

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 9 May 2024

Report of the Director of Education, Culture and Skills

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Delivering better services;

**Determination of Home to School Transport Policy -
Academic Year 2025/2026**

(Appendices 'A' and 'B' refer)

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Brief Summary

Lancashire County Council reviews its Home to School Transport Policy on an annual basis. New guidance was issued by the Department for Education on Home to School Transport for children of compulsory school age in June 2023. Although there are no changes to the statutory entitlement of pupils, the amended policy reflects the Department for Education's recommendations that all the information in relation to transport assistance is available to parents in one document. The previous mainstream and Special Educational Needs transport policies have therefore been amalgamated, and additional information has been provided to parents, to ensure transparency and understanding.

This is deemed to be a Key Decision and the requirements of Standing Order C18 have been complied with.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to approve the Home to School Transport Policy for the academic year 2025/2026, as set out at Appendix 'A'.



Detail

In accordance with the Education School Information Regulations 2008 (Regulation 8), the county council has a duty to publish all relevant information that may inform parental decision making when applying for a secondary school, no later than six weeks before the closing date for secondary school applications which is 31 October each year.

Additionally, the county council is required to publish general arrangements and policies in respect of home to school transport for children of compulsory school age. The county council informs parents of entitlement to receive transport assistance by publishing a Home to School Transport Policy on the Lancashire County Council website and it is reviewed annually.

Statutory Entitlement

The Department for Education issued new statutory guidance in June 2023 that reaffirmed that Local Authorities have a duty to provide free transport for all pupils of compulsory school age (5-16) if their nearest suitable school is:

- beyond 2 miles (if below the age of 8); or
- beyond 3 miles (if aged between 8 and 16)

Pupils attending secondary schools whose parents are on the qualifying benefits for free school meals, or in receipt of the maximum amount of Working Tax Credit, also receive assistance with travel costs if they attend one of their three nearest schools, provided the distance to school is between 2 and 6 miles. For low-income families there is also denominational transport assistance if a pupil is attending a particular school on the grounds of faith and the school is between 2 and 15 miles from home.

County Council's Home to School Transport Policy

The Home to School Transport Policy is reviewed annually and considered by Cabinet each summer term. New Department for Education Guidance; *Travel to school for children of compulsory school age. Statutory guidance for local authorities* was issued in June 2023; [Home-to-school travel – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/guidance/home-to-school-travel) As there have been no changes to the legislation governing home to school transport, the statutory entitlement of pupils remains the same.

The revised guidance is much more detailed and seeks to clarify the local authorities' statutory duties and respond to issues raised through consultation and through regular meetings held with local authorities and the Department for Education. The new guidance also seeks to help parents understand their rights with additional information on:

- considering if a parent can be expected to accompany their child;
- encouraging independence for children with disabilities;
- managing children's medical needs.

For the first time, the statutory guidance also provides specific advice to local authorities on how their policies and procedures should be reviewed to ensure



transparency and fairness, with a checklist of what needs to be included in the Home to School Transport Policy.

In light of the new guidance, the Access to Education Team have undertaken a complete overhaul of the County Council's Home to School Transport Policy, so that it includes the following 4 categories of eligible children:

- statutory walking distances;
- special educational needs;
- disability and mobility problems;
- unsafe walking routes.

The local authority will provide transport for children who attend their nearest school that is within walking distance of home, if it is unreasonable to expect that child to walk to school for reason of special educational needs and disabilities, disability or mobility issues.

For the first time, the mainstream and Special Educational Needs transport policies have been amalgamated, and there is a clear introduction explaining what parents can expect to learn from the document.

The new policy enhances the advice available to parents by:

- clearly explaining terms such as 'home address' and 'nearest suitable school'.
- clearly explaining how a child's eligibility will be assessed, including information on how distances will be measured and how route safety is assessed.
- clearly explaining the ways in which travel is provided.
- clearly explaining the eligibility of children with special educational needs, a disability or mobility problems and how they will be assessed on an individual basis.

The Home to School Transport Policy has been re-written to include additional information for parents. There is advice on how pupils should use, replace, or amend their travel pass in a separate information leaflet, which is set out at Appendix 'B'. There is also more detailed advice for parents of children with special educational needs, a disability or a mobility problem. Lancashire County Council's Unsafe Walking Route Policy has also been updated to reflect latest guidance from Road Safety GB.

The Home to School Transport Policy reflects the statutory guidance provided by the Department for Education, and is equitably applied when assessing all pupils transferring from primary to secondary school.

Information about the availability of transport assistance

During the Autumn Term, members of the Access to Education team attend most secondary school open evenings to advise parents on the admissions process and on entitlement to receive transport assistance. The admissions literature and the online application system both encourage parents to seek advice from their local



education office, if travel costs are part of their consideration when making a secondary school application.

Going forward, there will continue to be a positive communications strategy which will include:

- Updated Lancashire County Council website.
- School Admissions Posters/Year 6 flyers distributed with key message to 'Think Transport.'
- Press Releases.
- Social Media Campaign.
- Targeted Facebook advertisements.

The admission information which is available to all parents from each September (online and paper where requested) provides a summary of the Transport Policy. Parents are advised to check the policy carefully if getting their child from home to school and back is a consideration. Parents are directed to a full copy of the Home to School Transport Policy on the Lancashire County Council website, and are encouraged to seek advice from the area education office if they have any queries. The county council also has officers in attendance at most secondary school open evenings, to give advice on transport eligibility and admission queries.

Consultations

It has not been necessary to consult on the Home to School Transport Policy 2025/2026 as there have been no changes to the entitlement of pupils of compulsory school age to receive transport assistance.

Appendices

Appendices 'A' and 'B' are attached to this report. For clarification, they are summarised below and referenced at relevant points within this report.

Appendix	Title
Appendix 'A'	Home to School Transport Policy 2025/26
Appendix 'B'	Assistance with Home to School Transport – Guide for Parents

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

There are no suggested changes to parental entitlement to receive transport assistance.



Legal

In accordance with the Education School Information Regulations 2008 (Regulation 8), the county council has a duty to publish all relevant information that may inform parental decision making when applying for a secondary school, no later than six weeks before the closing date for secondary school applications which is 31 October each year.

Although the Department for Education have issued new guidance there have been no changes to the regulations relating to transport entitlement for pupils. There has therefore been no need to undertake a consultation on the amalgamation of the mainstream and special educational needs transport policies.

Financial

There are no financial implications as a result of this report. The Home to School Transport budget has been forecast to overspend in 2023/24, with the outturn position for the financial year currently being finalised. As part of the agreed budget for 2024/25 and the medium term financial strategy for future years, additional funding has been included to reflect both local and national increased demand across the service.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

