

CHANGES TO SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) SCHOOL TRANSPORT SERVICE

Stockport Council Consultation

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INTRODUCTION

Stockport Council is committed to:

- Working in partnership with parents/carers to support them with their legal responsibility to ensure their child/young person attends school.
- Promoting healthy, sustainable and safe travel solutions.
- Actively engaging with child/young people and involving them in the decision-making process.
- Promoting independent travel for children and young people wherever possible, taking account of their age and individual needs;
- Ensuring travel arrangements are as reliable and stress free as possible so pupils arrive at school in a calm state and able to learn.

What we are currently doing

- Stockport fully adheres to the requirements of the statutory duties in relation to school transport;
- We have increased the uptake in personal budgets in recent years threefold. This has allowed more parent/carers and young people to make their own flexible travel arrangements that are individual to their own personal or family circumstances,
- We have established more whole school contracts meaning that all routes associated with a school are given to one contractor to manage. This has provided capacity and value to the service,
- We have increased the capacity of our Independent Travel Training offer and we can further increase it as demand dictates.
- We are working with Greater Manchester Authorities to explore ways in which we can work together to provide better value for our residents.

What we need to do

- We need to offer better outcomes for our young people by aiming to increase confidence in and uptake of independent travel training,
- We need to work with families to showcase the benefits that personal budgets can bring to them by unlocking the support, flexibility and opportunity of alternative arrangements that these bring to them,
- We need to reduce our reliance on private hire taxis,

In the last 2 years the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) transport service has seen its costs double, and since 2020 the cost to provide travel assistance has almost quadrupled. In that same time the average cost per pupil receiving assistance from the service has more than doubled and the average cost per route commissioned by the service has risen by over £6,000.

We don't receive any additional funding from government in relation to SEND transport so the costs that are incurred are fully borne by Council.

We know the financial pressures we feel are because:

- There are more pupils requesting travel assistance from our transport service,
- Parents requesting assistance tend to prefer private hire taxi as opposed to other forms of assistance,
- An increasing proportion of pupils being transported have complex needs and as such can only be transported on their own,
- The availability of private hire taxis is reducing with fewer vehicles, drivers, and passenger assistants offering their service and bidding for the routes we commission.

As well as financial pressure, we are increasingly concerned about how difficult it is becoming to get private hire taxi contractors to quote on routes we commission – most contractors now either don't have the vehicles, the staff, or the capacity to work with us. In the past 12 months we have had numerous contracts terminated as a consequence of vehicle shortages, and recruitment and retention issues related to drivers and passenger assistants.

Stockport is not unique, and this mix of challenges and pressures exists almost universally in local authorities across the country. The Department for Education are currently listening to views of stakeholders in a national conversation about SEND services including transport and are keen as we are to find ways to make our services sustainable again.

We recognise how important home to school transport is to pupils and families and at its most basic level is a way to facilitate access to education, skills, and independence for later life.

We are wanting to engage with our residents, our SEND families, our schools, our transport contractors, and other interested parties about specific proposals.

These aim to offer better outcomes for our young people in preparation for adulthood by encouraging use of freely available travel solutions in Greater Manchester, independent travel, and personal budgets more so than we have done before. We also want to ask questions about how we can achieve better value in the private hire marketplace

This consultation specifically focuses on

- revising our post-16 policy to make it clear what travel arrangements we offer and in what circumstance, and
- changing the way we procure contracts with private hire contractors

ABOUT THIS CONSULTATION

This consultation will ask a range of questions intended to better understand the support for and impacts of a range of issues relating to SEND transport. Some of the issues we discuss in this document are complex and we welcome anyone wishing to engage in this process to contact us via email or by phone if they need clarification.

We want to hear from as many people as possible - there will be lots of ways that people can engage with this consultation and share their views;

- We continue to work alongside Parent and Carers Together Stockport (PACTS) who will be supporting families through this process.
- We will be running online information sessions for families and capturing their feedback as part of the consultation. Young people will also have the opportunity to fill out a more accessible version of the consultation form to ensure their views are captured.

Who is this for

This is for any resident of Stockport, anyone impacted by these proposals, or with a role or interest in SEND School Transport. It may include:

- Residents,
- Pupils,
- Parent/Carers,
- Schools/Colleges,
- Transport providers,
- Other interested parties.

Those young people and families who currently access SEND Home to School Transport and who may be impacted by the proposals in this consultation will be written to directly to inform them of the consultation and request their feedback.

Key dates

This consultation was published on **3 November 2025** and will close at 11:59pm on **15 December 2025**.

HOW TO HAVE YOUR SAY

RESPOND ONLINE

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible.

Visit www.stockport.gov.uk/haveyoursay to submit your response.

OTHER WAYS TO RESPOND

If for exceptional reasons, you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with our system, you may download a PDF version of the consultation document and respond either via email or post.

If you are not responding via the online survey, please can you ensure you provide:

- your name
- relevant contact details
- whether you are responding as an individual or on behalf of an organisation, along with your role
- whether you would like your responses to be kept confidential within your response.

Through PACTS

Through one of our online and in-person briefing sessions

By email

travelcoordination@stockport.gov.uk

By post

School Places, Admissions and Transport Team,
Third Floor, Stopford House,
Stockport,
SK1 3XE

Our Legal Duty

The following summarises the various legal duties that we have in respect of SEND transport. Under section 508, 509, and Schedule 35B of the Education Act 1996 local authorities are under several duties in relation to home to school transport which differ according to age, phase, and type of education.

For pupils aged between 5-16 years

The **pre-16 duty**, related to pupils aged between 5-16 years, is to provide free school travel arrangements to “eligible children”.

To qualify as an “eligible child”, the child must be of compulsory school age (5—16) attending a qualifying school and must fulfil one of the following criteria:

- The child is living outside of the statutory walking distance of the nearest suitable school.
 - For children aged over 5 but under the age of 8 the statutory walking distance is 2 miles.
 - For children aged over the age of 8 and under 16 the statutory walking distance is 3 miles.

OR

- The child cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school because of their mobility problems or other health and safety concerns related to their SEN or disability.

For pupils aged between 16-19 years

The **post-16 duty**, related to young people aged between 16-19 yrs, removes the requirement for local authorities to provide free travel assistance. Under this duty we must publish a travel statement that sets out what arrangements have been made for travel arrangements in the area that facilitates attendance at education or training for all sixth-form age pupils. We must also describe what arrangements have been made for pupils with learning difficulties and disabilities, and finally we must set out the circumstances for use of our discretionary powers.

For young adults aged between 19-25 years

The **young adult duty**, related to young adults aged between 19-25 yrs, requires us to make arrangements for the provision of transport and otherwise as they consider necessary free of charge to

- facilitate the attendance of adults receiving education at local authority-maintained institutions providing further or higher education and within the further education sector
- facilitate the attendance of adults with EHCPs outside of the Further Education and Higher Education sectors but only where we have secured the provision of education and the provision of boarding accommodation.

National Context

- The cumulative deficits for SEND services, including transport, are estimated to be around £6 billion nationwide by 2026,
- Costs associated with SEND transport have doubled since 2020 rising from £727m to £2.1b in 2025,
- The Department for Education (DfE) has reported that the cost of providing SEND transport has been increasing due to rising demand and the complexity of needs. The average cost per pupil for SEND transport has increased significantly over the past few years,
- The average council in England is now transporting 1,300 SEND pupils in 2023/24, up from 911 in 2018/19: a 43% increase. The average cost per SEND pupil using transport has also increased 32%: from £6,280 to £8,299,
- Due to the complexity of needs, there is an increasing use of individual taxis for transporting children with SEND. The use of cars and taxis for SEND transport increased by 36% between 2019 and 2023.

Stockport Context

Since 2020:

- The number of service users has almost doubled and spend against SEND transport has increased from £2.6m to a forecast year end position of £8.1m,
- The number of commissioned routes transporting users has increased from 127 to 243 which has led to occupancy of routes increasing. The number of single occupancy routes has increased from 21 to 50 on account of evidenced need for solo transport,
- The number of personal budgets issued has already increased from 40 to 171,
- Proportion of private hire contracts to personal travel budgets (PTBs) has increased. In 2020 there were 127 private hire routes (76%) and 40 PTBs (26%). In 2025 there are 243 routes (59%) and 171 PTBs (41%)
- 154 students successfully signed off as independent travellers
- 16 routes handed back due to not having either an available vehicle, driver or passenger assistant
- 4 school transport providers have ceased trading

The number of children new to the transport service consistently exceeds the number of young people leaving the service. Stockport, alongside many other local authorities continues to see an increase in demand for travel assistance. This increase in student numbers along with external factors such as vehicle manufacturing issues, inflationary pressures such as cost of fuel, cost of living, cost of wages to an employer (real living wage) are creating very difficult operating environments for all private hire contractors. Compounding these issues and further driving up the cost to run the service is that a significant proportion of the private hire workforce has left or is leaving their career.

The result of this has meant that at Greater Manchester level and nationally there is a lack of physical capacity in terms of vehicles and workforce to meet the demands. Local authorities are essentially competing with each other to secure and retain contractors.

The number of service users has doubled in the last 5 years and continues to increase. The spend of the service has more than doubled in the past 2 years. Incidents whereby contractors are handing back contracts due to them not having sufficient vehicles (due to breakdown or cost of replacement) or that drivers resigning/retiring are becoming more frequent.

PROPOSALS

Proposal 1 – Post 16 Policy and Practice

Key changes to our Post-16 policy are:

If you apply to the LA for travel assistance you will:

- Be asked whether you have exhausted all travel arrangement options available to you as detailed in Section 3 of the post-16 policy (see **Appendix 1**),
- If we agree that those options are unsuitable, the young person will be assessed for suitability for independent travel training,
- If you are deemed **unsuitable** for independent travel training then you will be offered a personal budget,
- If the young person is deemed **suitable** for travel training but is waiting to be trained, you will be offered a personal budget for the interim period,
- In exceptional circumstances the Council will commission transport where:
 - There is no person such as parent/carer or responsible adult connected with the learner that possess the capacity to facilitate the attendance of the learner, as evidenced by Council social care records.
 - The learner has complex **and** high-dependency health needs, or at the discretion of the Director of Education, Work, and Skills

For the purposes of the transport service, complex and high dependency health needs will be defined as a young person with **profound physical needs** with accompanying **health care needs and/or profound and multiple learning difficulties**; receiving multiple systems of care for which the parent/carer could not be expected to coordinate and arrange.

What is 'Independent Travel Training'?

Travelling independently can be a challenge for some people, limiting access to social, health and employment opportunities. Travel training teaches young people and adults who need additional support to make journeys using public transport safely and confidently on their own.

Travel training can involve:

- Short term support: Familiarising people with how public transport works in their area, giving them confidence to use it alone.
- Long term support: One-to-one personalised training programme over a period of weeks or months.

For over a decade, Stockport Council have worked alongside Pure Innovations to offer an Independent Travel Training programme that provides personalised training for young people with additional needs to

access public transport. Paired with one-to-one support, travel trainers identify regular routes that can be broken into manageable sizes, and each one is mastered until complete independence is built up.

The people who take part will finish their training with the confidence to use the bus, train or tram confidently and safely without supervision. Each person will benefit differently from travel training. The programme is designed to build resilience and support young people to live a more fulfilled and ambitious life. Travelling independently is empowering, learning to travel independently is an important step towards greater freedom and self-confidence for young people with additional needs. It can help young people build essential life skills and confidence to take part in new experiences. It gives young people more control and choice in their everyday lives. Independent travel also plays a key role in improving awareness of community safety and how to navigate different travel situations confidently and safely.

What is a Personal Transport Budget (PTB)?

Personal Travel Budgets (PTB) helps you to arrange your own home to school/college travel arrangements in a way that suits your personal circumstances. It is a monthly payment designed to help you make any arrangements needed, which will facilitate a young person accessing school/college. The budget is used to ensure the young person attends every day and can arrive on time and in a fit state to learn.

Benefits of a personal travel budget

- It provides freedom and flexibility for a family to choose the most appropriate travel arrangements that best fit their personal circumstances.
- It provides choice and control over how funding is used to access education in a way that suits you, your child and your family.
- It offers families an alternative to the traditional services that the council can provide.
- It may provide families with a direct link to the school/college and more frequent opportunities to discuss a child/young person's progress with teachers that they may not have previously had.

The amount of money that is awarded is based on the distance between your home and the school/college the young person attends. The distance measured is based on the safest walking route. Should the young person be absent from school/college, even if this is through no fault of theirs, a reduction would then be made in the following month's payment to reflect absenteeism, to ensure only days travelled would be covered.

We are proposing that a personal budget be based on 41p per mile plus an annual lump sum of £703.73

An example calculation:

A 4-mile journey to school/college each day would provide a monthly PTB of:

<i>Lump Sum Payment</i>	<i>Mileage</i>	<i>Trips</i>
<i>£703.73 for 38 weeks</i>	<i>0.41 per mile For 38 weeks per annum</i>	<i>4 (this includes the journey to school and return trips)</i>

Total £177.28 per month – based on 38 weeks

How can a PTB be spent?

Some ideas of how you can spend the PTB include:

- Purchasing a travel pass for yourself or a trusted adult to accompany a young person on public transport
- To cover fuel costs or wear and tear on your car
- Paying other people to take your child to school or college when you can't
- Arrange shared travel arrangements with other parents, such as shared driving responsibilities, walking buses or joint taxi arrangements
- Overcoming barriers that may prevent you accompanying your child to school, e.g. travel / childcare arrangements for siblings

I'm on Universal Credit; will it affect my claim?

A personal travel budget for the intent purpose of facilitating your child's travel to and from school/college should not be considered as an income or factored as part of your capital in any existing claim or as part of a new claim. This does not constitute advice however and you should seek your own advice in relation to your own personal claim.

Proposal 2 – Renegotiate Contracts

As the number of people accessing travel support continues to increase, so does the cost of delivering this support. We want to make sure that we are continuing to get the best value for money to the public purse when providing this service. As such, we are proposing to use a new way of assessing the value of quotes for new contracts and review existing high value contracts and will be based on a formula using the current Stockport Hackney Carriage fare rates but will also include premiums for vehicle types and passenger assistants. (Please see Appendix 1 on page 19). This will protect the LA from grossly inflated bids for routes.

We propose to:

1. Calculate best value in the following way:
 - A) Use of the hackney carriage fare rate including extra time for loading/unloading pupils.
 - B) A premium for each vehicle type dependent on their availability, premiums will be included within the consultation.
 - C) Cost of a passenger assistant.

An example of an existing contracted route is as follows:

- *Child's home to Special School, Solo route, Cost per trip £114.99, Annual cost of £43,969*

Our assessment of where value lies is as follows:

- *Carriage fare rate - £25.63 per trip based on journey of 8.6 miles*

- *Loading time - £3.00 per trip based on 10 mins loading/unloading*
- *Vehicle Premium - £13.00 per trip based on 8-Seater vehicle, size, specialist nature taken into account*
- *Passenger Assistant - £20.32 paid for 1 hour with national insurance and pension contributions included*
- *Total per trip = £61.95*

The difference between the existing contract cost and our own assessment of value per trip is - £53.04, a cost annually of £20,156

2. That we will change our practice and no longer enter into contracts where the bid exceeds 10% of the LA calculated best value.
3. That where the LA have made reasonable attempts to seek best value in the market and failed that it will only offer a personal budget to the applicant.
 - For Post 16 aged pupils the PTB will be offered as outlined in proposal 1 above. This will be a set amount based on the mileage calculation from home to school/college with an annual lump sum included.
 - For Pre 16 aged pupils the PTB will be calculated to ensure that travel to school remains free of charge for the family in line with the Pre 16 duty.
4. Create a new exceptional circumstance; if we hold data or share the opinion that you or the young person would be unable to manage a personal budget then we will consider local authority commissioned transport as a last resort. A specific example would be if the LA held social care records which indicate a history of parental neglect or incapacity and as such the management of finances may be unsuitable.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

Section 1 – About you

1. Are you a young person over 16 who currently accesses home to school/college transport?
Yes
No
2. Are you a Parent/Carer of a child who currently accesses home to school/college transport?
Yes
No

If yes, are they over 16?
Yes
No
3. Are you a Parent/Carer of child with SEND?
Yes
No
4. Are you a young person over 16?
Yes
No

If yes, do you have SEND?
Yes
No
5. Are you a contractor / operator who provides SEND transport currently in Stockport?
Yes
No
6. Are you a professional working with young people with SEND in Stockport?
Yes
No

Section 2 – Changes to Post-16 transport policy

7. Do you support the revised draft post-16 policy?

Yes

No

Don't know

(If you disagree or don't know, can you tell us why or provide further feedback?)

8. Do you feel that Independent Travel Training would help to improve outcomes for young people as they transition into adulthood?

Yes

No

Don't know

(If you disagree or don't know, can you suggest alternative proposal or provide further feedback?)

9. Do you feel that Independent Travel Training should be the initial offer of support from the Local Authority for students travelling to Post 16 education?

Yes

No

Don't know

(If you disagree or don't know, can you suggest alternative proposal or provide further feedback?)

10. Do you feel that a Personal Travel Budget offers a young person and their family greater flexibility to choose the most appropriate travel arrangements that best fit their personal circumstances.

Yes

No

Don't know

(If you disagree or don't know, can you suggest alternative proposal or provide further feedback?)

11. If a student is unable to take part in Independent Travel Training, do you feel that a subsequent offer of a Personal Travel Budget, based on 41p per mile plus an additional lump sum payment of £703.73 is appropriate to support travel to Post 16 education?

Yes

No

Don't know

(If you disagree or don't know, can you suggest alternative proposal or provide further feedback?)

Section 3 – Assessing best value for contracted routes

- 12. Do you support the proposal to review existing contracted routes to ensure the LA are receiving the best value?**

Yes

No

Don't know

(If you disagree or don't know, can you suggest alternative proposal or provide further feedback?)

- 13. If it is felt that an existing contract is not providing best value, do you believe that, where possible, the LA should renegotiate the existing contract with a view to it being aligned to where the LA perceives value to exist?**

Yes

No

Don't know

(If you disagree or don't know, can you suggest alternative proposal or provide further feedback?)

- 14. Using the example given on pages 9 and 10, do you feel that the proposed calculations of best value on existing or future contracts are fair and appropriate?**

Yes

No

Don't know

(If you disagree or don't know, can you suggest alternative proposal or provide further feedback?)

- 15. Do you support the proposal that bids not deemed to be within the scope of best value are to be rejected and a Personal Travel Budget offered to families instead?**

Yes

No

Don't know

(If you disagree or don't know, can you suggest alternative proposal or provide further feedback?)

- 16. Do you support the proposal to create a new exceptional circumstance which will offer LA support to families in very specific circumstances. The LA may withhold the personal budget and decide to commission its own travel arrangements for the young person?**

Yes

No

Don't know

(If you disagree or don't know, can you suggest alternative proposal or provide further feedback?)

NEXT STEPS

Stockport Council's Cabinet will make a decision based on consultation findings in February 2026.

If proposal 1 is adopted and a new Post-16 policy is approved this will come into effect ready for the new academic year starting in September 2026.

Any new practice changes featured in proposal 2 are adopted by Cabinet, will be implemented immediately.

Any applicants who have or are applying for travel assistance for the new academic year will have their application considered under the new post-16 policy.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Are the Local Authority only doing this to save money?

The Local Authority will be saving money, yes. We have a responsibility to ensure we are securing best value for the public purse. We also must ensure long term sustainability of the service in an environment where the private hire market has contracted in recent years at a time when demand is at its highest.

More importantly, there are many benefits associated with independent travel and/or the flexibility of personal budgets, they include:

- Greater options around further education
- Access to leisure opportunities
- Freedom to develop a social network
- Opportunities for work experience
- Arriving at a destination the same way as their peers
- Freedom and flexibility to choose the most appropriate travel arrangements for your child that best fit your personal circumstances
- It provides a direct link to the school/college and more frequent opportunities to discuss a child/young person's progress with teachers that they may not have previously had.
- For children under 16 and young adults over 19. A personal budget would cover all costs incurred which gives greater flexibility to arrange travel assistance which suits the family.

Will a PTB have an impact on other benefits?

No. PTBs have no impact on any other benefits you might receive. You should always seek your own advice in relation to your personal claim.

Will the PTB payments be taxed?

No. The payments are not taxed as the budget is a payment made in relation to the child / young person not the parents. It is used to enable your child to get to and from school each day and should not be used for any other purpose.

If I have two or more children with EHC plans, can I claim a PTB for each child?

You can claim for each child but whilst the first child would receive 100% of the PTB, the second child would only receive the mileage and not a lump sum payment. If both children are at the same school only one PTB can be claimed.

Would there be any disruption to my child's education?

The Council will work together with parents/carers to ensure that this is kept to an absolute minimum. Careful planning with the full co-operation of all parties can avoid most disruption.

APPENDIX 1

Table of Stockport Hackney carriage fares

Tariff 1 - Normal day rate (6am to 11:59pm)	
Up to 878 yards	£3
Then for every 126 yards	£0.20p
Waiting time (every 40 seconds)	£0.20p

Table of price per trip premiums for vehicle requirements

Saloon Car	£0
Black Cab	£0
MPV (5-7 seats)	£1
8 Seat minibus	£13
8 Seat minibus with tail-Lift	£15
16 Seat minibus	£18
16 Seat minibus with tail-lift	£20
22 Seat	£30
25 seat coach	£30