



Scrutiny committees gather evidence on issues affecting local people and can make recommendations based on their findings.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – March 2025

School Travel Support – Post 16 Transport

Report author **Simon Sims**
Head of Service – Access to Education, Employment, and Training

Reason for report	Requested for work programme by planning group	<input type="checkbox"/>
	To inform executive policy development	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Pre-decision scrutiny	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Item referred by other body	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Other (see summary)	<input type="checkbox"/>

Summary

This report has been drafted for the committee to review the current position relating to Post 16 School Travel Support and advise of the proposed changes required to deliver the necessary savings.

Significant work has taken place to reduce the costs of school travel support. This has included significant changes to policies for compulsory school age children, but there has been limited focus so far in relation to policies for Post 16.

Due to pressures on the Council’s General Fund, there is a £50k saving target associated with Post 16 transport for the 25/26 financial year and further savings in the following three financial years totalling an overall saving from the base budget of £200k. A number of potential options for policy amendments/changes to deliver these savings have been identified and listed in the report for consideration.

It is proposed that implementation of any proposed changes are introduced gradually as cohorts transition to post 16, or transition to new post 16 courses, rather than making changes to those already accessing particular courses.

Policy development foreword

Milton Keynes City Council needs to consider revisions to the policy statement in line with national guidance, to update and improve the definition of who is deemed eligible, agree on any changes to default offers, and whether a parental contribution should be required.

1. Recommendation

- 1.1 The Committee is invited to note the report and offer any recommendations either to the Cabinet or Officers.

2. Background and overview

- 2.1 Milton Keynes City Council has a statutory duty to offer free transport support to compulsory school aged children (aged 5 to 16 years in current national guidance) to those who meet the nationally set eligibility criteria.
- 2.2 Currently, as per DfE Guidance, Local Authorities are not legally required to offer and arrange transport for children under the 6th Form duty (16-19) but Local Authorities must publish a transport policy statement on or before 31 May each year. The statement must include the details of the transport arrangements and the details of the financial support in respect of reasonable travelling expenses that the local authority considers it necessary to make to facilitate access to education or training for learners of sixth form age for the following academic year.
- 2.3 For those under the 6th Form Duty the national guidance is less clear in terms of defined eligibility and legal elements of transport options offered. At pre-16, families can reject any offer that involves them having to manage money themselves (mileage and Family Led Travel Budget options) whereas it is less clear at post 16. Furthermore, the 6th Form duty legislation 'gives local authorities the flexibility to 'contribute to, fund or charge for other transport solutions where it wishes'.
- 2.4 Under the Post 19 Duty (19-25), under section 508B and Schedule 35B of the Education Act 1996, LA's are legally obligated to provide free school transport to "eligible children".
- 2.5 The overall intention of the adult transport duty is to 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.

3. Main issues for scrutiny

- 3.1 Significant work has taken place since 2017, with great effect, in relation to the provision of school travel support to reduce the cost to the General Fund. This includes measures such as ensuring the support offered is always the cheapest option available that meet the needs of the family; implementing a dynamic purchasing system to ensure a competitive provider marketplace; and securing the most efficient route planning for the transport we directly commission. There has also been a significant focus in the last two years in relation to SEND school place planning with a view to increase the availability of local SEND provision within Milton Keynes via the creation of additional local specialist placements at special schools, and units within mainstream schools. This has

sought to negate the need for families to receive travel support or to reduce the cost of the support required.

- 3.2 As most children receiving school travel support in Milton Keynes are compulsory school age, significant work has also taken place in relation to our policies and eligibility considerations in relation to this age group. Less scrutiny and consideration have been given to our policy and eligibility criterion for post 16.
- 3.3 Currently there are approximately 1,400 children of compulsory school age receiving free travel support to access education, and national data shows the cost of delivery per capita for this cohort is currently under the national average for children with and without SEND. The table below, shows the average national cost per capita for pre-16 SEN transport is £130 per week and £43 for mainstream children, whereas the Milton Keynes average cost per capita for children with SEN is £85 and £36 for those without.
- 3.4 Currently there are 181 children being transported to placements under the 'Sixth Form duty'. National data shows the per capita cost of supporting this cohort is in line with the national average of £70 per week; however, unlike Milton Keynes, many surrounding areas request a contribution from families of this age group to allow access onto transport (other than those on low income). On average other LA's charge between £500-£1,000 each academic year.
- 3.5 Currently there are 45 children under the Post 19 duty being transported to placements. National data shows the per capita cost of this is currently significantly above the national average (England £11 per week v MK £21 per week).

	2.1.4 Home to school transport (pre 16): SEN transport expenditure (C)	2.1.5 Home to school transport (pre 16): mainstream home to school transport expenditure (C)	2.1.6 Home to post-16 provision: SEN/LLDD transport expenditure (aged 16-18) (F)	2.1.7 Home to post-16 provision: SEN/LLDD transport expenditure (aged 19-25) (G)	2.1.8 Home to post-16 provision transport: mainstream home to post-16 transport expenditure (F)
ENGLAND - Average	£130.00	£43.00	£70.00	£11.00	£14.00
Milton Keynes	£85.00	£36.00	£70.00	£21.00	£1.00

- 3.6 The total cost of Post 16 transport (based on current average cost per option) is £1.1m per academic year. Of the 226 children receiving post 16 transport, 129 (56%) attend special schools, and the majority have continued into the Post 16 provision after previously attending the school. These children typically continue to receive support by way of MKCC commissioned transport as it is not currently re-reviewed at this point. Commissioned transport usually costs significantly more than the other support options (see table below showing current average costs per child per annum).

Option	Ave. Cost
Mileage	£1,359
FLTB	£3,427
Shared	£5,624

- 3.7 There are currently 32 children attending Out of Area post 16 provisions at a cost of £210k per academic year, which is an increase from £145k last year. Costs have increased due the number of children increasing from 22 to 32, and because Moulton College in Northamptonshire took the decision to increase the cost of their college bus which collects children from Milton Keynes.
- 3.8 Currently our policy ‘Prioritises support for those attending specialist provisions or in receipt of a specific grade of High Needs Funding’; however, it does not require MKCC SEND Service to confirm in advance that this is the closest most appropriate provision, so it can be difficult to challenge the placement and need for travel support retrospectively. This is particularly challenging for children accessing out of borough provisions such as other Further Education Colleges. Furthermore, it does not take account that some children attending specialist provisions at Post 16, or those in receipt of high needs funding, may now be able to travel more independently (or could do with some travel training) as they develop and prepare for adulthood.
- 3.9 MKCC officers from a range of service areas have formed a ‘Post 16 working group’ to review the options in relation to policy changes, prior to making recommendations to appropriate internal governance boards, and any public consultation and political decision required. These options are list below and set out in Annex 1 for further clarity:
- 3.9.1 **Greater clarification of what would be considered as the ‘nearest suitable school’.** Based on wording used by other local authorities, an example of this which could reduce the cost of supporting access to out of area placements could be...

Those aged 16-18 will *only* receive ‘free’ school travel support if they attend the nearest, suitable education setting as **defined/confirmed by MKCC***. Applications made to other education settings (regardless of any requests for consultations from the setting to MKCC) will be deemed as ‘parental preference’, so the parent/carer will be responsible for ensuring the young person can access.

**Course content at Further Education locations will only be considered in relation to the main qualification and not vocational elements.*

- 3.9.2 **Prioritising support for those with the highest levels of need and the lowest income.** Transport support could be restricted to those who meet the criteria below and are also in receipt of the highest amount of Working Tax Credit, as

per the Extended Rights criteria. e.g. based on wording used by other local authorities a definition could be added to the policy statement to say –

Transport will only be considered if the setting is over 3 miles from the home or if the child has the below defined in their EHCP -

- *Long term severely restricted independent mobility, due to a physical disability.*
- *Long term severely restricted independent mobility due to a medical condition resulting in severe persistent pain and/or extreme fatigue.*
- *A sensory impairment resulting in severely restricted mobility.*
- *Severe behavioural emotional and/or social difficulties in comparison with other children of their age. This may be linked with cognitive ability or be as a result of a specific development disorder.*

3.9.3 Ensuring the cheapest most appropriate support option is offered to the family by default. Mileage or Family Led Travel Budgets (FLT) could be offered as a default which would reduce the number of contracts MKCC directly commissions for shared vehicles. Mileage and FLT are much cheaper options than shared.

Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There would be an increase to the number of vehicles going to each school and some are already struggling with space (particularly at Slated Row, Redway, and White Spire) • Could disproportionately impact the sustainability of some of our transport providers that specialise in providing this type of transport for children with SEND.
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential saving could be in the region of c.£400k assuming similar numbers to now, and all Post 16 children receiving Travel Support were given an FLT. This could increase further if people all received mileage. • Families have greater ownership and control in relation to their travel arrangements. • Ensure parity across all children.

3.9.4 Ensuring the cheapest most appropriate support option is offered to the family by default but allowing for MKCC discretion. Like the option above the default offer could be that Mileage or Family Led Travel Budgets are given unless the local authority determines another option is more appropriate. For instance, where it is cheaper/environmentally beneficial for the local authority to add to existing shared vehicles (such as at special schools where lots of other children are attending). This would reduce the need to put on commissioned vehicles to Milton Keynes College.

Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There could be challenge/complaints from families who have previously had commissioned transport to their previous school.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents could challenge the perceived inequity for children accessing different provisions.
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential saving could be in the region of c.£75k, assuming similar numbers to now, and the shared routes to MK Special Schools continued, but FLT/Mileage offered to eligible children accessing any other destinations • Those with the highest level of need will continue to get the highest level of support. • Some families will have greater ownership and control in relation to their travel arrangements. • Supports preparation for adulthood by encouraging independence.

3.9.5 Families could be required to pay towards the cost of transport which is directly commissioned by MKCC. Currently there are 144 Post 16 children that travel on shared transport directly commissioned by MKCC. We currently offer a Privilege Fare scheme for Post 16 children without EHCPs who live in rural areas and access a mainstream school to ‘purchase a seat’ on a shared vehicle (whilst available) to assist them with accessing school. Currently a seat costs £558.60 per academic year. A similar policy could be applied to passengers under the 6th Form duty to add a charge as the legislation ‘gives local authorities the flexibility to ‘contribute to, fund or charge for other transport solutions where it wishes’. This could be applied purely to those on shared transport, or more broadly as a requirement to pay the first £558.60 on all travel support options. It appears many local authorities already do this. This requirement could be waived for families on low income.

Risks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Families are unlikely to want to contribute towards the cost of travel. • If families do not pay, and arrange their own transport, this could increase the number vehicles going to schools who have limited space. • If families do not pay and the number of contracts reduces, provider sustainability could be impacted.
Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Would generate c.£80K per year towards the cost of delivering school travel support, assuming the current number of 144 post 16 children remains similar in the future, and a contribution of £558.60 for those using transport directly commissioned by MKCC. • If families chose to make their own arrangements instead of paying, the number of contracts could be reduced, and this will reduce the overall cost.

3.9.6 Focus on Travel Training for young people with SEND. This could be explored further by working with special schools, and specialist units of mainstream

schools, to identify young people that would benefit from independent travel training to reduce the need for more expensive travel support options. This would also empower young people to be more independent and support their preparations for adulthood. This has been trialled previously in Milton Keynes but stopped during Covid. There is currently very limited resource within MKCC to deliver this, so consideration would need to be given to alternative delivery options. The time required to progress and deliver this means it would be unlikely to deliver savings for 2025/6 but could help to deliver savings beyond that time.

4. Further actions and timescales

- 4.1 The policy statement needs to be published by May 31st, 2025, therefore any changes that would require a consultation or Delegated Decision would need to be fully completed beforehand, but the considerations of the Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee would be welcomed as next steps are progressed.

List of background papers

Annex A – Options Currently Identified