

# CABINET



Date of Cabinet: **25 November 2024**

Title of report: **Post-16 SEND Transport – outcomes of second public consultation and proposed change to Council policy**

Name of Cabinet Member: **Councillor Lesley Storey**

Responsible Director: **Cath McEvoy-Carr – Director: Children and Families**

Report Authors: **Mark Patton – Assistant Director: Education**

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**Confidential / Not for Publication**  
**No**

**Key Decision**

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## **Report summary and link to Council priorities:**

This report provides a summary of the public consultation processes around changes to the current Council policy of providing free home-to-school transport for all post-16 learners with special educational needs and/or disabilities, and sets out a proposal to change the current Council policy.

## **Summary of decision being asked:**

Cabinet is asked to approve the proposed change to the current council policy to state that from September 2025 there will be no home-to-school transport commissioned by the Council for any new post-16 students with SEND. Post-16 students currently in receipt of commissioned SEND transport support will continue to receive this until their educational studies end.

## 1 What is the report about?

- 1.1 This report provides a summary of the public consultation processes undertaken as part of a strategic review of the Council's home-to-school transport policy for post-16 learners who have SEND. The report also makes a proposal for change to the current Council policy.

## 2 What decisions are being asked for?

- 2.1 Cabinet is being asked to approve the proposal that the current council policy is revised to state that from September 2025 there will be no home-to-school transport commissioned by the council for any new post-16 students with SEND. Post-16 students currently in receipt of commissioned SEND transport support will continue to receive this until their educational studies end.

## 3 Why are the proposals being put forward?

### Background

- 3.1 The law requires a local authority to provide free home to school transport to eligible children and young people who are aged 5 to 16 years old. At the end of the academic year in which a young person reaches age 16, there is no longer a legal duty on a local authority to provide transport.
- 3.2 The 2023/24 outturn position for education was a reported pressure of £0.7 million, with significant pressure on the SEND Transport Service resulting from increased demand for services.
- 3.3 The 2024/25 projected outturn position for education at Quarter 2 shows an increase in projected pressure to £2.3 million, which again includes significant demand pressures in SEND Transport.
- 3.4 The 2025/26 draft budget assumptions update to Cabinet in September 2024 included total estimated Council cost pressures of over £30 million, with the estimated pressure on SEND Transport amounting to approximately 10% of this total figure.
- 3.5 As the projected increase in funding is not sufficient to meet the increased costs of providing services, it is imperative that the Council takes steps to reduce costs to ensure that we can continue to meet our statutory responsibilities and that we remain financially resilient.
- 3.6 Transport costs have significantly risen year-on-year. Given the budget restraints across the council it is no longer viable for Newcastle City Council to continue to provide free transport assistance to everyone regardless of their age.
- 3.7 Newcastle City Council currently (October 2024) provides transport assistance to **193** students to support them to attend their post-16 education

setting. The same eligibility criteria are currently applied as to young people who are below 16 years of age. The Council spent £1.3m on post-16 SEND transport in 2023/24; the current forecast spend for 2024/25 is £1.6m.

- 3.8 In proposing this policy change, we are looking to increase further our independent travel training, and to create more inclusive opportunities for family-based approaches. This will help us to make efficient use of public resources to gain better outcomes and value for money.
- 3.9 We introduced independent travel training to eligible students in September 2022. This has been hugely successful and positively received by young people, their parent/carers, and the educational placements we are working with. In this school year, four students have already been signed off as independent travellers and the training team are currently working with a further 47 students on their theory and practical training. We are hoping that the continued success of this training will allow us to expand this offer and assist more young people to access this valuable opportunity to develop their independence as they move into adulthood.
- 3.10 As part of the Council’s budget setting consultation – November 2023 to January 2024 – we set out two proposed changes to how we administer post-16 SEND transport arrangements: one to increase flexibility in personal transport budgets and the second to reduce the costs of post-16 SEND transport. At that time, 49 people and organisations commented on these. The Council committed to a further consultation in the spring of 2024. The calling of a general election meant that the second consultation happened in late summer 2024.
- 3.11 As part of the Council budget setting process it was clear that maintaining the current arrangements was no longer affordable. Since that time, pressure on the Council budget has increased further during the early part of the financial year 2024/25 as referenced in other reports in this Cabinet meeting.
- 3.12 The second consultation happened over a ten-week period from Thursday 11 July 2024 to Friday 19 September 2024. The consultation document at Appendix A was circulated to all stakeholders via email, letter and using social media channels. The consultation document outlined the four options the Council was considering, and the basis for these. Note that there was not an option for ‘no change’ as a consequence of paragraph 3.7 above.
- 3.13 There were several methods available to respond to the consultation (see the consultation document at Appendix A):
  - a) an online form
  - b) the Council’s Let’s Talk platform
  - c) via email
  - d) in person at any of five face-to-face drop-in sessions –

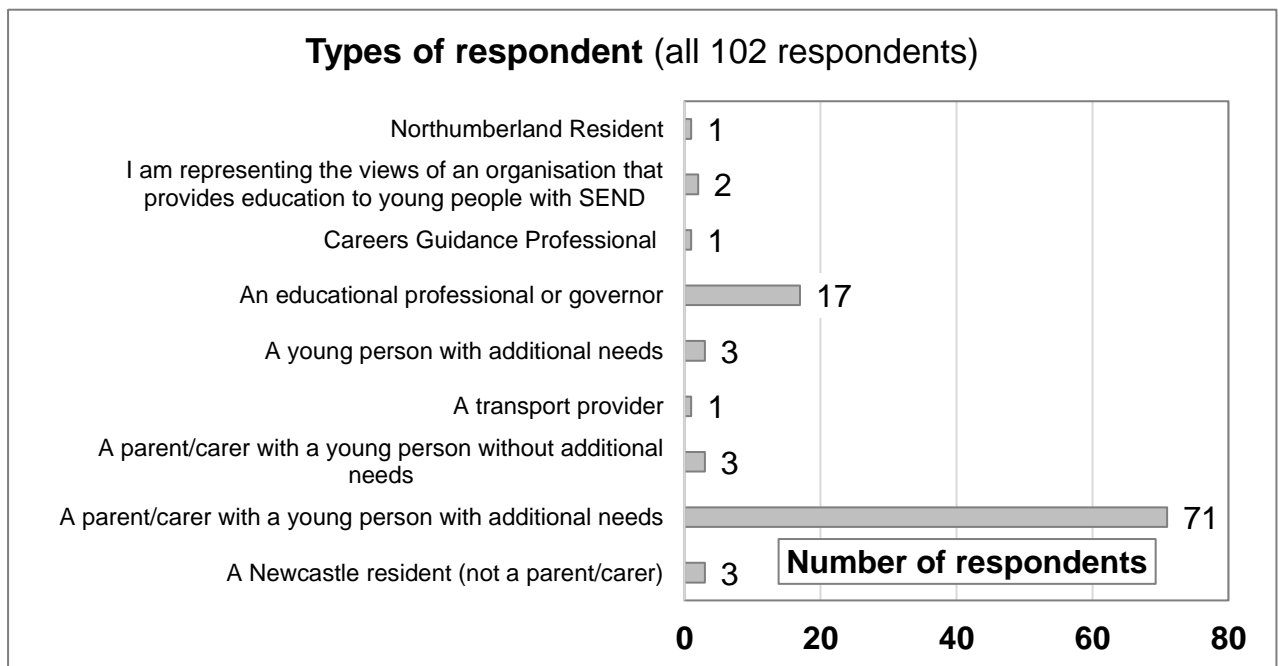
Date	Time	Venue
6 August	10am-11am	Galafield Family Hub

Date	Time	Venue
23 August	11am-12pm	Fawdon Children's Centre
3 September	5pm-6pm	Carnegie Building (Benwell)
11 September	10am-11am	Charlton Street (Lemington)
17 September	4pm-5pm	Byker Sands

A total of 41 families came to five drop-in sessions above, and seven professionals.

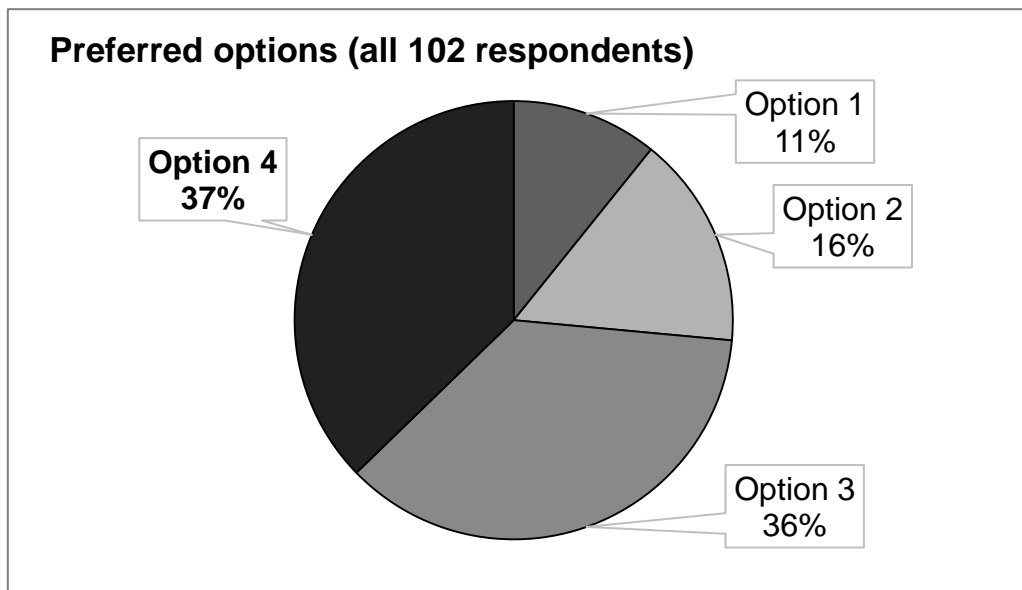
### Consultation findings

- 3.14 A total of 119 responses were received during the consultation. A small number of respondents replied more than once but with different option choices; at least one person responded three times to the consultation and gave a different option choice each time. Once these multiple choices had been removed, this left a total of **102** responses. (We have removed responses where it is clear that the same person has responded several times and chosen different options each time from the analysis, because we do not know which options are their genuine preference.)
- 3.15 The 102 respondents fell into a number of different categories:



## Preferred options – all respondents

- 3.16 We asked respondents what their preferred options for the future of post-16 SEND transport were (this was a required question):



- 3.17 The chart shows that the two options with the most responses are **option 4** (fixed charge of £650), with 38 people choosing this, and option 3 (tiered offer), with 37 people choosing this.

The options (Options 1-4) in full are as follows (they were provided on p2 of the consultation document at Appendix A):

**Option 1:** Stop delivering this service completely from September 2025 for all post-16 students.

**Option 2:** Stop delivering this service from September 2025 for any new post-16 students with SEND. Students currently in receipt of support will continue to receive this until their educational studies end.

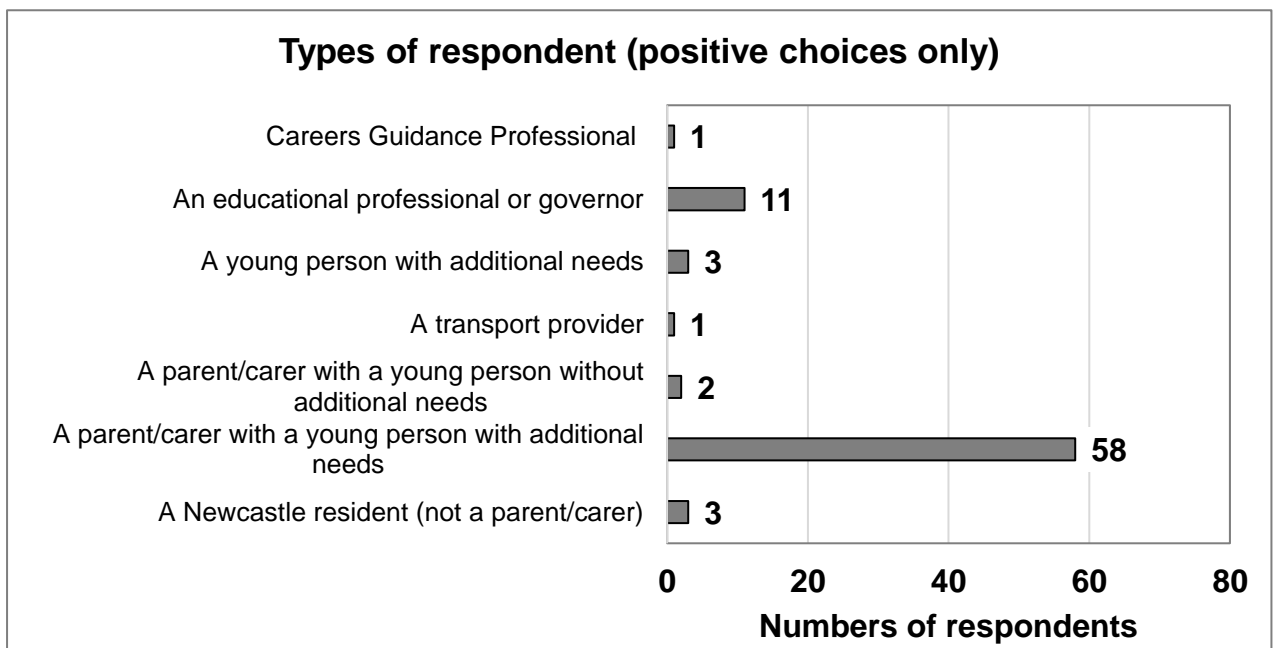
**Option 3:** From September 2025, introduce a tiered offer consisting of Independent Travel Training or a Personal Travel Budget following the outcome of assessment of the young person's needs and ability.

**Option 4:** From September 2025, if an eligible student is not able to travel independently or is not able to benefit from a Personal Transport Budget, we will introduce a fixed charge of £650 per eligible student towards the cost of their travel support for each school year. The charge is a contribution from the student toward the costs of arranging their home to school transport. Students aged 16-17 years old living in a low-income household would be exempt from the charge.

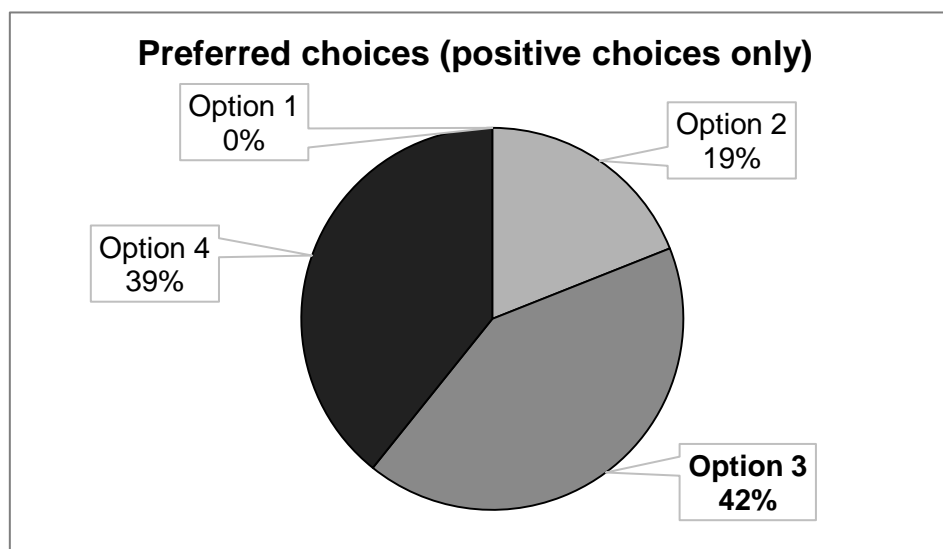
## Preferred options – respondents who positively expressed a preference

3.18 A significant number of this group – **23** respondents – stated in their comments that they did not like any of the four options presented and wished for the current policy to continue. We acknowledge their views; however, as stated in this report and in the consultation information presented, we do not see maintaining the current policy as a viable option. Therefore, we decided to analyse the data again to identify the preferences of the **79** respondents whose choices were made on the understanding that there is no option to maintain the current policy.

3.19 These 79 respondents fell into a number of different categories –



3.20 Looking at the preferred options of this group –



- 3.21 The chart shows that the two options with the most responses from this group are **option 3** (fixed charge of £650), with 33 people choosing this, and option 4 (tiered offer), with 31 people choosing this. Therefore, when we look at the preferences only of people who positively selected an option (without stating that they would prefer none of them), both options 3 and 4 have the highest number of responses, and option 3 has a higher number of responses.

### **Narrative responses from all respondents**

- 3.22 Alongside expressing a preference on their preferred option for change, all respondents were invited to submit a free text response to tell us more about their views on the proposals. The free text responses of all 102 respondents are reproduced at Appendix B. This is a confidential appendix only visible to decision-makers once any identifying personal details have been removed. We are not publishing these comments publicly in order to respect and protect respondents' privacy.
- 3.23 An analysis was carried out of the textual responses made by respondents. A summary of the main themes is presented below:
- a) **Opposition to Changes in Transport:** Many respondents express opposition to the proposed changes, with several stating that their children cannot travel independently due to their special needs. They emphasize the crucial role of transport in ensuring access to education.
  - b) **Financial Burden:** A recurring theme is concern over the financial impact on families. Parents fear they will not be able to afford the proposed contributions, especially those from low-income households or single-parent families.
  - c) **Impact on Routine and Mental Health:** Several comments highlight the negative impact that changes in transport might have on students' routines and mental health. This is particularly noted for children who thrive on consistency, such as those with autism.
  - d) **Concerns About Independent Travel:** While some respondents acknowledge the potential benefits of Independent Travel Training (ITT), many express doubts about its viability for their children, citing severe disabilities, vulnerabilities, or complex needs.
  - e) **Support for Tiered Options:** Some parents support the idea of a tiered system, such as Options 3 or 4, that includes assessments of individual needs and abilities. They suggest this approach could balance cost-saving measures with fairness.

### **Proposed policy change**

- 3.24 Financial pressures on the Council's core budget are unprecedented meaning that providing universal free transport for all post-16 learners with SEND is not financially viable. With the estimated cost pressure within SEND Transport comprising approximately 10% of the total estimated cost pressures for 2025/26, it is imperative that steps are taken to address this. In the face of existing and further increasing pressure on the Council's core budget it is regrettable that Options 3 and 4 are no longer considered to be financially viable.
- 3.25 It is therefore proposed that the current Council policy on home-to-school transport for post-16 learners be amended to reflect Option 2:

## **Option 2**

Stop delivering this service from September 2025 for any new post-16 students with SEND. [Post-16] Students currently in receipt of support will continue to receive this until their educational studies end.

### **4 What impact will this proposal have?**

4.1 The proposed action will support the Council's agreed medium term financial plan.

4.2 See also the risks outlined in section 12 of this report.

### **5 What are the equality, diversity and inclusion implications?**

5.1 A potential disadvantage may be that some post-16 learners with SEND are unable to access education providers further away from their home. We will mitigate this by improved access to independent travel training for children and young people to mean that post-16 learners with a disability can use accessible public transport confidently. We will also signpost to other sources of financial support that are available for young adults with disabilities.

### **6 What are the climate implications?**

6.1 There may be positive climate implications from the policy change proposed in the report if this results in an increase in the number of post-16 young people accessing public transport to travel independently to education.

### **7 How will success be measured?**

7.1 Quantifiably, we would expect that there will continue to be an increase in the number of post-16 young people who access education, training and employment independently.

### **8 What is the timetable for implementation?**

8.1 The proposed change will begin to take effect from the start of the 2025/26 academic year, that is from September 2025.

### **9 What are the legal implications?**

9.1 A representative of the Assistant Director Legal Services has reviewed the report and has no additional comments.

### **10 What are the finance implications?**

10.1 The representative of the Chief Finance Officer has reviewed the report and has confirmed that these proposals align to the budget savings outlined in the Council's medium term financial planning.

### **11 What are the procurement implications?**

11.1 There are no procurement implications contained in this report.

## 12 What are the key risks and how are they being addressed?

- 12.1 If this change of policy is not adopted then there will be further financial pressure on the Council's core budget. Adopting this policy change will keep this element of the medium term financial strategy on track.
- 12.2 A risk is that a number of post-16 learners with special educational needs and or disabilities may not be able to access post-16 education and may become NEET (not in education, employment or training). We will mitigate this by improved access to independent travel training for children and young people to mean that post-16 learners with SEND can use accessible public transport confidently. We will also signpost young people and families to other sources of financial support that are available for young adults to access post-16 education, such as bursaries.

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## Appendices

Appendix A – consultation document circulated to all stakeholders

**Confidential** Appendix B – full free text responses of 102 respondents (suitably redacted to prevent identification of individuals directly or indirectly)

Appendix C – updated Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) following second public consultation

## Background Paper

None

## Appendix A – consultation document for post-16 SEND Transport change



### Home to school transport consultation for post-16 students with SEND

We are proposing to review the way in which we provide home to school transport support to those students who are aged 16 years and over, and who have a special educational need and/or disability (SEND). We are asking you to tell us what you think about some options we are considering.

#### Background information

The law requires a local authority to provide free home to school transport to eligible children and young people who are aged 5 to 16 years old. At the end of the academic year in which a young person reaches age 16, there is no longer a legal duty on a local authority to provide transport. In addition, the right to transport assistance is at the discretion of the individual local authority.

Transport costs have significantly risen year on year and with budget restraints across the council it is no longer viable for Newcastle City Council to continue to provide free transport assistance to everyone regardless of their age.

Newcastle City Council currently provide transport assistance to **162** students to support them to attend their post-16 education setting. The same eligibility criteria are currently applied as to young people who are below 16 years of age.

Academic Year	No of post-16 pupils receiving home to school transport assistance	Total cost
2021/22	78	£1.2m
2022/23	127	£1.4m
2023/24	178	£1.3m

In proposing these changes, we are looking to increase independent travel training and to create more inclusive opportunities for family-based approaches. This will help us to make efficient use of public resources to gain better outcomes and value for money.

We introduced independent travel training to eligible students in September 2022. This has been hugely successful and positively received by young people, their parent/carers, and the educational placements we are working with. We are hoping that the continued success of this training will allow us to expand this offer and assist

more young people to access this valuable opportunity to develop their independence as they move into adulthood.

We would like your views on how we can shape our service to make it sustainable for the future.

Many other local authorities both nationally and regionally have changed their post-16 SEND transport policy or are currently consulting to make changes to their post-16 transport offer in line with our proposals below.

### **What are the options we are thinking about?**

The following are possible changes that we could make to ensure that we can continue to offer support where it is most needed.

#### **Option 1**

Stop delivering this service completely from September 2025 for all post-16 students.

#### **Option 2**

Stop delivering this service from September 2025 for any new post-16 students with SEND. Students currently in receipt of support will continue to receive this until their educational studies end.

#### **Option 3**

From September 2025, introduce a tiered offer consisting of Independent Travel Training or a Personal Travel Budget following the outcome of assessment of the young person's needs and ability.

#### **Option 4**

From September 2025, if an eligible student is not able to travel independently or is not able to benefit from a Personal Transport Budget, we will introduce a fixed charge of £650 per eligible student towards the cost of their travel support for each school year. The charge is a contribution from the student toward the costs of arranging their home to school transport. Students aged 16-17 years old living in a low-income household would be exempt from the charge.

Please see the frequently asked questions at the end of this document [on the next page] for further information.

## How do I reply about these proposals?

There are a number of ways that you can tell us what you think is the best option. You can:

- email us at this email address: [SENDTPConsultation@newcastle.gov.uk](mailto:SENDTPConsultation@newcastle.gov.uk)
- complete a simple online form. You open the online form by clicking [here](#).
- come and tell us what you think at one of these drop-in sessions:
  - 6 August, 10am-11am
  - 23 August, 11am-12pm
  - 3 September, 5pm-6pm
  - 11 September, 10am-11am
  - 17 September, 4pm-5pm

The venues for these drop-in sessions will be posted on the Local Offer website in the next week or two.

Thank you for reading this proposal and for thinking about it. And thank you for telling us what you think. This will help Councillors to make the best decision possible.

This consultation closes at **5pm on Friday 19 September 2024.**

10 July 2024

## FAQs (frequently asked questions)

### **If the post 16 transport offer is withdrawn will this impact on children who are currently in year 11 at a school who will be moving up to 6<sup>th</sup> form in the same school for their post 16 education?**

Yes. The same rules apply to schools as to all other educational establishments. Once pupils complete the academic year in which they turn 16, and changes to the post 16 transport offer will apply regardless of whether they are moving establishment or not.

### **If the post 16 transport offer is withdrawn for students going into year 12 or above in September 2025 is there any other financial support available to families to contribute towards getting young people to their education placement?**

16 to 19 bursary funds are there to help students remain in education. Families and young people can apply for funding if the young person meets the criteria. Students who are granted such a bursary will also need to agree to standards of attendance and behaviour with their school or college.

In Newcastle the following secondary schools have agreed a joint scheme called the Newcastle Schools' 16-19 Bursary Scheme, which is managed by the council:

- Benfield School
- Excelsior Academy
- Gosforth Academy
- Jesmond Park Academy
- Kenton School
- North East Futures UTC
- Sir Charles Parsons School
- St Cuthbert's Catholic High School
- St Mary's Catholic School
- Studio West
- Thomas Bewick School
- Walker Riverside Academy.

For more information of the Newcastle bursary scheme, follow the following link [16-19 Bursary Scheme | Newcastle City Council](#)

Further Education colleges also run bursary programmes that can offer assistance to students that can be used to support travel. For further information students or families should contact the college directly.

### **If a tiered offer is introduced, will families have the option to refuse to accept the Personal Travel Budget (PTB) offer or opt out of Independent Travel Training (ITT)?**

Independent travel training and public transport will be considered as the first option for all post 16 students requesting support with travel. The provision of transport may be withdrawn if a student or parent/carer refuses an assessment to determine their ability to travel independently or to undertake independent travel training, where this is felt to be appropriate by the local authority and/or placement provider. A Personal Travel Budget will always be offered to eligible students where the local authority believes this is appropriate based on the student's needs and is a more efficient use of funds, as opposed to arranging taxis.

### **Who will need to pay if a contribution for post 16 transport is introduced from September 2025?**

The proposed travel contribution of £650 per academic year and can be paid either in one full amount or in monthly instalments through a Standing Order arrangement. The amount identified is equivalent to an All Zone over-16 Travel Permit supplied by Nexus. The SEND transport team will offer PTB's and ITT and in exceptional circumstances door to door transport will continue to organise taxi provision where eligibility has been met and, in all cases, will still subsidise a large proportion of the cost.

Exemptions to the contribution include:

- children in care (CiC)
- low-income families (Highest Working Tax Credits or Free School Meals)
- young people assessed in their own right who are already making payments to Adult Social Care via a Personal Budget.