

Updated: 16<sup>th</sup> February 2023

# **Public Consultation on the Warwickshire County Council Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Home to School Transport Service 2022**

## **Q&As**

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### **1. Changes to the application process for SEND home to school transport**

We are proposing to introduce a new application process which would remove the need for parents/carers to make a separate application for SEND home to school transport which they have to do currently.

The new process would ask parents/carers to make an expression of interest at the same time as applying for their child's school place. A simple 'Yes/No' tick box on the school application form would let us know that they wish their child to be considered for SEND home to school transport.

**If approved, the new application process would be introduced in time for parents/carers applying for a school place for September 2024.**

#### **Q – Why do you want to change the application process for SEND home to school transport?**

A - We are proposing changes to the way parents/carers apply for SEND home to school transport as we believe this will provide a more efficient and improved overall service for families. This change will not affect eligibility, or the type of transport options offered to children and young people.

#### **Q – What are the benefits to families of changing the application process?**

A - We believe the new application process should make it easier and simpler for parents/carers who may find the current application form time-consuming and complicated to complete.

It should also minimise any delays and mean that parents/carers are informed sooner about transport options for their child/young person therefore giving them longer to put arrangements in place for the start of the academic year.

**Q – Are there any other benefits to changing the application process?**

A – By asking parents/carers to express their interest in home to school transport when they make their child or young person’s school application, this will allow our transport team more time to plan effectively and work with transport providers to offer appropriate transport based on level of need. It is hoped that this will result in better value for money being achieved. Under the current arrangements, the transport team can be expected to plan transport with little notice, due to the application process taking place later in the year, which can result in a higher number of costlier options being used, such as taxis.

**Q - My child/young person currently receives SEND home to school transport will this affect us?**

A – If approved, the proposals would be implemented first for new applications and change of circumstances, for example where a child has changed school or moved house. Other than this, transport assistance will be reviewed as part of the annual review process and may be re-considered at that point.

**Q – What will happen if I don’t request transport when I submit my child/young person’s school application?**

A – There will be another opportunity for parents/carers to express an interest in home to school transport when they receive their school placement confirmation.

For arrangements to be put in place in time for the start of the academic year all requests for transport will need to be submitted by the deadline given. Any requests submitted after this date will still be considered but we cannot guarantee that arrangements will be in place for the start of the academic year.

**Q – What do I do if my child/young person has moved to a new education setting, and I need to apply for transport?**

A – Parents/carers will be asked to confirm whether they want to be considered for transport assistance or not.

**Q – What do I do if we’ve moved house and I need to apply for transport?**

A – Parents/carers would be asked to confirm whether they want to be considered for transport assistance or not.

**Q – What will happen after I express an interest in home to school transport when applying for my child/young person’s school place?**

A - This information will be passed to our school transport team and if your child or young person is eligible for transport, they can start looking at options and ensure appropriate transport is offered and/or set up in time for your child or young person’s start date.

**Q - If a child or young person travels by public transport will there be someone at home to meet them?**

A - It is the responsibility of parents and carers to ensure there is someone at home to meet the child or young person whether they travel by public transport or specialist vehicle.

**Q - How will a child or young person get to the bus stop or boarding point if using public transport?**

A – If a child or young person is travelling by public transport, it will be the responsibility of parents and carers to accompany them to the bus stop or boarding point at the time when buses are scheduled to arrive/depart. Young people who have been successfully travel trained may be signed off as able to do this independently.

**Q - Who does the risk assessment, and can it be appealed?**

A - Specialist Transport Risk Assessors complete the Risk Assessment. This is a collaborative document that the parent/carer has input to. If there are differences of opinion, the assessment will be peer-reviewed by a different Risk Assessor or the Team Leader.

**Q – You mention Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) only. What about children and young people without these who still have a need?**

A – This consultation is about home to school transport for those with EHCPs. Clarifications that are proposed are only applicable to those children and young people who have EHCPs.

Children and young people who do not have EHCPs might meet the criteria for mainstream home to school transport. The criteria are stated in the policy and there are no proposed changes to these.

## **2. Introduction of a Needs Assessment Matrix (NAM)**

The Needs Assessment Matrix (NAM) has been designed to build on existing practices and to make decision making more consistent and provide an evidence base for decisions.

The NAM focuses on five areas (Mobility, Medical, Behaviour, Vulnerability, and Independent Travel Training) and provides guidance for travel options as a result.

The NAM is to be used once a child or young person has been identified as eligible for transport assistance, so this is not a tool to identify if they are eligible or not, it is a tool to aide in the identification of which transport options are available.

**If approved, the NAM would be introduced in August 2023 and used to support risk assessors in identifying appropriate transport options for children and young people starting school in September 2023.**

**Children and young people currently accessing home to school transport will not be immediately affected but will be reassessed under the new framework if they move education settings or house after 1 August 2023.**

**Q – Why are you proposing to introduce a Needs Assessment Matrix?**

A - The Needs Assessment Matrix (NAM) is a tool that has been designed to help identify which travel options are available for a child or young person based on their level of need.

We believe it will provide a more consistent, evidence-based approach in how we assess requests for transport and will make the process more transparent and fairer for those children and young people who are eligible to receive transport.

**Q – How will the Needs Assessment Matrix help towards preparation for adulthood and increased independence for my child/young person?**

A - The matrix is intended to help us identify the most appropriate transport options for a child or young person based on their individual needs. Currently, there are some instances where a taxi or minibus may be provided for a child or young person, when in fact they may benefit from travelling more independently with the right support. By supporting young people to develop the confidence and skills needed to travel independently, we can help prepare them for adulthood and offer them a greater sense of freedom. Therefore, wherever it is appropriate for a child or young person, we would encourage more independent travel.

**Q – How will my child or young person be assessed against the Needs Assessment Matrix? What factors will you consider?**

A - There are five areas of the assessment – mobility, medical, behaviour, vulnerability, and independent travel training. Within each area, a 1-5 score will be given for need and likelihood. Those scores will be plotted on a matrix to give an

overall score for that area. Once the five area scores are completed, a total score will be given, which will correspond to an overall need level. This need level will identify the travel options available.

**Q – Is the Needs Assessment Matrix being introduced just to save money?**

A - The main reason the matrix is being proposed is to build on and improve the way we identify SEND transport options and to provide an evidence base. The aim is to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND in relation to transport.

We believe that by using the matrix we can ensure consistent and transparent decisions are being made about the most appropriate transport options for a child or young person based on their individual level of need. The matrix would provide a list of options for our transport assessors to present to children, young people, and their families.

However, it is important to state that we need to operate within the funding available from Central Government. Therefore, we are encouraging children, young people, their families, and key stakeholders to participate in the consultation to help us make the right decisions and choices on the proposed changes to SEND home to school transport across Warwickshire.

**Q - Will the introduction of the new assessment matrix result in a change to my child or young person's route and/or transport arrangements?**

A – Anyone currently in receipt of home to school transport would not be impacted by the changes, unless their child or young person moves to a new education setting or you move house after August 2023 (the planned implementation date of the framework, if approved).

Children or young people applying for a school place for September 2023 onwards would be assessed under the new framework.

**Q – Who in the risk assessment department is qualified to determine what status a medical need is classed as?**

A - Risk Assessors carry out the process with reference to medical professionals, submissions from GPs or consultants, and will ask for more information in the case of more complex or specific medical needs.

**Q - If I disagree with application of the Needs Assessment Matrix, do I have to appeal?**

A - No. If there is a difference of opinion between parent/carer and Transport Risk Assessor this will be clearly communicated. Their use of the matrix will then be peer-

reviewed by another Transport Risk Assessor and the Team Leader. This is not an appeals process.

**Q - Does the NAM take individual needs into account rather than putting CYP into umbrella categories?**

A - Within each category subjective decisions are made based upon evidence including from the EHCP. Differences in conditions and needs are considered in this and there are a range of outcomes available in each.

**Q - Will you be changing transport providers with the introduction of the Needs Assessment Matrix? My child or young person finds it difficult to manage change and has had the same driver for some time now.**

A –There will be no change of transport provider for children and young people currently in receipt of home to school transport. Anyone currently receiving transport assistance would only be reassessed according to the matrix following a change in circumstances such as a change of school, or house move. There may be an appropriate time in a child or young person’s journey through education where different options may become available.

**Q – Do you consider child safety and vulnerability as well as location?**

A - Location is important in terms of the school attended, and whether it is the one named on the EHCP, but thereafter the determination of which transport options are suitable will use the NAM to ensure needs, child safety and vulnerability are considered.

**Q - If there is no passenger assistant, how will the driver manage if an incident occurs on transport, or if an accident occurs?**

A - Mainstream school transport already operates with just a driver in many cases. There is a clear reporting process for the driver to notify managers if any issues occur, and this will continue.

If assistance is required in an emergency this will be sent by the company running the service, and if there is a need to review needs of those who use it this will be done by the Transport Risk Assessment team and Contract Monitoring Officers. It is unlikely that larger groups of children will be travelling together in a minibus without a passenger assistant, as the assessment of needs takes the combinations and needs of a group into account when deciding if one is needed.

**Q - If there is no passenger assistant on a school route, how will potential safeguarding concerns be managed? For example, the driver is alone with only one child on board.**

**A -** This is already the case for children and young people who use taxis and minibuses to travel to a mainstream primary or secondary school. All staff have enhanced DBS checks and attend mandatory training including safeguarding awareness.

We are not proposing to remove existing passenger assistants but will be considering the use of passenger assistants based on individual need for new applications or when there is a change in circumstances.

**Q - Is the Needs Assessment Matrix just an excuse to get out of providing school transport for vulnerable children?**

**A –** No. The introduction of the matrix does not change the eligibility criteria and will not reduce the numbers of those who are entitled to transport. It will help us make consistent and clear decisions on the most appropriate type of transport available based on the individual needs of the child or young person.

**Q – My child/young person is due to start school in September 2023, does this affect them?**

**A –** Yes. If the changes are approved, they will be implemented in August 2023 which means that anyone applying for a school place for September 2023 will be assessed using the new matrix.

**Q – What happens if I do not agree with the outcome of the assessment?**

**A –** If you do not agree with the outcome of the assessment or the transport options offered for your child or young person you can challenge the decision by going to appeal, in the same way that you can currently. The Council follows the Department for Education recommended appeals process. More information on this can be found on our website: [www.warwickshire.gov.uk/schooltransportappeal](http://www.warwickshire.gov.uk/schooltransportappeal)

**Q – How will my child or young person be affected by the introduction of the needs assessment matrix?**

The NAM will be used for any new applications. If your child or young person is already receiving transport assistance, the introduction of the NAM will not impact them. If you are a young person, parent or carer applying for new transport assistance, the NAM will guide the Council in their decision making of the options available to you.

**Q - What mechanism will the Council use to determine if a passenger assistant is needed?**

A – An assessment will be carried out to determine whether a passenger assistant is required. This will take into consideration the individual needs of the child or young person, the passengers they may share with and the size and type of vehicle they will be travelling on.

**Q – If my child/young person is eligible, what transport options could be offered?**

The Council decides the most appropriate means of supporting children and young people to travel to and from school, considering the aims of promoting independence and sustainable travel, while ensuring cost effectiveness.

The following types of travel assistance are provided:

- Bus pass for public transport supported with Independent Travel Training if necessary.
- Travel allowance for reimbursement of rail pass, supported with Independent Travel Training if necessary
- School bus
- School bus with passenger assistant
- Travel allowance or Direct Travel Payment
- Independent Travel Training
- Taxi
- Taxi with passenger assistant
- Accessible/adapted vehicle with passenger assistant

### **3. Updates to the Home to School and College Transport Policy (2020)**

The Home to School and College Transport Policy (2020) sets out our approach to providing transport to schools/education settings for children and young people aged 3 to 19 years old (up to 25 years for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities).

We are proposing some updates to our current policy [[Home to School Transport Policy](#)], to make it clearer and easier to understand.

**Q – Why are you making updates to the policy now?**



A – The council is consulting on the proposed changes to the application process and introduction of the Needs Assessment Matrix, this is a good opportunity to clarify some sections of the policy that have caused confusion in the past.

**Q – Which sections of the policy are you updating?**

A – The council is updating 3 sections of the policy, listed below with the specific subsections

- Section 4 - General principles applying to transport
  - 4.5 -Behaviour
- Section 5 - Provision of transport for those of compulsory school age
  - 5.1 - Transport Arrangements
  - 5.2 - Direct Travel Payments

**Q - Do the policy updates change eligibility criteria for my child or young person?**

A – No, the Council is seeking to clarify sections of the policy that have caused confusion in the past. This will lead to consistent, clear, and easily understood decisions that are made in a timely manner. We are not changing the eligibility criteria for children or young people.

**Q - I do agree that parents/carers should take some responsibility for malicious damage - how do you decide what is malicious or behavioural due to circumstances though?**

A – Any incidents will be thoroughly investigated, and a decision will be made based on reports from the driver and passenger assistant, and reference to the EHCP (Education, Health, and Care Plan) and risk assessment carried out by our team as we should already be aware of any expected behaviours.

**Q - If the needs of my child or young person do not change, will I still need to apply for transport every year?**

A – If transport is offered when a child or young person starts at a school or setting, then this will continue for the following academic years without the need to reapply, except in the following circumstances:

- When transferring from primary to secondary school, as there is a change in setting
- When transferring from infant to junior school (where applicable)
- If there is a change in home address
- For all those due to start year 12 (age 16 +). Annual reapplication is needed from the age of 16 as there are more options for post 16 education, and it is

necessary to reapply each year to ensure continued entitlement to transport whether attending schools or colleges. Additionally, for those aged 16-18 years there is an annual contribution for transport that is required.

**Q – Will children or young people who are transported to respite straight from school be affected by the changes?**

A – No. There are no changes proposed to respite transport.