

# SCRUTINY REPORT

**MEETING: Children & Young People Scrutiny**

**DATE: 12 March 2026**

**SUBJECT: Home to School & College Transport & Travel Assistance**

**REPORT FROM: Ben Dunne, Director of Early Years, Education & Skills**

**CONTACT OFFICER: Nicola Hudson, Transport & Contracts Manager**

---

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Council has a statutory duty to make necessary travel arrangements for eligible children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

The School & College Transport Team sits within Education Operations in the Department for Children & Young People.

The team manages travel assistance and home to school transport provision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to support attendance at schools and colleges both in Bury and outside of the borough.

In addition the team process applications and issue travel passes provided by TfGM for eligible pupils travelling to mainstream schools.

This report provides background information regarding the policy changes, summarises the current pressures and provides an overview of ongoing developments.

## **1.0 BACKGROUND**

### **POLICY CHANGES**

- 1.1 In January 2024, the DfE published updated guidance in respect of travel assistance and school transport, and it was necessary to review the Bury policy to reflect this guidance. Furthermore, an LGO ruling required the Council to review its travel assistance policy and implement a revised policy by 31 May 2024.
- 1.2 Following several engagement sessions with parents/carers a new proposed policy was co-produced with representatives from Bury2gether, parent/carer forum and was subject to consultation with a wide range of stakeholders. The new policy was approved by Cabinet members in April 2024 and implemented from 1 June 2024.

### **SERVICE DEMANDS**

- 1.3 The number of children & young people eligible for SEN travel assistance and travel passes to mainstream schools continues to increase year on year.

**SEN Travel Assistance – 48.89% increase in children and young people accessing travel assistance from 2020/2021 to 2025/2026**

Academic Year	Transport	Mileage/Personal Budget	Total	Yearly Increase
2025/2026*	495	175	670	
2024/2025	526	147	673	11.05%
2023/2024	499	107	606	12.04%
2022/2023	438	95	533	7.31%
2021/2022	420	74	494	8.9%
2020/2021	394	56	450	2.66%
2019/2020	388	50	438	3.88%
2018/2019	384	37	421	

\*figures correct up to 4 March 2026

**Mainstream Travel Passes – 48.46% increase from 2020/2021 to 2025/2026**

Academic Year	Successful Applications	Unsuccessful Applications	Total Applications Received
2025-2026*	290	123	628
2024-2025	395	324	719
2023-2024	325	234	559
2022-2023	375	230	605
2021-2022	330	79	409
2020-2021	303	120	423

\*Applications received to date for 2025/2026 academic year, 189 applications are in the process of being assessed. Total applications received includes withdrawn applications or those returned to families for additional information

All applications submitted before 30 June for the next academic year are guaranteed to be processed in time for the start of the new school year. For 2025/2026 this equated to 137 applications.

- 1.4 A total of 130 SEN transport routes are operating on a daily basis, 53 of these routes travel to schools outside of the borough of Bury transporting 108 children and young people.

**TRAVEL ASSISTANCE**

- 1.5 Travel assistance is provided to 57 schools.
- 1.6 The team continue to actively promote alternate forms of travel assistance and have seen a significant increase in the uptake of mileage and personal travel budget.
- 1.7 In line with DfE guidance mileage reimbursement, personal travel budgets and independent travel training can only be offered as an alternative to dedicated transport with parental consent. If parents decline alternative travel, transport must be offered.

## ROUTE CANCELLATIONS

- 1.8 The majority of routes operate on a daily basis however, it is acknowledged that some routes have experienced cancellations due to pupil escort sickness/absence, relief pupil escort availability and driver availability.
- 1.9 Cancelling transport is always the last resort and only taken after all other options have been explored, this includes staff from the relief pool covering, spare drivers covering the pupil escort role, parents acting as escort where their child is the sole occupant of the vehicle, doubling up on routes and school staff covering the escorting role where availability allows.
- 1.10 The recruitment of pupil escorts continues to be a priority for the team. From 1 September 2025 to 4 March 2026 a total of 15 pupil escorts/relief pupil escorts have been appointed to the role. Recruitment checks are ongoing for a further 2 pupil escorts (DBS check, medical clearance, references).
- 1.11 As of 9 March 2026, there will be 2 routes requiring a pupil escort for the AM & PM journey. This is the lowest vacancy rate since September 2022 and February 2025 when 10 routes were vacant.

## BUDGET PRESSURES

- 1.12 Due to increased demand for SEN travel assistance the team are reporting a significant overspend on home to school transport and travel.

Budget – Month 9 (December 2025)

Project	Budget	Forecast	Under/Overspend
EE10000 – Pupil Escorts	£685,000	£731,300	£46,300 overspend
ET80000 – Home to school General	£199,200	£199,200	
ET80001 – SEN Transport – Out of borough	£429,000	£323,500	£105,500 underspend
ET81000 – Staffing	£217,160	£217,160	
ET82000 – Independent Travel Training	£87,150	£84,550	£2,600 underspend
ET83000 – SEN HTS Individual Routes	£2,611,800	£3,102,000	£490,200 overspend
EU90000 – Home to College Transport	£422,100	£418,200	£3,900 underspend
ET90000 – Home to School Travel Non-SEN (Travel Passes)	£151,300	£146,900	£4,400 underspend
Total	£5,140,681	£5,157,169	£383,900 overspend

\*Underspend will reduce, invoices are paid on a termly basis

## 2.0 CURRENT ISSUES

- 2.1 Rising demand linked to growth in EHCPs and increasingly complex SEND needs.
- 2.2 More children and young people requiring specialist or bespoke arrangements, including 1:1 transport and supervision.
- 2.3 Increased travel distances due to limited local specialist capacity and higher out of borough placements.

- 2.4 Ongoing pressure on provider availability in particular taxi and specialist minibus operators.
- 2.5 Pupil escorts are employed on a term time only basis, a number of staff remain in the three days unpaid leave scheme that was introduced several years ago. Although pupil escorts are now exempt from the current 3 days unpaid leave scheme the historic scheme does cause difficulty with providing cover as staff are required to take their unpaid leave during the school term when transport is operational.
- 2.6 There are capacity issues within the School & College Transport Team. The Travel Supervisor post has been vacant since December 2025 following the resignation of the previous postholder who was on long term sickness absence. A recruitment exercise has been undertaken and onboarding checks are ongoing.
- 2.7 Due to the increased volume of applications being received for both SEN travel assistance and travel passes the team are not always able to meet statutory guidelines for the processing of applications alongside maintaining the day-to-day operation of the transport service. Peak times for the service are March to December when parents are applying for travel assistance and travel passes in preparation for the new academic year.
- 2.8 Staff within the team undertake a range of activities including; day to day amendments to transport, arranging cover for staff absence, processing of mileage reimbursement claims, setting up of personal travel budget accounts and audit, assessment of SEN travel applications, assessment & issue of mainstream travel passes, invoice processing, recoupment of monies from other local authorities, sickness monitoring, travel appeals, complaints, behaviour monitoring, contract management.

### **3.0 ONGOING DEVELOPMENTS**

#### **REVIEW OF MILEAGE REIMBURSEMENT / PERSONAL TRAVEL BUDGETS**

- 3.1 A review of the reimbursement rate for personal travel budgets and mileage reimbursement is in progress. The current reimbursement rate is 44 pence per mile for a maximum of two return journeys per day. Considering will be given to increasing the 44p per mile to make the alternative travel offer more attractive to parents/carers. This will have an impact on the budget, however, could reduce the number of children and young people accessing transport provision.

The average cost of transport per young person equates to £6,654 per academic year, although mileage reimbursement and personal travel budgets have increased the average cost per young person is £1,464.

#### **GM COLLABORATION**

- 3.2 A review of all transport routes has been undertaken with GMCA (Greater Manchester Combined Authority) and TFGM (Transport for Greater Manchester) to consider collaboration with neighbouring authorities. TfGM led on the project to analyse and consider potential efficiency savings. Routes were analysed utilising QRoutes, route planning software. This is the same software using by the transport team to plan all transport routes.
- 3.3 One route was identified that could potentially be combined with a route operated by Stockport Council however, on further investigation due to the individual needs of the children and length of journey it was not possible to collaborate.

- 3.4 Collaboration with neighbouring authorities will continue and where possible routes will be combined.
- 3.5 A draft behaviour policy has also been produced alongside GM colleagues and GMCA.

#### **EXPLORATION OF DIFFERENT DELIVERY MODELS**

- 3.6 Alternative delivery options are being explored with the Council's internal transport team based at Bradley Fold and Persona. Meetings are scheduled to take place throughout March 2026.

#### **4.0 CONCLUSION**

- 4.1 The new travel policy has been successfully implemented following collaborative work with schools, parents/carers and colleagues in the EHC team and Social Care.
- 4.2 There is no legal duty on a local authority to provide free or subsidised travel to young people attending post 16 education however, it was recognised that many families and students with SEND would experience difficulty in accessing post 16 provision.
- 4.3 Under the new policy assistance continues to be offered to eligible post 16 students in the form of independent travel training, mileage reimbursement or a personal travel budget. Only door to door transport has been removed from the travel offer.
- 4.4 The transport team is committed to supporting children and young people to access travel assistance and attend parents' evenings, school coffee mornings, open days, meetings and moving on events (students transferring to post 16) to offer advice and support in relation to travel assistance.
- 4.5 The transport team successfully operate 260 SEN transport journeys per day supporting 495 children and young people to access their place of education. A further 175 children and young people are supported with an alternative form of travel assistance.

---

---

#### **List of Background Papers:-**

#### **Contact Details:-**

*[Report Author]*

Executive Director sign off Date: \_\_\_\_\_

JET Meeting Date: \_\_\_\_\_