants must undertake mandatory safeguarding training and receive bespoke medical training from the NHS if required for students they support. Schools also support our drivers and passenger assistants with training on an ad-hoc basis when needed.

As part of the ongoing improvements to the service, we are developing a Learning and Development plan that covers additional areas of learning to support our students better.

We will also be supporting training sessions for drivers and passenger assistants in many of our schools, which can give drivers and passenger assistants the opportunity to get further advice from the schools they work with on how best to support individual students on transport.

**Will drivers and police officers be trained in the Oliver McGowan autism awareness course?**

Home to school transport drivers are provided with individual training, supported by schools. Thank you for the suggestion of the Oliver McGowan Autism Awareness Course; we will explore this.

We cannot insist on the training that police officers receive, but we will share this suggestion with colleagues in West Midlands Police.

Public transport providers must make reasonable adjustments under the Equality Act 2010 to enable people with disabilities to travel safely. Each provider publishes information about accessibility on its website.

## Independent Travel Training

Independent travel training is a training programme for young people with special education needs to help them achieve independence as they move into adulthood. Following a very successful pilot, in July 2023 the council's Cabinet approved the development of a permanent independent travel training programme.

There is lots of information about independent travel training on the Local Offer website.

### **What is the research around independent travel training and the quality of data to support the programme? Is it based on children in a similar city to Birmingham?**

Research across all age groups has shown that being able to travel independently has the biggest impact on the ability of people with disabilities to participate in their communities, access health and other services and the work and education opportunities open to them.

Independent travel training addresses challenges to individuals with learning disabilities. This is evidenced in recently released in depth studies and identified in the following reports:

- The NICE report (2022) ["Disabled Children and Young People up to 25 with Severe Complex Needs: Integrated Service Delivery and Organisation Across Health, Social Care and Education"](#). This paper recommends the provision of a training programme by local authorities across the UK to assist individuals with complex needs to build skills enabling them to travel independently. It states: *'Local authorities should help disabled children and young people with severe complex needs to use transport (to help them get anywhere they need to go, not just to school). They should consider providing a training framework to achieve this. Local authorities could develop their own training programmes as part of this framework, or use existing ones'*
- [The National Disability Strategy \(2021\)](#) and [Valuing People \(2001\)](#). These papers identified the ability to live independently and participate within the community as two substantive challenges faced daily by individuals with learning disabilities. Independent travel training provides these individuals with the skills and confidence to achieve greater independence in their lives and the ability to participate more within the community.

### **How is risk evaluated for children doing independent travel training?**

Our independent travel training programme is available for young people between 11 and 25 years of age who are eligible for travel assistance and have an EHCP. Only

young people who are deemed as suitable for training and who express an interest in joining the programme will be offered training.

Independent travel training is completed only when the young person can safely and confidently use public transport to and from their school. The programme and support do not stop once the young person has successfully completed the training. The programme will continue to support the student for as long as they need afterwards and as they move to different schools and into their choice of further education or employment as they become young adults.

## **Personal Travel Budgets**

### **What is a Personal Travel Budget (PTB) and what can it be used for?**

Personal Travel Budgets are one of the support options the Children and Young People's Travel Service may offer to families who are eligible for travel assistance.

A Personal Travel Budget is an amount of money paid direct to families for them to make arrangements to take their child to school. Families are able to decide how best to use this money to enable them to take their child to school. It could be used for fuel costs or for childcare for a younger sibling for example.

### **How are Personal Travel Budgets paid?**

Personal Travel Budgets are paid on a monthly basis over 11 months to the parent or carer (in the case of those under 18) or to the student or a person acting on their behalf (in the case of those over 18).

The parent/carer or student then assumes full responsibility for the travel arrangements and getting the child or themselves to their place of education on time and achieving good attendance.

## **Budget**

### **Why have you put it on children with special needs to recoup your overspending?**

We have a statutory duty to deliver a sustainable service enabling parents/carers to support their children where possible and promote each student's development. An internal council audit found that the travel assistance policy was not being effectively adhered to and that decisions were not made consistently.

A clear structure is now established for the decision-making process with formal panels. This structure ensures that applications for travel support are considered against the policy and that decisions are robust and consistent. This decision-making structure has not been introduced to deliver savings. Each child's and young person's needs are always paramount when decisions are made.

