



EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Children & Education (DCS)
DATE:	Friday, 29 November 2024

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED: Children, Young People and Education

WARD/S AFFECTED: (All Wards);

SUBJECT: Eligibility for Free Home to School Transport

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To present recommendations following a review process of checking eligibility for free home to school transport.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Member approves the following recommendations:

- To honour the free bus passes for the remainder of a pupil's education for those pupils who have previously been issued a free bus pass in error but are in years 10 or 11 in their phase of education or who have circumstances that justifies the arrangement continuing.
- To honour the bus passes until the end of this academic year only, for those pupils who have previously been issued a free bus pass in error but where there are no circumstances that justify this arrangement continuing post this period.

3. BACKGROUND

Following the transfer of school transport services to the Children's and Education department, all systems and processes relating to home to school transport are being reviewed. This review to date has included an appraisal of eligibility for all pupils that have previously been issued with a bus pass. This appraisal concluded that 50 pupils had previously been issued with a free bus pass in error.

The Council's home to school transport *policy (Appendix 1)* advises that if an error is identified then families will be advised of this error and given notice of when the Council will stop providing free transport, *"If your child is going to school and we find that we are allowing them to travel free by mistake, we will let you know that we have made a mistake and we will give you notice of when we will stop providing free transport. The notice we give you will be for the rest of the term in which we realise we have made a mistake"*.

Prior to the start of the 2024/25 academic year, eligibility checks were made for all pupils that had previously been provided with free home to school transport. Of these re-assessments, there were 50 cases that required further investigation to assess the reasoning for free home to school transport previously being approved.

The families of these 50 pupils were advised in writing that they were only being issued with a bus pass for the Autumn 2024 term whilst a full re-assessment of their eligibility was completed. The letter specifically confirmed that this re-assessment might result in free transport being removed if the full re-assessment confirmed that the applicant's case did not meet the criteria for free home to school transport as stated within the Council's home to school transport policy.

Each pupil's eligibility has been carefully re-assessed and circumstances specific to that pupil were also considered.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

It is recommended that in 29 cases, the pupils should continue to have free home to school travel for the remainder of their secondary education for the following reasons:

- 26 pupils are currently studying for their GCSEs and any disruption to education from the removal of free transport could be detrimental to their future outcomes.
- 3 year 9 pupils have circumstances that could be considered exceptional should their cases be progressed to appeal.

It is recommended that in the other 21 cases the pupils should have free home to school travel for the remainder of the 2024/25 academic year only:

- 13 are year 8 pupils - this will be a future years' savings circa £18,525.
- 8 are year 9 pupils – this will be a future years' savings circa £7,600.

The families of these 21 pupils will be given 2 additional terms' notice that free home to school travel will not continue post the 2024/25 academic year.

Parents will be advised that should their circumstances change (for example a change of school or home address), they can re-apply for home to school transport. Any parent that does re-apply will have the right of appeal if their application for free home to school transport is refused.

There will be financial implications for those families that choose for their children to continue to travel to school by public transport or school buses.

Whilst the Council may be subject to reputational risk in respect of free bus passes previously being issued in error, that risk does not in itself justify the continuation of free home to school travel being granted to children who are not eligible under the Council's policy.

The ongoing review of systems and processes will ensure in future years that home to school transport eligibility decisions are made transparently and in line with the Council's determined Home to School Transport policy.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

None.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Future years' savings based on the application of the recommendations in this report will amount to circa £26,125; this will be factored into the Council's budget savings for 2025/26.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

None. The Council will continue to fulfil its statutory duty to provide free home to school transport to

pupils who are eligible under our Home to School transport policy.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Resource will be met from existing establishment.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

10. CONSULTATIONS

Parents of those pupils whose eligibility was being re-assessed were advised of the re-assessment and the potential implications on 23 August 2024.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded and published if applicable.

VERSION: 1

CONTACT OFFICER:	Sarah Anderson, School Transport Manager Carol Grimshaw, Head of Service - Schools System Support
DATE:	
BACKGROUND PAPER:	Appendix 1 Home to School Transport Policy