CABINET

Date of Cabinet:	**20 October 2025**
Title of report:	**Post-16 SEND Transport – outcomes of third 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:	**Ian Dawson – Interim Assistant Director: Education**

Confidential / Not for Publication **No**

Key Decision

Report summary and link to Council priorities:

This report provides a summary of the public consultation processes around the 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. The proposal reflects the Council's priority to provide sustainable governance of its financial resources and public money.

Summary of decision being asked:

Cabinet is asked to approve the proposed change to the current council policy to take effect from September 2026. The proposed policy – set out as part of the consultation letter at Appendix A of this report – will replace the current universal provision for eligible young people.

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 asked to approve the proposed change to the current council policy to take effect from September 2026. The proposed policy – set out as part of the consultation letter at Appendix A of this report – will replace the current universal provision for eligible young people. 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 outturn position for education shows an increased cost pressure of £2.5 million, which again includes significant demand pressures in SEND Transport.

3.4 The 2025/26 budget agreed at City Council in March 2025 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. Funding for this comes from the council's general fund and some elements of SEND transport can be funded from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant.

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 (June 2025) provides transport assistance to **213** 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, and spent £1.5m on post-16 SEND transport in 2024/25.

3.8 In proposing this policy change, we are looking to maximise the use of funding from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant where possible. We are also looking to increase further our independent travel training, and to create more inclusive opportunities for family-based approaches. Where affordable and possible, we will ask parents/carers to contribute to any SEND transport costs for post-16 learners. This will help us to make efficient use of public resources to gain better outcomes and value for money.

3.9 The Council has a responsibility to prepare young people with SEND for adulthood. Being able to access transport independently is an important part of this. 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 the school year 2023/24 11 young people were signed off as independent travellers, representing a significant step for them and an estimated cost saving to the council of £43,000 per year for these students. In this school year (2024/25), 12 students have already been signed off as independent travellers (estimated saving to the council of £67,000) and the training team are currently working with a further 13 students on their theory and 14 students on their practical training. We are hoping that the continued success of this training will allow us to expand this offer, with a larger training and assessment team, and assist more young people to access this valuable opportunity to develop their independence as they move into adulthood.

Previous consultations on this issue

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 The second consultation happened over a ten-week period from Thursday 11 July 2024 to Friday 19 September 2024. Following analyses of the responses to this second consultation, further work was carried out to ensure that a revised policy is more able to account for individual learner needs and family circumstances. Additionally, further work was done to scrutinise the content and impact of post-16 SEND transport policies of other local authorities in the region and beyond.

3.12 The third and most recent consultation took place over a four-week period from 28 April to 25 May 2025.

3.13 There were several methods available to respond to the 2025 consultation (see the consultation document at Appendix A):

a) an online form

b) the Council's Let's Talk platform

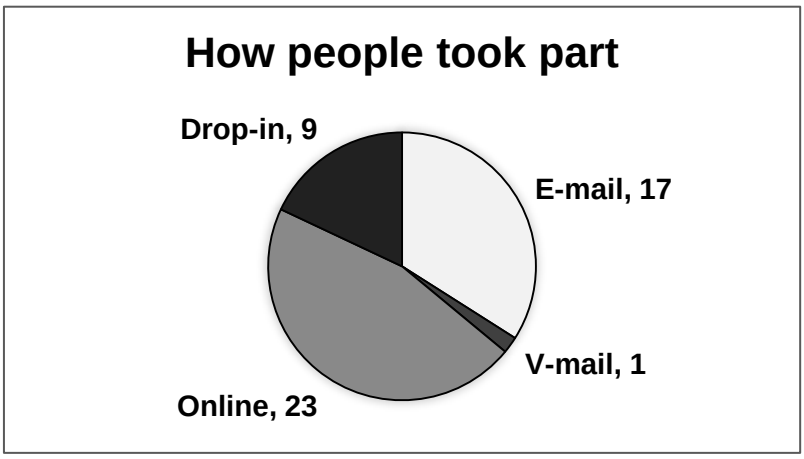
c) via email (electronic mail) or vmail (voicemail)

d) in person at any of four face-to-face drop-in sessions –

Date	Time	Venue
1 May	5pm-6pm	Gosforth Library
6 May	1pm-2pm	Galafield Family Hub, Kenton
12 May	10am-11am	Carnegie Building, Benwell
23 May	10am-11am	Byker Sands

Consultation findings

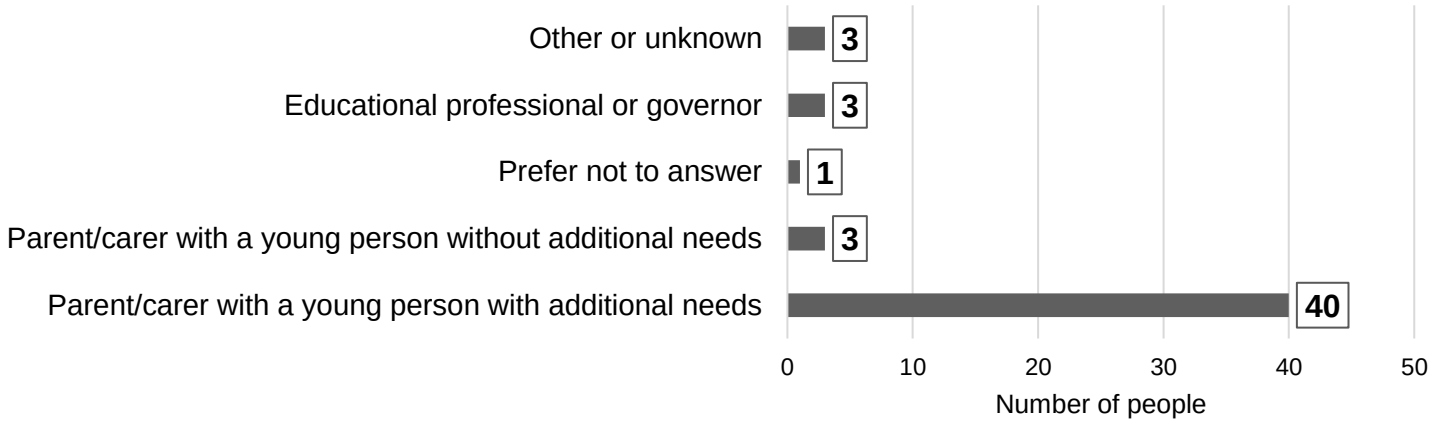
3.14 A total of 50 responses were received to this consultation from the methods shown, with 'online' (using the online survey) being the most common method used to take part:



This compares with 102 individual responses to the previous consultation in the summer of 2024.

3.15 The 50 respondents fell into a number of different categories:

Who took part



Narrative responses from all respondents

3.16 An analysis was carried out of the textual responses made by respondents. A summary of the main themes is presented below.

3.17 The consultation responses show a mainly negative reaction to the proposed changes to Newcastle City Council's post-16 SEND home-to-school transport policy. The main themes identified in people's comments were:

a. Strong opposition from most respondents
   - The majority of responses expressed concerns that the revised policy would create barriers to education for young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), particularly those unable to travel independently.
   - Many respondents described the proposed removal or reduction of funded transport as discriminatory and unfair.

b. Concerns about clarity, fairness, and implementation
   - Respondents reported that the policy lacks sufficient clarity about:
     - Eligibility criteria
     - Definitions of "exceptional circumstances"
     - How decisions will be made or reviewed.

c. Impact on family life and finances
   - Families emphasised the practical and emotional burden the policy would place on them, especially where parents would have to give up work or juggle complex caring responsibilities.
   - Some suggested that a means-tested contribution model would be more acceptable than removing support entirely.

d. A small number of supportive views
   - A minority of responses recognised the need to prioritise limited resources and welcomed the option of Personal Transport Budgets (PTBs), greater flexibility, and more targeted support for those with the highest need.

3.18 Conclusion

While a small number of respondents welcomed elements of flexibility and fairness in principle, the overwhelming sentiment expressed through the consultation is one of concern. Respondents fear the proposed changes would limit educational access, increase inequality, and disproportionately affect the most vulnerable.

Proposed policy change

3.19 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.

3.20 It is therefore proposed that the current Council policy for home-to-school transport for post-16 learners be amended to reflect the proposed Post-16 SEND Transport Policy with effect from September 2026.

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 who are able to can use accessible public transport confidently. We will also signpost to other sources of financial support that are available for young adults with disabilities.

5.2 In summary, students requiring support for home-to-school travel as part of their education, health and care plan will be offered access to alternatives such as independent travel training, a personal transport budget and post-16 bursaries on a case-by-case basis. Commissioned transport for eligible post-16 learners may also still be provided – with or without a parental contribution to costs – on a case-by-case basis and according the criteria set out in the Post-16 SEND Transport Policy statement.

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 2026/27 academic year, that is from September 2026.

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 the financial implications are as set out within the body of the report and its appendices.

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 contribute to keeping 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 having a graduated approach to accessing home-to-school transport support, and by maximising the use of the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant where permitted to reduce the pressure on the council's core budget.

12.3 This means that there isn't a blanket approach but one that is flexible according to individual needs and circumstances.

12.4 One of our key aims is to prepare young people for adulthood. Improved access to independent travel training for young people means that post-16 learners with SEND who are able to will be able 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.

Report Authors:

Ian Dawson, Interim Assistant Director: Education

ian.dawson@newcastle.gov.uk

Appendices

Appendix A – consultation letter and document circulated to all stakeholders

Appendix A(i) – Responses to the consultation (confidential)

Appendix B – Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

Appendix C – updated contextual information

Background Paper

None

Appendix A – consultation letter and document for post-16 SEND Transport Policy

SEND Transport Service
Newcastle City Council
Floor 3, Civic Centre
Barras Bridge
Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8QH

Email:
SENDTPConsultation@newcastle.gov.uk
www.newcastle.gov.uk

28 April 2025

Post-16 SEND Transport Policy 2026/27 – public consultation

Newcastle City Council is proposing to make some changes to the way that we support post-16 learners and their families to get from home to school and back again each day. These proposed changes only affect those children and young people with **special educational needs and or disabilities** (SEND).

There are three main reasons for suggesting changes. Firstly, we have been looking at what other local areas do and also listening to our families about how things could be better. We all want our young people to live an enjoyable, successful and full life when the time is right for them. We want our young adults in the city to be as independent as they can be; we want them to be able to experience the many exciting things that living and working in a city like Newcastle, in the wonderful north-east, has to offer. A big part of this is to be able to get around independently and use different types of transport easily and confidently.

Secondly, there are lots of young people who are not yet ready to travel independently. To help with this we can arrange independent travel training for young people, we can organise for taxis or buses to take post-16 learners to school or college, and we can provide money to families who want to take their children to school themselves. We have been looking at what other local areas do, and we think we can make further improvements to what we do. This will help more young people to be independent travellers and also give more families the flexibility to help them to get their own children to school each day.

Thirdly, we currently help some of our young people with SEND aged 16-19 to get to and from school or college. This means that many of these young people do not have to pay anything to go to school or college. The council does not have to do this but we have been doing it for many years. This costs the council a lot of money (well over a million pounds each year). We all know that times are tough and money is tight. This is true for the council as well. The council has to make decisions all the time on what things it spends the

money it has on. We are very sad to have to think about changing our free offer of support to 16-19 year-olds with SEND, but we feel that we simply have no choice.

We want to hear what you think about our proposals. The draft policy statement for 2026/27 can be found on our Local Offer website (www.newcastlesupportdirectory.org.uk/send-local-offer). This document will also tell you about the ways that you can tell us you think about the draft policy statement.

If you can't find the draft policy statement then email us at SENDTPConsultation@newcastle.gov.uk or call us on (0191) 277 4646.

We want to hear from you before the deadline which is **5pm** on **Sunday 25 May 2025**.

We look forward to reading and listening to your views.

Best wishes
Mark Patton
Assistant Director: Education

Post-16 Transport Statement 2026/27

The following transport statement applies to post-16 travel in the 2026/27 academic year.

There is no automatic or legal entitlement to free home to school or college transport once a student is over compulsory school age. Compulsory school age ceases on the last Friday in June in the school year in which a child reaches the age of 16. This is usually at the end of Year 11. However, Newcastle City Council will provide travel assistance to eligible learners aged 16 to 25 years to their place of study to promote participation, where the council deems it necessary.

Post-16 learners with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) – guiding principles

Some learners aged 16 to 25 years with Special Educational Needs, a disability or a medical need may be eligible for travel assistance if they study **full-time** on an approved course with the provider **closest to the learner's home** that can deliver the course.

Post-16 learners will have purposefully chosen their own post-16 programme of study or course. There should be a **clear pathway to employment or training** following the completion of post-16 education. This should be clearly articulated in their EHCP (education health and care plan).

It is expected that learners will **attend school or college regularly** to take up their chosen course. Where a learner is receiving home to school/college transport assistance and is not attending regularly (for example, average attendance for the academic year falls below **80%** after the first term) then the council reserves the right to review any transport assistance arrangements in consultation with the learner, their family and the provider.

Learners with special educational needs or a disability who attend a **Further Education College** have the same entitlement to travel assistance as those attending a school setting, except for the following:

- passenger transport assistants may be provided to a further education establishment if a learner's disability or medical condition requires this
- assistance required to alight from transportation must be organised by prior arrangement with the college staff.

Repeating a course or programme of study

It is occasionally necessary for a post-16 learner to repeat a course or qualification. There are many reasons why this might be necessary. As a general guide, we would not consider it an appropriate use of public funds to support a post-16 learner to repeat a course or qualification more than once.

Process of assessing post-16 SEND transport eligibility

If the post-16 learner is eligible for assistance with home to school/college transport, this will usually be in the form of a **personal transport budget** unless exceptional circumstances apply. We will adopt a graduated approach to considering the provision of home to school/college support according to the following steps:

1. Is the chosen post-16 programme of study/course a **full-time** course and at the **closest provider** to the learner's home where there is a choice of providers? If yes, then,
2. assess eligibility for SEND transport support - Applications for travel support for post-16 students with additional needs will be assessed in accordance with the criteria outlined on the Special Educational Needs Disabilities web page. If eligible then,
3. assess eligibility for Independent Travel Training – see section below. If this is not appropriate for the learner at this stage then,
4. discuss an appropriate Personal Transport Budget according to learner's and family's needs – see section below. If this is not appropriate for the family at this stage then,
5. assess eligibility for a personal financial contribution to home to school/college travel costs – see section below. If this is not appropriate then,
6. SEND Transport Service may arrange home to school travel support arrangements according to the needs of individual children. Note: to ensure the appropriate use of public funds learners receiving local-authority arranged transport may be required to have a period of waiting time either before and/or after their timetable courses. This may allow learner journeys to be combined to maximise the use of public funds. This will be reviewed annually or if any circumstances change.

Newcastle SEND Transport Service Independent Travel Training Offer

Newcastle City Council promotes independent travel training which enables young people with additional needs to learn new skills which can be used for travelling to post-16 education or training placements using public transport. Independent travel training enables young people to gain confidence, develop social, communication and life skills, promotes good health and wellbeing, and ultimately leads to them becoming more independent.

Independent travel increases access to education, employment, and training opportunities, to health services and social/leisure activities. If a young person has an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), the need for support with travel after the age of 16 should have been reviewed and written into their Transition Plan, which must include the views of the young person. The Transition Plan should specify actions that will be taken to help the student develop their independent travel skills in preparation for attending their next placement after leaving school.

For more information contact the SEND Transport Team on 0191 2774646 between 7.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, or via email to SENDTransportservice@newcastle.gov.uk.

Personal Travel Budget (PTB) for children with additional needs

Personal Travel Budgets (PTBs) will help families to arrange learners' home to school travel arrangements in a way that suits their personal circumstances.

A PTB is usually provided to parents or carers of learners with Special Education Needs Disability (SEND) who are eligible for travel assistance. It allows families to make flexible arrangements, monitor the quality of their young person's transport directly or they could work with other families to achieve the best possible travel arrangements for their young people in a cost-effective way.

What are the benefits of personal travel budgets?

PTBs provide freedom and flexibility for families to choose the most appropriate travel arrangements that best fit with their individual circumstances.

It provides choice and control over how funding is used to get the learner to and from school/college on time in a way that suits the family best.

It ensures public resources are distributed in a fair and cost-effective way according to need.

It allows families to explore opportunities to share with other parents/carers and potentially increase buying power.

Who can get a Personal Travel Budget?

A family can get a PTB if the post-16 learner is eligible for travel assistance from the council. Additionally, when deciding to offer a PTB, the SEND Transport Service team would look at the learner's attendance record at school. Families may be refused a PTB if the learner's average attendance is currently below 80%.

How is a Personal Travel Budget worked out, and how much will I get?

The Personal Travel Budget band is based on the mileage between home and school. The amount paid is based on two return journeys between home and school each school day of the year.

Band 1 – Up to 5 miles (between home and school, one way) = £2,000 per school year

Band 2 – Over 5 miles up to 10 miles (between home and school, one way) = £3,000 per school year

Band 3 – Over 10 up to 15 miles (between home and school, one way) = £4,000 per school year

Band 4 – Over 15 miles up to 20 (between home and school, one way) = £5,000 per school year

Band 5 – Over 20 miles (between home and school, one way) = £0.50 per mile to and from the school and based on a standard return trip. Payments are based upon 190 days travelling per school year.

How will I be paid and how often will I be paid?

Payments will be made by bank transfer in advance on either a 4- or 5-weekly basis. 10% of the total amount is paid at the end of the academic year, subject to a minimum of 95% average attendance*****. The remaining 90% is paid in 11 instalments. Instalments will be made from the beginning of the academic year (September) or commencement of the PTB.

*****An authorised absence qualifies as an attendance for the purposes of calculating the average yearly attendance for PTB purposes.

> **EXAMPLE**
> Journey from home to school = 4 miles
> PTB falls into Band 1 = £2,000 per year
> 11 x monthly payments from September of £163.64, paid in advance
> Final payment £200 paid in August following confirmation of attendance across the school year.

Will I have to pay money back if transport support is not needed?

Yes. The payment structure should make this less difficult for families to manage.

Can I get help with arranging transport if I have a PTB?

Yes. We provide support and advice about how to use a PTB, and advice about how to make any arrangements with providers. However, you must put the arrangements in place yourself.

For further information about PTBs contact SEND Transport Service on 0191 2774646 between 7.30am to 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, or by email to SENDTransportservice@newcastle.gov.uk.

Personal financial contribution to post-16 transport costs

We may ask families to make a financial contribution to the costs of any transport arranged by the council's SEND Transport Service. We will only do this if the family's financial circumstances mean that the free school meals criteria are not applicable. Families new to the city with post-16 learners with SEND may be required to provide appropriate financial information to the council to enable the free school meals assessment to be carried out.

How much will this financial contribution be?

For the academic year 2026/27, the indicative financial contribution we will ask for is **£980.10**. This figure is based on the cost of a Network One Student and Young People

monthly ticket (currently £89.10) for 11 months of the year, and is line with charges raised by some of our regional local authority neighbours. Please note that this charge will be confirmed in the spring or summer of 2026 when the cost of the monthly ticket for the 2026/27 school year is confirmed.

How will this financial contribution be collected?

We will send an annual invoice which can be paid either in full or in instalments.

What will happen if I don't pay?

Any home-to-school transport support in place will be ceased immediately and action taken to recover any financial contribution due to the council.

What happens if my family circumstances and income change during the year?

You MUST contact the SEND Transport Service immediately to discuss any change in circumstances.

Contact

For further information or answers to any further questions, please contact the SEND Transport Team on **0191 2774646** between 7.30am and 4.30pm, Monday to Friday, or via email to **SENDTransportservice@newcastle.gov.uk**.

o o O o o

Statement to be reviewed: in the autumn term of 2026 in preparation for the 2027/28 academic year

Tell us what you think of this policy statement by –

- Filling in a short online form by clicking here: https://forms.office.com/e/E20hqPCs6N
- Writing to us at: Post-16 SEND Transport Consultation, SEND Transport Service, Newcastle City Council, Floor 3, Civic Centre, Barras Bridge, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE1 8QH
- Responding via Let's Talk Newcastle Online: www.letstalknewcastle.co.uk
- Tell us what you think in person at one of our personal drop-in sessions:

Date	Time	Venue
Thursday 1 May	5pm-6pm	Gosforth Library, Regent Farm Road, Gosforth
Tuesday 6 May	1pm-2pm	Galafield Centre, Newbiggin Lane, Newbiggin Hall
Monday 12 May	10am-11am	Carnegie Building, Atkinson Road, Benwell
Friday 23 May	10am-11am	Byker Sands Family Centre, 19 Raby Cross, Byker

These drop-in sessions are for individuals who wish to give us their views in person. This means that you might have to wait until someone else has finished speaking with our staff.

- Call us and leave your views on **0191 277 8886**.

Remember the deadline for responses is **5pm** on **Sunday 25 May 2025**.

Appendix B – updated Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) following third public consultation

Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA)

Informing our approach to fairness

Proposal: Review of the provision of SEND transport support to post-16 learners
Date of assessment: June 2025
Lead Officer: Mark Patton
Assessment team: Deanne Taylor, Linda Steel
Portfolio: Children and Families
Version: 3
Planned review date: Autumn term 2026

Newcastle City Council

Section A: Current service

1. What does the service / function / policy do?

Newcastle City Council believes that strong and effective education, training, and care for everyone – whatever their background – will create a more productive economy, fit for the future, and ensure that everyone has a chance to reach their potential to live a more fulfilled life.

Local authority transport policies play an important role in supporting young people's participation in education and training. By publishing their transport policies each year, local authorities enable young people (and their parents/carers) to take reasonable account of the arrangements available when choosing between different options.

Local arrangements should ensure that those with the most severe disabilities with no other means of transportation are able to undertake further education and training after their 19th birthday to help them move towards more independent living.

Local authorities must act reasonably, taking into account all relevant matters, such as the needs of their population, the local transport infrastructure, and the resources available.

Newcastle City Council currently offer a variety of travel arrangements for eligible students aged 16-25 with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) to access education and training places including:

- travel permits.
- passenger transport assistants if a student's disability or medical condition requires this.
- independent travel training.
- personal travel budgets provide freedom and flexibility for families and carers to choose the most appropriate travel arrangements for their child that fit with their personal circumstances.

2. Who do we deliver this service / function / policy for?

The SEND Transport service supports children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) who need help to get from home to their place of education and back again. Not all children and young people can access this service. The government publishes rules that the Council has to stick to when deciding who can use the service.

Currently 1,139 (84% of all SEND transport users) children aged 16 and under use this service, and 213 (16% of all SEND transport users) young people use the service to access post-16 education.

3. Why do we deliver this service / function / policy?

Supporting eligible children and young people with SEND to get from home to school is a legal requirement for those up to and including the age of 16 years. It is an optional service for those young people with SEND aged over 16 years in their post-16 education studies, with some exceptions.

The relevant statutory guidance documents are published by the Department for Education as **Travel to school for children of compulsory school age, June 2023**[1], and **Post-16 transport and travel support to education and training, January 2019**[2]. Further reference to legal statute (for example the relevant Education Act) are contained in these guidance documents.

4. How much do we currently spend on this service / function / policy?

Gross expenditure (post-16 SEND transport): £1,500,000
Gross income (post-16 SEND transport): £0
Net budget (all SEND transport services): £10,300,000

Comments: The expenditure is funded by the council's General Fund.

5. How many people do we employ to deliver this service / function / policy?

Number of posts: 19
Number of full-time equivalent officers: 14.28

Comments: These staff deliver the whole of the SEND Transport service, not just the post-16 element. All staff members deliver the service to families with children and young people of all ages. There are no staff members who only work with post-16 young people.

Section B: Proposal for future service

1. How do we proposed to change the service / function / policy?

We are proposing a graduated approach to decision-making about post-16 SEND transport as set out in the consultation document. Briefly, if the post-16 learner is eligible for assistance with home to school/college transport, this will usually be in the form of a **personal transport budget** unless exceptional circumstances apply. We will adopt a graduated approach to considering the provision of home to school/college support according to the following steps:

[1] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1165730/Travel_to_school_for_children_of_compulsory_school_age.pdf
[2] https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5c48534c40f0b616fba5cb6a/Post16_transport_guidance.pdf

1. Is the chosen post-16 programme of study/course a **full-time** course and at the **closest provider** to the learner's home where there is a choice of providers? If yes, then,
2. assess eligibility for SEND transport support - Applications for travel support for post-16 students with additional needs will be assessed in accordance with the criteria outlined on the Special Educational Needs Disabilities web page. If eligible then,
3. assess eligibility for Independent Travel Training. If this is not appropriate for the learner at this stage then,
4. discuss an appropriate Personal Transport Budget according to learner's and family's needs. If this is not appropriate for the family at this stage then,
5. assess eligibility for a personal financial contribution to home to school/college travel costs. If this is not appropriate then,
6. SEND Transport Service may arrange home-to-school/college travel support according to the needs of individual young people.

The consultation is likely to take place in the spring term 2025, with a decision from Cabinet in July 2025.

2. What evidence have we used to inform this proposal?

The consultation options above have been proposed based on an analysis of the costs of this service in the past and on indicative forecasts of post-16 learner numbers in the next few years. Feedback from previous consultations has also been taken into account. In addition to this, see the research done with other local authorities that is reported in Section C1 below.

We have also monitored decisions taken by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman where parents/carers have appealed the decisions of local authorities on this matter.

The final decision on any proposed change to the post-16 SEND transport policy will be taken by the Council's Cabinet. This decision will be informed by the outcomes of a full stakeholder consultation.

3. What will be the financial impact of this proposal?

It is difficult to forecast the exact savings that this proposal will yield. However, paragraph 3.9 provides contextual detail of savings that can be achieved by independent travel training for young people who are ready and able to undertake this. Further, we do not ask parents/carers for any financial contribution to post-16 transport costs so any contributions that are forthcoming will reduce the cost pressure on this budget.

4. What will be the impact upon our employees of this proposal?

Number of FTE: Not applicable.
% of workforce: Not applicable.

Comments: There is no anticipated impact on Council employees.

Section C: Consultation

1. Who did we engage with to develop this proposal?

Who we have engaged with to develop this proposal: we have spoken with and researched what other local authorities do.
When / how: this research work has been done over the last twelve months or so through a mixture of talking with individual local authorities and researching their policies published on their council websites.
Main issues raised:

- Many local authorities are struggling to maintain support for post-16 SEND transport because it is unfunded by central government.
- Some local authorities, like Newcastle, currently have a 'full' offer.
- Other local authorities charge post-16 learners a fixed sum each year (or term) as a **contribution** to their education travel costs. A typical or average sum is £650 per year.
- Some larger local authorities use a system of means-testing to assess whether families can afford to support their post-16 young people with the costs of travelling to their chosen place of education. If they can, then no financial support is provided. If families cannot afford to support their young people with educational travel costs, then support is provided. This is closely and regularly monitored, and the support is withdrawn if affordability becomes possible for the family. The number of eligible post-16 SEND learners in Newcastle is relatively small (currently 213). It is estimated that the costs of setting up and then maintaining a means-testing process would negate any potential savings. It was also felt that such means-testing may be perceived by families as unnecessarily intrusive.
- Some local authorities do not fund post-16 SEND transport at all.

2. Who do we want / need to engage with during consultation?

Who we want to engage with during consultation: all stakeholders –

- Current Year 10 and Year 11 pupils with SEND and their families.
- Current post-16 learners and their families.
- Newcastle's Parent-Carer Forum.
- All post-16 providers, including schools, colleges, and training providers.
- Council for Disabled Children (CDC).
- Elected members.
- Newcastle's MPs.

The consultation will be publicised via our council website, Let's Talk and social media and the city's Local Offer website (our one-stop shop for all things SEND related).

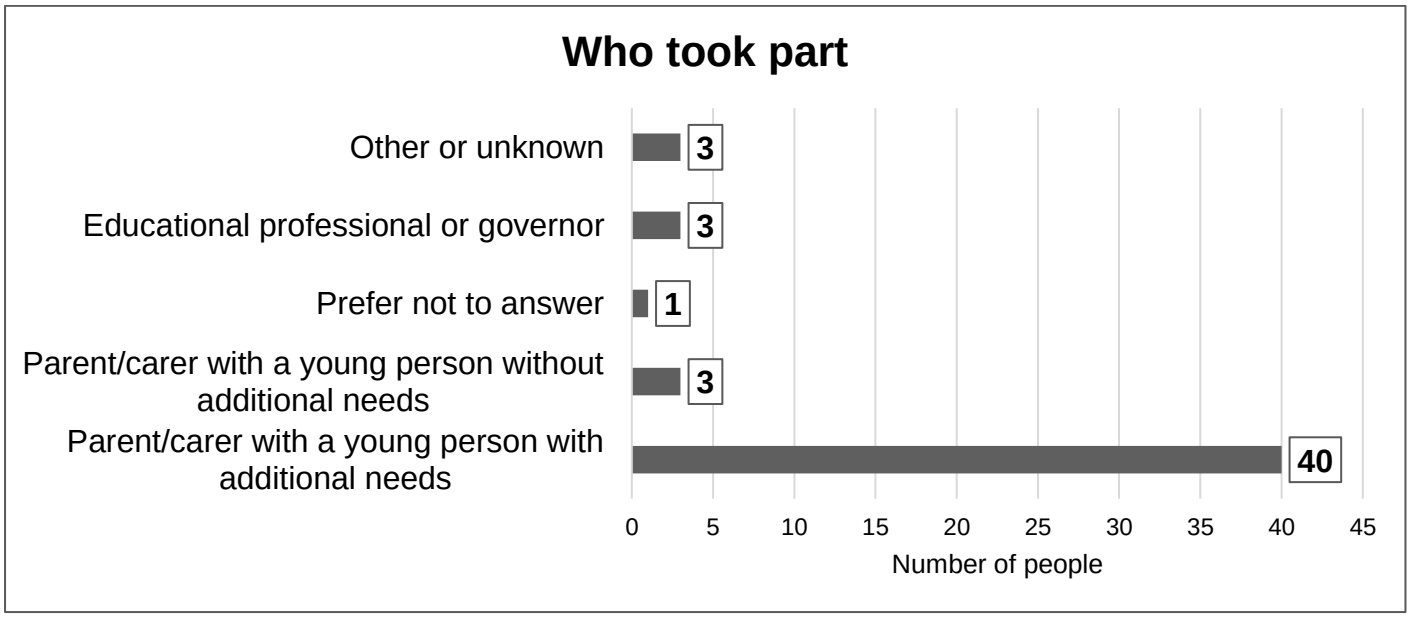
When / how: spring term 2025 (April to May). People will be able to use a variety of ways of telling us what they think about the options, including –

- electronically, including via the Council's Let's Talk process
- writing to us
- talking with us at various face-to-face drop-in sessions that will be publicised
- talking with us in a number of online sessions that will be publicised.

3. Who provided feedback during the consultation process? (to be completed post-consultation)

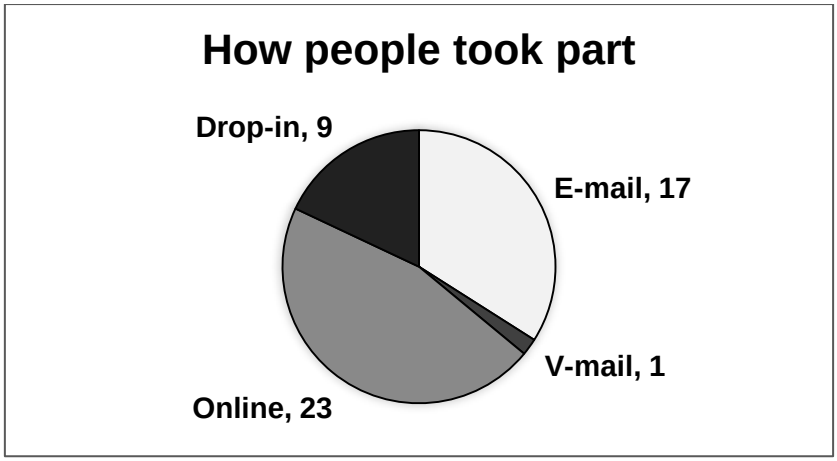
Who provided feedback in the consultation process (to be completed post-consultation):

During the third four-week consultation (April to May 2025), the respondents fell into the following groups:



The 'Other or unknown' category includes a response from Contact, a charity for families with disabled children. The two other respondents in this category did not declare in which capacity they were responding.

When / how: During the third four-week consultation (April to May 2025), respondents provided their views through a number of different routes:



Main issues raised: see paragraph 3.24 of the report for a more detailed analysis, but in summary while a small number of respondents welcomed elements of flexibility and fairness in principle, the overwhelming sentiment expressed through the consultation is one of concern. Respondents fear the proposed changes would limit educational access, increase inequality, and disproportionately affect the most vulnerable.

Section D: Impact assessment

The section below sets out actual or potential disadvantages or benefits that may arise from implementing this proposal. This assessment is set out for people with characteristics protected by the Equality Act 2010 and other broader areas of potential impact.

People with protected characteristics

Age

Type of impact: Potential disadvantage and potential benefit.

Detail of impact: Potential disadvantage may be that post-16 learners with SEND are unable to access education providers further away from their home.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: improved access to independent travel training for children and young people to mean that they can use public transport confidently. In addition, a contribution to travel costs may be provided, depending upon which stage of the assessment process the learner reaches (see section B1 of this impact assessment).

Disability

Type of impact: Potential disadvantage and potential benefit.

Detail of impact: Potential disadvantage may be that post-16 learners with SEND are unable to access education providers further away from their home.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: improved access to independent travel training for children and young people to mean that post-16 learners with a disability who are able to can use accessible public transport confidently. Signposting to other sources of support that are available for young adults with disabilities. In addition, a contribution to travel costs may be provided, depending upon which stage of the assessment process the learner reaches (see section B1 of this impact assessment).

Gender reassignment

Type of impact: None.

Detail of impact: Not applicable.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: Not applicable.

Sex

Type of impact: None.

Detail of impact: Not applicable.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: Not applicable.

Marriage and civil partnership

Type of impact: None.

Detail of impact: Not applicable.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: Not applicable.

Pregnancy and maternity

Type of impact: None.

Detail of impact: Not applicable.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: Not applicable.

Race and ethnicity

Type of impact: None.

Detail of impact: Not applicable.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: Not applicable.

Religion and belief

Type of impact: None.

Detail of impact: Not applicable.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: Not applicable.

Sexual orientation

Type of impact: None.

Detail of impact: Not applicable.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: Not applicable.

Other potential impacts

Unpaid carers

Type of impact: Potential disadvantage.

Detail of impact: Post-16 learners with SEND are unable to access education providers further away from their home, removing choice. There may be significant risk to the young person linked to their disabilities and cost implications to households who are already/likely to be experiencing poverty.

How will this be addressed or mitigated? improved access to independent travel training for children and young people will mean that they can use public transport confidently. In addition, a contribution to travel costs may be provided, depending upon which stage of the assessment process the learner reaches (see section B1 of this impact assessment).

People vulnerable to socio-economic impacts

Type of impact: Potential disadvantage.

Detail of impact: Post-16 learners with SEND may be unable to access education providers further away from their home.

How will this be addressed or mitigated? improved access to independent travel training for children and young people will mean that they can use public transport confidently. In addition, a contribution to travel costs may be provided, depending upon which stage of the assessment process the learner reaches (see section B1 of this impact assessment).

Businesses

Type of impact: Potential disadvantage.

Detail of impact: employers wishing to provide training, apprenticeship, internship, or work experience opportunities for post-16 learners may find that young people are unable to travel to the workplace and/or their place of education affordably.

How will this be addressed or mitigated? improved access to independent travel training for children and young people to mean that they can use public transport confidently. In addition, a contribution to travel costs may be provided, depending upon which stage of the assessment process the learner reaches (see section B1 of this impact assessment).

Geography

Type of impact: None.

Detail of impact: Not applicable.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: Not applicable.

Community cohesion

Type of impact: None.

Detail of impact: Not applicable.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: Not applicable.

Community safety

Type of impact: Potential disadvantage.

Detail of impact: if post-16 learners with SEND are unable to access education providers further away from their home or are unable to travel to the workplace and/or their place of education affordably, they may become at risk due to interlinked vulnerabilities of disability alongside dis-engagement with education and/or employment, with limited support, and nothing to do all day.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: improved access to independent travel training for children and young people to mean that they can use public transport confidently If children and young people can be supported to access independent travel safely, and can continue to access education and training, this should benefit them in the longer term. In addition, a contribution to travel costs may be provided, depending upon which stage of the assessment process the learner reaches (see section B1 of this impact assessment).

Public Health

Type of impact: None.

Detail of impact: Not applicable.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: Not applicable.

Climate

Type of impact: None.

Detail of impact: Not applicable.

How will this be addressed or mitigated?: Not applicable.

Appendix C – updated contextual information

Find below some contextual information, correct as at the end of May 2025.

Elected member or senior officer query	Pre-16 (ie up to and incl Y11)	Post-16 (Year 12 onwards)
Number of pupils we provide SEND Transport for	1352	213
How many pupils in receipt of SEND Transport attend mainstream schools/colleges?	7	0
What was the cost of commissioned SEND Transport in FY22/23? (NB Total cost = **£7.3m)**	£5,845,345	£1,486,420
What was the cost of commissioned SEND Transport in FY23/24? (NB Total cost = **£8.1m)**	£6,725,685	£1,366,215
What was the cost commissioned of SEND Transport in FY24/25? (NB Total forecast = **£10.3m**)	£8,719,280	£1,538,700
What is the forecast cost of commissioned SEND Transport in FY25/26? (NB Total forecast = **£11.1m**)	£9,335,100	£1,778,120
Unmitigated position, ie what happen if we did nothing	Based on the current cohort of pupils, the cost of post-16 home-to-school travel is projected to be in excess of **£9 million** over the next six years.	