



APPENDIX 1

Coventry Travel Assistance Policy Statutory School Age (5-16 years old)

Version: For Public Consultation, November 2016

Proposed policy for public consultation

1. Introduction

- 1.1 Coventry City Council (the “Council”) is committed to enabling all children to lead independent healthy lives, feel safe and secure and achieve their full potential. For children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, this includes enabling them to develop the skills to live an ordinary life in adulthood, and fulfil their entitlement to independent living and employment.
- 1.2 This Policy sets out the entitlement for children and young people of statutory school age (5 to 16), who have special educational needs or a disability to home to school travel assistance. This policy reflects the Department for Education’s *Home to school travel and transport guidance – Statutory guidance for local authorities July 2014*¹.
- 1.3 In determining travel assistance for eligible children and young people, the Council is committed to reducing traffic congestion, improving road safety and reducing the environmental impact of vehicle journeys by promoting the use of alternative forms of travel - such as walking, cycling and use of integrated public transport. In this regard, the Council has adopted the principles contained in the 2016 Local Plan and policy LP98 adopted Supplementary Planning Document – ‘Delivering a more sustainable city’² and works closely with schools to develop School Travel Plans that help to achieve this aim. Wherever possible, in the provision of travel assistance the Council will consider travel options that minimise the number and length of vehicle journeys.

2 Who this policy applies to

- 2.1 This policy applies to all eligible children and young people of statutory school age (5 to 16) who are resident in Coventry and have special educational needs or a disability.
- 2.1 A child’s home is defined as the place where the child is habitually and normally resident in Coventry. Where a child lives at more than one address, the principal home address is the address at which the child spends at least 50% of their time, which would ordinarily be the address the child is registered at whilst attending school, and, where applicable, the address of the parent who is in receipt of Child Benefit or Child Tax Credits for the child.
- 2.2 The Council does not provide travel assistance for children of pre-school age (0-4 year olds) except in exceptional circumstances.
- 2.3 The eligibility criteria for young people age 16 to 25 in further education, is the subject of a separate policy.
- 2.4 This policy covers the provision of home to school travel assistance at the beginning and end of a school day only.

¹https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/445407/Home_to_School_Travel_and_Transport_Guidance.pdf

² http://www.coventry.gov.uk/info/111/planning_policy/2310/local_plan/2

3 Schools covered by this policy

- 3.1 This policy refers to “suitable” and “qualifying” schools. “Suitable” means that the school is suited to the pupil’s age, ability and aptitude and any special educational needs the pupil may have.
- 3.2 Qualifying schools are: community, foundation or voluntary schools; community or foundation special schools, non-maintained special schools, pupils referral units, maintained nursery schools; or city technology colleges (CTC), city colleges for the technology of the arts (CCTA) or academies, including free schools and University Technical Colleges (UTC).
- 3.3 For children with special educational needs, an independent school can also be a qualifying school where this is named on the child’s Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or statement, or it is the nearest of two or more schools named.

4 Eligibility criteria

- 4.1 The Council will take into account the following criteria and considerations (as set out in statutory guidance) to determine whether a child or young person is eligible to receive travel assistance from the Council:
 - Statutory walking distance eligibility;
 - Extended rights eligibility;
 - Special educational needs, a disability or mobility problems eligibility;
 - Unsafe route eligibility; and
 - Exceptional circumstances.
- 4.2 **Statutory walking distance**
 - 4.2.1 Statutory walking distance refers to the distance between the child’s home address and their nearest suitable school. The nearest suitable school is taken to mean the nearest qualifying school with places available that provides education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child and any special educational needs that the child may have. Statutory walking distance is measured by the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk safely.
 - 4.2.2 Children will be **eligible** for travel assistance based on distance if they meet the following criteria:
 - a) The child lives at least 2 miles away from their nearest suitable school (as defined at 4.2.1 above) measured by the shortest safe walking distance and they are under 8 years of age); or
 - b) The child **or young person** lives at least 3 miles away from their nearest suitable school (as defined at 4.2.1 above) measured by statutory walking distance and they are 8 years of age or over (and of compulsory school age).

4.3 Extended rights eligibility (low income levels)

4.3.1 Extended right eligibility refers to eligibility related to family income levels. The Council will provide travel assistance where pupils are entitled to free school meals or if their parents are in receipt of maximum Working Tax Credit in the following cases:

- a) The nearest suitable schools is beyond 2 miles (for children over the age of 8 and under 11);
- b) The nearest suitable school is between 2 and 6 miles (if aged 11-16 and there are not three or more suitable nearer schools);
- c) The nearest suitable school is between 2 and 15 miles and the nearest school preferred on grounds of religion or belief (aged 11-16).

4.4 Special educational needs, disability or mobility

4.4.1 If a child cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school accompanied by an adult, because of a disability affecting their mobility or associated health and safety issues relating to their special educational needs (SEN), they may be eligible for travel assistance. This is regardless of the distance between home and school. Eligibility will be assessed on an individual basis.

4.4.2 In determining whether a child can reasonably be expected to walk to school, accompanied by an adult, the Council will take into account the maturity of the child and whether it is reasonable to expect a parent to accompany a child of that age.

4.5 Unsafe route eligibility

4.5.1 A child will be eligible for travel assistance if it is agreed that all walking routes inside the distance criteria are judged to be unsafe.

4.6 Exceptional circumstances

4.6.1 Where a child or young person does not meet the eligibility criteria, parents may apply for travel assistance under the exceptional circumstances criteria. Applications will be determined on personal circumstances and consider whether on the evidence provided, a child would not be able to travel to and from school without support and that it would be unreasonable to expect a parent to meet the responsibility of securing attendance.

4.6.2 The following are examples of what would **not** be considered exceptional circumstances:

- Parents/carers work or care commitments
- Parents/carers experiencing difficulties in getting their child to a pick-up point

5 Types of travel assistance

5.1 In determining the form travel assistance will take the Council will consider the following factors:

- The special educational needs, disability or mobility needs of the child;
- The development of independent travel skills;
- The length of journey in distance and travel time;
- The efficient and effective use of public resources.

5.3 The travel assistance offer will include:

- i) **Independent Travel training:** the provision of independent travel training will enable young people to travel independently between home and school utilizing public transport when appropriate.
- ii) **Public Transport:** the provision of a bus pass for the child or if appropriate the child and accompanying adult.
- iii) **Innovative travel arrangements:** these may include a walking bus or cycling allowance.
- iv) **Personal Travel Budget:** A personal travel budget may be agreed with parents to enable them to make arrangements to secure their child's school attendance. This will be calculated at a rate of 45p per mile for journeys within the City and 25p per mile for out of City journeys
- v) **Minibuses and taxis:** Where assessed as essential due to the particular needs of the child or young person, the Council may provide a minibus, taxi or adapted vehicle. Generally, the number of children in each vehicle will be maximised. Route planning may require children to be collected from agreed pick-up points. In these instances pick-up points will be secured at safe and convenient locations, within a reasonable distance from the child's home.

5.4 The Council will ensure that the travel assistance offer is reasonable and meets the need of the child. If a parent chooses not to accept that offer, the Council will not be obliged to offer an alternative option.

6 Escorts

6.1 The Council may determine an escort is necessary to ensure the safety and well-being of children, the safe operation of vehicles and/or the care needs of individual children or young people. This will be determined during the eligibility assessment process.

7 Parental responsibility and preferences

7.1 Parents/carers are responsible in law, for ensuring that their children attend school regularly. If a parent/carer exercises their right to choose a school other than the nearest suitable school, the Council does not have a duty to provide travel assistance. In these circumstances parents/carers will be required to make their own travel arrangements.

7.3 If a family move home and elect to keep their child at a particular school, eligibility for travel assistance will be reviewed, If the school is not the nearest suitable school or the family have moved closer to the school and it is deemed within reasonable walking distance, the child may not meet the eligibility criteria for travel assistance.

8 The Application and Assessment Process

8.1 The application process is designed to be as simple as possible whilst ensuring that full consideration is given to the specific needs of the child or young person. Parents should allow up to three weeks from the date of application to the start of any assistance provided.

8.2 Stage 1: Application

8.2.1 The parent/carer must make a formal application for travel assistance. The application form is available on-line on the Coventry City Council website. Hard copies are available on request.

8.3 Stage 2: Assessment

8.3.1 The application will be assessed against the Council's eligibility criteria. If the criteria is met the Council will then determine the most appropriate type of travel assistance to offer taking into account the factors set out in paragraph 4 of this policy.

8.4 Stage 3: Decision

8.4.1 Following the assessment process, the parent/carer will be informed in writing of the outcome of the application and will be sent details of the travel assistance offer and any contact details they may require.

9 Appeals

9.1 An appeal must be submitted in writing within **28 calendar days** of the letter refusing travel assistance or proposing changes to existing arrangements. Appeals must be sent to the SEN Team, Coventry City Council, Floor 3, Civic Centre 2, Earl Street, Coventry CV1 5RS or by e-mail to SEN@coventry.gcsx.gov.uk within 28 calendar days of receiving the decision not to provide travel assistance. The letter of appeal must provide the reasons for challenging Coventry's refusal of assistance or changes to proposed arrangements and include any fresh documentary evidence.

9.2 Stage 1 – Initial Appeal

9.2.1 The appeal will be considered by a Senior Officer within the SEN Service. The appeal will be reviewed and all evidence submitted will be considered. The original decision may be upheld, overturned or alternative solutions may be identified. If the application is not approved the appellant will be notified of the decision in writing and will be informed of the next and final stage of the appeal process.

9.3 Stage 2 – Final Appeal

9.3.1 The appeal will be considered by an independent appeal panel. Final appeals must be submitted in writing within 28 days of the date of the stage 1 decision. This letter of appeal must provide the reasons for challenging the stage 1 decision and may include new documentary evidence. Appellants will be informed of the final decision in writing.

9.3.2 During the appeals process no new travel assistance will be provided or in the case of existing arrangements, no change will be implemented. A young person will be responsible for ensuring that they attend the educational establishment until the outcome of the appeal is determined. There is no right of appeal if a decision is made to vary the form of travel assistance. There is only a right of appeal if an application for travel assistance is refused or if existing travel assistance is ceased.

10 Removal of support

- 10.1 The Council may remove travel assistance with immediate effect where it is proven that assistance was obtained on the basis of fraudulent or misleading information, or where the young person's individual circumstances have changed, which results in young person no longer being eligible for support or has been assessed as not requiring such support.
- 10.2 The Council expects young people to behave appropriately on transport and must ensure health and safety of all passengers and staff is maintained. Any behavioral issues whilst on transport will be dealt with by the Council in conjunction with young person's educational establishment. Transport may be suspended whilst an investigation is undertaken. In such circumstances, it will remain the responsibility of the parent/carer to ensure that the young person attends the educational establishment in the interim period.

Proposed policy for public consultation