



Assisted Travel & Home to School Assisted Travel consultation: FAQs

Why is the Council consulting now on its Home to School Assisted Travel policy?

Regular reviews of this policy are best practice and expected by the Department for Education (DfE). However, in line with other local authorities, the London Borough of Sutton is experiencing rising numbers of children and young people using the service in the context of significant pressures on local authority budgets. To continue to support families that need assistance to get young people to school/college safely, the Council needs to review how provision is delivered. This puts Sutton in line with the approach already adopted by many other local authorities. This is also a good opportunity to consider more flexible forms of travel assistance that better promote the learning of life skills and preparation for adulthood.

Why does the Council need to make savings?

The Council is experiencing rising demand and rising costs for travel assistance at the same time as it is having to make savings. The Council currently spends £8.3M on home to school travel assistance, compared to £7.1M in 22/23 and £6.1M in 21/22. This level of increase is unfortunately not affordable and the policy review needs to help direct resources to meet the Councils' statutory duties and support those most in need. This responds to the pressures on local authority budgets nationally, with many local authorities having undertaken similar consultations in recent years.

Why are you seeing rising demand on the transport service?

There are several factors here. The local area is seeing an increasing number of children with special educational needs and disabilities and, in particular, Education Health Care Plans (EHCPs); whilst having an EHCP does not automatically lead to eligibility for transport, there is a correlation with the increase in need for home to school travel assistance. The Council is also seeing more parents with eligibility apply for transport who may not have previously done so, due to the impact of ULEZ, cost of living and other personal circumstances.

How will the Council decide what changes to make to the policy?

The Council is consulting on these proposals and will report back to the People Committee in February next year. It will be for councillors to decide if any changes are to be made.

Depending on the decisions that are made, the Council will be implementing changes to the policy from September 2024.

I / my child currently uses this service, will I lose my transport?

London Borough of Sutton will still have a statutory duty to provide appropriate travel assistance to all those that are eligible to receive this and are of statutory school age. If the People Committee agreed to stop discretionary travel assistance for those groups outside of statutory school age, this would begin from the new academic year starting September 2024.

My child has complex needs and is currently attending a special school or specialist base – will their transport change?

The Council's approach to assessing transport provision is needs-based so that young people with the most complex needs and greatest barriers to attending school will continue to be supported. Given the nature of the service, there are often changes where operators change their vehicles, drivers or passenger assistants or where we need to find new providers for particular routes. However, this is part of normal service and falls outside the consultation's scope. If families have any concerns, they should email assistedtravelteam@cognus.org.uk.

When will I know if there are any changes to the way my child is supported to travel to school?

There will be no changes to the way that children are supported to travel to school before September 2024. The Council is consulting on these proposals and will report back to the People Committee in February next year. Depending on the decisions that are made, the Council will be implementing changes to the policy from September 2024. The Council will communicate with parents in the summer term on any changes that it intends to make.

Will I need to reapply for transport?

The Council may ask parents to reapply for transport and will confirm if this is the case as soon as possible, once the consultation outcome is agreed. The Council is currently working on updating the application form for travel assistance to make this clearer for families to complete and easier to assess for eligibility.

How will my family be supported through changes to existing transport?

London Borough of Sutton always aims to give sufficient notice to families of changes in their transport – this is flexible based on when we have confirmation of changes from operators and network reviews, but this will always be communicated in advance. For example, this year the Council delayed the implementation of new routes from June to September following feedback from families that wanted more time to prepare their young people for changes. The Council and Cognus are always happy to work with families in partnership to ensure these transitions, which they recognise can be challenging, are well-supported and signposted.

How are you ensuring that parents' input is captured?

As well as the public consultation from 26 Sept – 11 November, which includes an online survey that will be widely promoted to families, the Council also asked Sutton Parent Carers Forum if they would arrange meetings so we could talk to parents and carers about some ideas. The Council held two early engagement events (one face-to-face and one online in the evening) in late March. This was to ensure parents'/carers' feedback was captured early in our planning, and that ideas from families could be considered. A summary of these ideas, and the Council's response on their feasibility to deliver assisted travel and meet its budget, is on Citizen Space under the heading 'Related'.

The Council will also be launching a series of consultation events this Autumn, both face-to-face and online, to ensure families have an opportunity to discuss the proposals and consider the impact of options before submitting responses. To ensure the consultation is fully accessible, an easy read version and translated copies are available on request.

Who is currently eligible for travel assistance?

Eligibility criteria for travel assistance is set out in London Borough of Sutton's current [Home to School Assisted Travel policy](#). In line with recently [updated DFE guidance](#) it is important to note that parents have a responsibility to transport children to school unless there are exceptional circumstances which mean this is not possible and /or their SEND needs have a significant ability on the transport arrangements they require. The presence of an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) does not mean a child is eligible. Equally, sibling childcare, working or study commitments or the absence of a car cannot be considered as the sole basis for receiving travel assistance. For eligible children and young people the provision will be safe and appropriate for their needs, but the Council can't organise assistance around the individual preferences of parents or their individual circumstances.

How can I support my child with preparation for adulthood?

The Council will be promoting [independent travel training \(ITT\)](#), already in place with a new provider to support preparation for adulthood. This is available for families who are eligible for transport where this would be an appropriate offer. It may also be offered to young people who are not eligible under our transport policy, but who would benefit from this service as part of a discretionary offer for Preparation for Adulthood support. If you would like more details for families with an interest in exploring this for young people, please contact Sutton ITT team: email: itt@kcil.org.uk tel: 020 8546 9603.

Who are Cognus Assisted Travel?

Cognus is commissioned, and wholly owned, by London Borough of Sutton, to provide many education services to mainstream schools and specialist education providers in Sutton. Cognus' Assisted Travel service is a statutory service that ensures that young people are able to travel to school or college when they would otherwise be prevented by disability or need. Whilst the Home to School Assisted Travel policy is owned by London Borough of Sutton, Cognus assesses applications in line with this policy, manages any appeals and organises and manages assisted travel for 900 children and young people every year. Cognus is also supporting the Council to review this policy to ensure the service remains

sustainable and meets the need for those eligible young people that require travel assistance to access education. If you wish to contact the team about day-to-day transport issues, email assistedtravelteam@cognus.org.uk.