

Frequently asked questions

Why are we proposing these changes?

We want to offer a more personalised travel assistance service that meets the needs of people in our borough. We want to ensure young people have travel solutions that work for family life and address the key issues families' face when travelling to school, while supporting young people to get a good head start in life and build the independence skills they need for the future.

Our population of young people is expected to increase over the next few years and we need to prepare for the future and become flexible in how we provide our services so we can meet the changing demand and promote resilience and independence in our community. Although our service budgets are increased each year, the demand for our travel assistance service is increasing at a rate that we cannot continue to sustain unless we work with our residents and think differently about how we provide support, by using our resources to deliver sustainable solutions.

Why are we talking to people about the changes?

We want to hear from you about the changes we're proposing and the way that we're proposing to implement these.

How can I have my say?



You can respond through our online form or you can attend one of our feedback sessions taking place across the borough. You can only give comments during the time this consultation is open.

If you need support with having your say, you can ask the Council for information in an accessible format, or you can seek support from your child's school, college or local parent group.

Will the type of assistance my child gets change under the proposed policy?

The type of assistance your child receives can change every year when you renew their application for re-assessment, depending on your child's circumstance. Under the proposed new policy, the types of travel assistance available will not be changing, but the type of assistance your child is eligible for may change.

Why might the type of assistance I get change?



As part of the Council's long-running principle to promote people's independence, every year we look at whether your child can travel to school or college independently, or safely with someone they know.

We're proposing as part of the new policy that we complete an assessment with your child after you apply, where we might work with you on what the challenges are with getting your child to school and look at what you and your child can do to manage things differently. This may mean that you won't need assistance from us anymore.

When determining whether a student needs assistance, current policy has been to look at whether the young person can travel independently or be **travel trained** to enable them to go to school or college by themselves, before anything else. This skill will benefit them for the rest of their lives. Normally, with **travel training**, we'll support your child while they are waiting for travel training to start. Under the new proposed policy, we'd like to do more **travel training** and work with the young person and others involved in their life to build their independence skills from an early age.

We know that independent travel skills are not developed overnight and we'll usually look at developing their skills over a period of up to 3 months using personalised techniques.



If this is not appropriate – because of timing, the age of the student or because of their needs – we would then always look at whether someone involved in your child’s life can support them to travel to school in a vehicle available, and we may reimburse some of your fuel costs for this. It’s likely that we’ll look again at the student’s ability to travel independently at a later date.



While we expect the above options will be suitable for most people, we know that some people may need further support and so we might look at whether the student is eligible for our direct transport service. We may ask parents/guardians to drop their child off at a meeting point to reduce their journey time or to support a smooth running journey.

The type of assistance you already get may change because your circumstances have changed, or because we are applying existing aspects of the policy that become applicable to you, or because of the new arrangements we’re proposing.

What if I don’t get the type of travel assistance I want?

The Council and our current policy determines whether a student is eligible and what support a student may be eligible for.

While we have to primarily consider the needs of the student when allocating a service, we also have to balance how we use public money and what works more efficiently, and so our principle has always been to consider both the needs of the student and what the most cost-effective option is, before providing a type of travel assistance. This means you may not get the type of assistance you want, but it will be the most appropriate for your situation.

My child is in primary school. How will a decision be made about whether they can get travel assistance under the proposed policy?

Under the proposed policy, the Council will generally expect students of primary school age to be accompanied by their parent, guardian or someone involved in the student's life with no travel assistance provided.



A good reason will need to be provided from parents/guardians as to why this cannot be done. We will always look at the whole picture of family life and look at what is reasonable to expect of families, and our assessment process will help with this, however a

parent's work commitments, childcare arrangements or managing getting their children to different schools **will not** normally be considered good reasons to receive travel assistance under the proposed policy.

What if my work commitments get in the way of transporting my child to school, or what if I have other children that attend different schools?

If these are challenges you are facing, under the proposed policy the Council will advise you to look for breakfast or after school clubs, use alternative care options available (such as childminders or au pairs) or take up your statutory right to flexible working hours in order to help you manage these time pressures. Travel assistance is not designed to support people with these challenges.

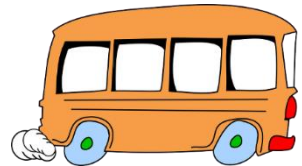
Whose responsibility is it to get my child to school?

While the Council can provide assistance to facilitate a student's attendance at school, it remains the parent/guardian's responsibility to get their children to school regularly and on time.



What if my child needs supervision when travelling to school via one of our direct services, such as on a bus or taxi?

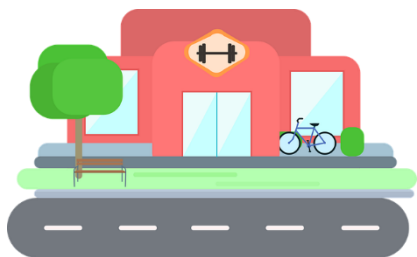
Under the proposed new policy, we will consider first whether a parent/guardian can supervise their child while they are travelling to school on our services.



In line with our principle, we would expect you to travel with your child on some of our direct transport if the student is of primary school age, or if they have complex needs, including medical needs. The Council will assess the student's need for supervision on direct transport using the proposed policy criteria.

My child is over the age of 16. How will a decision be made about whether they can get travel assistance?

Our new policy proposes bringing the eligibility criteria for students over the age of 16 in line with the law. We'll also be primarily looking at how we can support young people to develop the skills to be able to travel independently during college and once they leave education. This means that more of our conversations will be about their strengths, how we can build on these and how we can help them develop skills for life.



Before assisting students over the age of 16, we're proposing to look at whether there are alternative services not provided by the Council that you can access before we provide any support.

If you are eligible for these alternatives and they can meet your transport needs, we won't provide any Council assistance.

Some of these alternatives may be a travelcard, the 16-19 year old bursary fund, a Freedom Pass or a type of transport service available at the college the student attends.

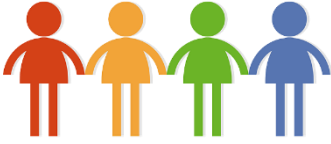
If you haven't applied for these alternative services before coming to us, we'll recommend that you do so and we can support you with the process of applying if you need help.

If you are not eligible for the alternatives, or these services do not meet your needs, we will consider you for Council travel assistance. This means we'll look at what the impact will be if no arrangements are made and whether travel assistance will support students getting to college without incurring stress.



If the student is over the age of 19, we'll normally only assess travel assistance needs if they started their course before their 19th birthday. If they did not, they won't be eligible for support.

What if my child receives assistance but is not eligible under the new proposed policy?



When you renew your application during the renewal period, we'll let you know whether your child will be eligible for travel assistance the next academic year.

If you're not eligible under the new proposed policy, we'll let you know that you won't be getting travel assistance from us in the future. This means you'll have to make other arrangements to manage your family life and get your child to school.

We might agree with you that the summer holidays is enough time to make other arrangements to get your child to school.

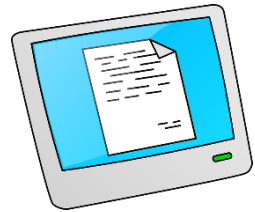
In some circumstances, we may agree to a 'reduction plan', where we continue to provide the same type of assistance for a maximum of one half-term to enable you time to make other arrangements.

How will my application be assessed under the proposed new policy?

We're proposing to change the process for assessing travel assistance needs so it takes a personalised look at the student's situation, their strengths and the challenges in family life.

We'll be asking for minimal information from you on the initial application form, which asks you why you are applying for assistance from us. From this, we may talk to you, the student and other professionals involved in the student's life in order to make a decision. We may work with you to look at ways that challenges can be overcome to support the student getting to school without support from us, or with minimal support from us.

Our aim is to make the process as stress-free as possible and to involve the student and the family more in the decision making process. It also aims to ensure that the solution provided is sustainable and looks at how the student can become independent in the future.



What circumstances of the family will be taken into account when determining whether the student is eligible, and what support they are eligible for?

There are a number of things that will be taken into account about you and your child's situation before providing travel assistance.

This can include whether the family has access to a vehicle and the ability to drive, whether there is anyone close to the family that can support with getting the children in the family to school on time, whether the student has other ways of getting to school, such as by public transport or walking independently, and what impact the student's disability has when travelling.



We recommended reading the proposed policy for the full list of what can be taken into account about you and your child's circumstances during the assessment of eligibility.

What if I refuse to have an assessment carried out with my child?

Should an assessment be completed on your child following your application, either over the phone or face-to-face, this is designed to support you and to help us understand the needs of your child and the family situation, so we can offer you a more personalised service. Should you refuse to have an assessment, we can refuse to proceed with your application.

What will happen if I provide inaccurate or misleading information in my application form or as part of the assessment process?

If the Council suspects fraudulent information has been provided, under the new proposed policy it reserves the right to investigate this further and take legal action against you as necessary.

When will I know whether my child will get travel assistance next academic year?

If you apply during the renewal period, the proposed policy aims to give you a decision about whether or not your child will have travel assistance by the end of the existing academic year. This means that you should know by the end of July whether your child will get travel assistance the coming September.



What if I apply late?

If you apply past the closing date, we cannot guarantee that any assistance will be provided for the start of the next academic year in September.

While every effort will be made to assess your application as quickly as possible, applications made on time will be prioritised to start at the beginning of the school year. Parents/guardians are expected to get their children to school as appropriate while awaiting a decision.

Who makes the decisions about my application?



A panel within the Council makes decisions about your application. This panel can consist of a:

- Manager within the children and adults with disabilities service

- Member of education and school admissions services
- Member of the travel assistance service
- Member of the direct transport service
- Quality assurance/policy advisor

What if I believe the decision isn't right and information about my child hasn't been considered during the application process?

By law, we are required to follow a two stage appeals process. This enables you to ask us for the decision to be reviewed, by providing us information about why you believe the decision to be wrong. The people who made the original decision will review this request. If you do not provide enough information in your request for a review, we may reject this and ask you to provide additional information to enable us to review it further.



If, after the outcome of the first stage, you still believe the decision to be wrong, you can submit a second stage appeal. This will need to include additional information that wasn't included in your first request for a review. A panel made up of people who were not involved in the original decision will consider your request. Under the new proposed policy, you'll be able to attend this panel to present your case should you wish to.

At the time of publishing this policy, the appeals panel can consist of:

- Assistant Director of Education Services
- Head of Education Provision and Inclusion
- Head of Children and Adults with Disabilities Team
- Quality assurance/policy advisor
- Member of the travel assistance service (to present the information)

Have your say on the proposals

Get in touch at:

www.havering.gov.uk/schooltravelassistance

Email us at:

travelconsultation@havering.gov.uk

