

## TRAFFORD COUNCIL

**Report to:** CYP Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 19 November 2024  
**Report of:** Karen Samples  
Director of Education Standards, Quality and Performance

### Report Title

**Overview of travel assistance to support children, young people and adults to access education and training.**

### Summary

This report provides an overview of the how the local authority is meeting its duties in relation to provision of travel assistance for eligible children, young people and adults to access education and training. It has a specific focus on travel assistance for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and includes details of:

- Eligibility criteria
- Travel solutions
- Trafford Travel Coordination Unit functions
- Staff induction and training, including health and safety
- Procurement and contract management
- Application and appeals
- IT Systems and Business Intelligence
- Licensing
- All age travel assistance policy and review process

### Recommendation(s)

For information only.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Sarah Butters  
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Background Papers: None

### **Background**

1. Local authorities have statutory duties around provision of travel assistance to support certain groups of children, young people and adults to access education and training. The duties are different depending on the age of the person requesting assistance:
  - Compulsory school age – national eligibility criteria

- Pre-school and school age – discretionary eligibility criteria
  - Sixth form age young people 16 to 19 years (or up to 25 with an education, health and care plan EHCP) who started their course before their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.
  - Adult learners – 18 years and over, including those with an EHCP, adults attending daycare and adult learners who started a course after their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday.
2. The Trafford All Age Travel Assistance Policy describes how these duties are met and it is reviewed annually.
  3. There is increasing demand for travel assistance linked to the increasing number of pupils with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND). This table shows how the number of commissioned transport routes for passengers with SEND has increased over time:

Year	No. Routes	No. SEND Passengers
2022	254	778
2023	261	868
2024 (to date)	284	886

4. This table shows the increasing budget pressures over time:

Transport / Financial Year	Budget (£'000)	Actual Spent (£'000)	Variance (£'000)
2024/25 (to date)	8,508	8,382 (projected)	-126 (projected)
2023/24	6,756	7,515	759
2022/23	5,217	6,624	1,407
2021/22	5,014	5,692	678
2020/21	4,430	4,766	336
2019/20	4,198	4,486	288
2018/19	3,573	3,902	329
2017/18	3,332	3,401	69

### Eligibility – School Age

5. Parent/carers have responsibility for making sure their child attends school and travel arrangements are an important consideration when making school preferences. In certain circumstances, we provide travel assistance for eligible children to attend their nearest suitable school. Parent/carers have a responsibility to apply for this.
6. The LA must provide free travel assistance to eligible pupils of compulsory school age as defined by the Education Act. This is a summary of the eligibility criteria and travel solutions:

Age	Criteria	Travel Solutions
5 to 16 years	Pupils attending their nearest suitable school and it is further than the statutory walking distance: Under 8 years old - 2 miles Over 8 years old - 3 miles Travel assistance is not offered for those that choose to travel to a school that is further away	Free travel pass or for SEND pupils could also be commissioned transport, personal travel budget, independent travel training or disabled

Age	Criteria	Travel Solutions
	from home.	travel pass.
5 to 16 years	Extended rights for children eligible for a free school meal to remove any financial barrier of exercising school choice. Age 8-11 (over 2 miles) Age 11-16 (between 2 and 6 miles) Age 11-16 (between 2 and 15 miles for religious preference)	Free travel pass
5 to 16 years	Unsafe route - for pupils within statutory walking distance but where walking route would be unsafe.	Free travel pass
5 to 16 years	SEND - for pupils who live within statutory walking distance but who could not reasonably be expected to walk due to their SEND or mobility issue, even if accompanied by parent.	Commissioned transport, personal travel budget, independent travel training or disabled travel pass.

7. Trafford has also defined 3 additional discretionary criteria within its policy:

Age	Criteria	Travel Solution
5 to 10 years	Primary age children eligible for a free school meal who choose to travel between 2 and 15 miles for religious preference.	Free travel pass – but we have never had any application under this criterion.
4 years	Reception children prior to reaching compulsory school age (term after 5 <sup>th</sup> birthday) if they would otherwise be an eligible child under one of the nationally defined eligibility criteria above.	Free travel pass, commissioned transport, personal travel budget, independent travel training or disabled travel pass – depending on why they are eligible.
2 to 4 years	Pre-school children aged 2 to 4 years with an EHCP or who are undergoing an EHC needs assessment and are placed at a Trafford primary special school. There must also be medical or social reasons why the child could not attend without travel assistance.	Commissioned transport

8. The guidance permits local authorities to charge for travel assistance provided under discretionary criteria and Trafford currently charges for commissioned transport offered to pre-school children with SEND. The charge is £185 per term, reduced to £85 per term for low-income families who meet the criteria for free school meals.

### Eligibility – Sixth Form Age

9. The sixth form duty applies to young people aged 16 to 19 years, and up to 25 years for those with an EHC plan where they are continuing a course started before their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. The policy intention is to ensure sixth formers can access education and training of their choice and if travel assistance is requested, it is assessed and provided where necessary.

10. The majority of learners are signposted to the Greater Manchester free travel pass which is universally available to all 16 to 18-year-olds, or other travel passes for disabled people with enhanced benefits.
11. Commissioned transport is offered for those with the most complex needs who are not able to travel independently. A small number choose to access a personal travel budget to make their own travel arrangements.
12. The guidance permits local authorities to charge a contribution for commissioned transport provided to sixth form age learners. Trafford do not currently charge but this is being reviewed in light of increasing number of pupils with EHC plans.

### **Eligibility – Adult Learners**

13. The adult duty applies to those attending a course which they started after their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday, including those with EHC plans. The policy intention is that those with the most severe disabilities with no other means of transportation can undertake further education and training after their 19<sup>th</sup> birthday to help them move towards more independent living.
14. If travel assistance is requested, it is assessed and provided where necessary and it must be free of charge.
15. Commissioned transport is offered for those with the most complex needs who are not able to travel independently. A small number choose to access a personal travel budget to make their own travel arrangements.

### **Travel Assistance Solutions**

16. A variety of travel assistance solutions are available. These are some of the types of assistance that may be offered:
  - Travel passes for use on the bus and tram network issued by us.
  - Car mileage allowance of 45p per mile if the child is eligible but parent/carers want to make their own transport arrangements. If the equivalent cost of us arranging transport is less, then parent/carers will be paid the lower amount. Costs are reimbursed termly, based on the child's attendance at school.
  - A personal transport budget may be offered for children with SEND. This means parent/carers can organise their own travel arrangements to school, giving them more flexibility and control. The amount paid will be calculated based on the distance between home and school. Payments are usually made directly into the parent/carer bank account each term.
  - Independent travel training so that children are able to travel independently to and from school and other social activities.
  - Provision of transport commissioned by us for outward and return journeys between home and school.
  - Passenger assistants (PA) may be provided on transport we commission where this is necessary for the safe operation of vehicles and/or care of children.

### **Trafford Travel Coordination Unit (TTCU) Functions**

17. Trafford Travel Coordination Unit (TTCU) oversee the provision of travel assistance. They are a small team comprised of:

- 1 Service Manager
- 1 Senior Travel Assistance Officer
- 5 Travel Assistance Officers
- 1 Independent Travel Training Officer

18. TTCU roles and responsibilities include:

- Managing all aspects of the operations which currently includes over 880 passengers, across more than 280 commissioned transport routes, delivered by more than 25 contractors.
- Recruiting passenger assistants (PAs) with support from Trafford HR, via the safer recruitment process.
- Managing PAs in line with Trafford's corporate policies and procedures.
- Making sure the staff employed to work in the service are appropriately qualified and trained, including over 130 passenger assistants and over 280 drivers.
- Making sure all staff have the necessary information to enable them to act appropriately should an emergency situation arise.
- Procuring vehicles which are appropriate to meet the needs of the service.
- Undertaking risk assessments for the transport service and ensure control measures are in place.
- Investigating accidents and incidents regarding employees, passengers and vehicles and take appropriate action in accordance with Council Policies.
- Ensuring an appropriate risk assessment is completed when needed for passengers.
- Acting as a point of contact in the event of dispute.

### **Staff Induction and Training**

19. A comprehensive Passenger Assistant Handbook has been produced in partnership with TTCU employees, Health and Safety, Human Resources and appropriate Trade Unions to help passenger assistants and drivers deliver a high-quality transport service.

20. It is designed to support staff in conducting their duties and is used as both an induction document for new employees and as a refresher for existing employees. PAs are required to confirm they have read and fully understand the handbook.

21. It provides detailed information for PAs and drivers covering:

- health and safety procedures – infection control, accidents, dangerous occurrences, emergencies
- medical needs and illness including the emergency care pathway and epilepsy care pathway
- risk assessments and control measures
- confidentiality
- seeking further support and escalation of issues
- record keeping and passenger register
- pick up and drop off procedures
- safety procedures including for wheelchair users
- communication, dignity and respect
- HR processes including reporting absence, annual leave

22. Training of staff is provided via several avenues, including via the Council's online learning platform, classroom-based training delivered by a range of professionals

including Trafford Health & Safety Unit, TTCU, Trafford Virtual School, Special Schools and other education professionals.

## **Service Standards**

23. A set of service standards has been in place for a number of years to clearly define the specific responsibilities of the Council, transport providers and of parents and carers in relation to the approved travel arrangements offered to children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.
24. Underlying these standards is the principle that, if Trafford Council agrees to provide travel assistance, it will be provided in a safe and cost-effective manner, taking account of the specific needs of the child and with regard to the best use of the Council's resources.
25. One element of the service standards covers the expected standards of behaviour on the vehicle. On some rare occasions, and only in consultation with the school, TTCU may be required to instigate permanent or fixed periods of exclusion from travel assistance. In these circumstances where the Council is unable to provide safe transport, either on a temporary or permanent basis, parents/carers are responsible for transporting their child and ensuring their regular attendance at school.

## **Procurement and Contract Management**

26. Commissioning arrangements are through a Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). Contractors go through an application process to join the DPS which is managed by STAR procurement and includes a wide range of checks including a quality element which is scored by TTCU. If a contractor application to join the DPS successfully meets all the requirements, they are then able to bid to deliver routes.
27. When TTCU need to commission a vehicle for a route, a tender document is created specifying the requirements and this is then advertised. Any contractor who is part of the DPS can then bid for the work. TTCU review the bids once the tender submission date has passed and award to the winning bidder.
28. Before a tender is awarded, the contractor is asked for the driver details which are then verified with the appropriate licensing authority.
29. As part of the DPS, contractors are obliged to ensure that their drivers undergo any training required by the Council. Drivers are invited to school-based training. We are currently piloting the use of the Council's online learning platform with one of our contractors with a view to rolling this out to all contractors.

## **Applications and Appeals**

30. The School Transport module of the EYES system was recently procured to manage applications for travel assistance. It went live in June 2024 meaning parents apply for travel assistance through the parent portal, alongside other applications such as school admissions and early years. This has delivered customer journey improvements, as well as some small administrative efficiencies in the processing of applications, although these have been offset by increasing demand. Applications are then processed within the EYES system and parents are notified of the outcome in writing. TTCU are working with colleagues in Business Intelligence to design and implement further reports to improve our understanding

of passenger needs linked to wider information available within Liquid Logic systems.

31. A two-stage appeal process is in place for all transport applications:

#### **Stage one**

Parent/carers can request a review of our decision within 20 working days from receipt of their outcome letter. The request should explain why the decision should be reviewed and provide any additional information about personal or family circumstances which parent/carers feel we should consider. A senior officer will review the decision and inform the parent/carer of the outcome in writing within 20 working days of receipt of the written request for review.

#### **Stage two**

If the parent/carer is not satisfied with the outcome at stage one, they can make a written request to escalate the matter to stage two. Requests must be submitted in writing within 20 working days from receipt of the stage one outcome letter. Within 40 working days of receiving the request, an independent appeal panel will consider written and verbal representations. The independent appeal panel will be independent of the original decision-making process but not necessarily independent of the council. Parent/carers will receive a detailed written notification of the outcome within 5 working days of the panel meeting.

32. There is an increasing number of appeals at both stage one and two. In calendar year 2024, there have been 6 stage two appeals heard by the independent panel, none of which have been upheld, evidencing robust decision making at stage one.

### **IT Systems and Business Intelligence**

33. Logistical planning and route management is carried out via a recently procured cloud-based school contract and passenger transport management system known as PAX. It uses QRoutes software which provides industry standard logistical planning to achieve route optimisation.

34. This system is used to either find a space on an existing run for a pupil or used to create a new run for a pupil. Once the run details have been finalised, this information put into a letter to parents.

35. Some small savings (around £30k) were achieved in 2023/24 through a route optimisation pilot using this software to recommission all routes for some individual schools. Further route optimisation took place in September 2024 and will continue to be rolled out in stages linked to the commissioning cycle for individual routes.

36. The next step with this system is to configure and roll out the financial management element of PAX which will achieve more robust budgetary control, this is being carried out jointly with finance colleagues. Implementation expected by end of the current financial year. This will support with costing of any future savings options that may be identified.

37. Scheduling for the new academic year is normally conducted during the summer school holidays, once the schools have finished. This means TTCU officers can concentrate on scheduling the routes to incorporate leavers and new starters, go out to tender for any new runs required and to terminate any runs no longer required. It is a very busy time for the service and to ensure any applications for

the new academic year are actioned for the start of September, applications must be submitted by the end of June. Parents are notified of the arrangements for the new academic year by the end of August, once the scheduling has been finalised.

## **Licensing**

38. TTCU work in partnership with Trafford Licensing who are responsible for enforcing licensing regulations in our area, as well as with other relevant licensing authorities. This includes DVSA in relation to checks on Passenger Carrying Vehicles (PCV).
39. Due to recent licensing incidents involving Trafford licensed drivers, TTCU and licensing have increased the number of checks undertaken to mitigate against any unlawful acts. A revised 4 level process was jointly developed and implemented by TTCU and Trafford Licensing:

### **Level 1 – Contractor Responsibilities**

All contractors formally commissioned through DPS with contractual obligations to check all drivers used. The contract prescribes “all drivers must be a competent and reliable person, properly and appropriately licensed and be Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) checked to enhanced level in accordance with procedures authorised by the Home Office for the disclosure of the criminal backgrounds of people with access to children or other vulnerable persons.”

### **Level 2 – License Details Data Collection**

When a contract is issued for a particular run, the contractor completes a form to provide the driver details including licence number, expiry date, licensing authority and information about the operator licence where relevant.

### **Level 3 – Licence Verification**

Where Trafford is the licensing authority, a list of licences is shared with Trafford Licensing who will check them against details held in their system. Drivers are recorded as being used for school transport in the Licensing system enabling improved joint monitoring and notifications when a driver’s licence expires or is revoked / refused.

For non-Trafford issued licenses, TTCU check the licence information with the relevant licensing authority.

### **Level 4 – Spot Checks**

A program of audit checks is carried out across agencies. Trafford Licensing carry out annual checks on all Trafford operators. Annual checks at Trafford school gates carried out jointly by TTCU, DVLA and Trafford Licensing.

## **Policy Review**

40. The All Age Travel Assistance policy is reviewed annually, to ensure delivery in line with statutory guidance and with a view to identifying strategies to improve efficiency of service delivery.
41. The SEND code of practice sets the expectation that professionals working with children with special educational needs or disabilities will support them to prepare for adult life and help them to achieve the best outcomes in employment, independent living, health and community participation. For many children, learning



to travel independently is an important part of preparing for adulthood and will help them lead fulfilling adult lives. Independent travel is therefore a strategic priority.

42. Several workstreams are underway in relation to review of the policy for travel assistance provided from September 2025:

#### **GM School Transport**

- Trafford is a pilot LA working alongside Salford and Manchester to explore collaborative commissioning of routes to out of borough schools, particularly those furthest away, to achieve savings. It is currently at proof-of-concept stage, looking at the 20 highest cost routes for each LA. Learning will be shared as this work progresses and if successful, it is proposed the collaborative approach is rolled out across all routes across LA borders.
- Trafford have expressed an interest to work on a GM approach for post 16 transport, with a view to developing and implementing a consistent approach across the region. This work has only recently commenced and is currently at an information gathering stage.
- Senior officers attended GM school transport legal training in July.

#### **Independent travel training offer**

- Review and development of the current offer.
- Exploration of opportunity to offer coach transport for identified cohort at one particular school as stepping stone towards independent travel on public transport.

#### **Transfer to post 16 provision**

- Targeted communication to parent/carers of current passengers in year 11 to highlight the difference in travel assistance within statutory guidance once a pupil becomes post 16. Signpost to the local offer of travel passes, specific schemes and support offered by local post 16 education providers. Key messaging to encourage careful consideration of transport when exploring post 16 options.
- Engagement has taken place with Trafford schools to support this messaging. Wider communication planned with professionals across the system.

43. Any policy change identified as a result of this work will be consulted on. The timescale for publishing the new policy is no later than 31 May 2025 for implementation from 1 September 2025.