

Survey on changes to discretionary SEND transport

The Proposals

The proposed options to make savings on current discretionary SEND travel assistance are:

1. Offering support to those demonstrating the 'highest level of need' only by introducing tighter 'exceptions' criteria for post-16 SEND students and offering the most cost-effective support, as set out in Appendix 4, draft post-16 SEND transport policy.
2. Increasing the current post-16 transport contribution from £370 to £608 (the 2015 cost of a bus Freedom ticket).
3. Introducing a 50% rate of contribution for low income families, at £304.
4. Introducing an annual contribution for pre-school SEND travel assistance at the same rates as post-16 travel (£608 / £304).

These changes (proposal 2,3 & 4) would be for all travelling children from September 2016.

HEADLINES

35 people completed the SEND survey online.

71% of respondents were parents or carers of a SEND child, and 80% were women.

Concerns included how ESCC will determine whether a parent is available to help with transport, and which young people will be given travel support. Comments regarding the increase or introduction of a contribution were that many families of children with SEND may be unable to cope with the additional cost, and that these families have less expendable income as a result of the additional expenses for the child. The implication is that increasing transport costs may mean that other sacrifices have to be made, or the young person may not be able to attend their post-16 placement. There were fewer negative responses to the introduction of a contribution for pre-school children, although there were concerns about children not attending placements.

Response to the survey in detail

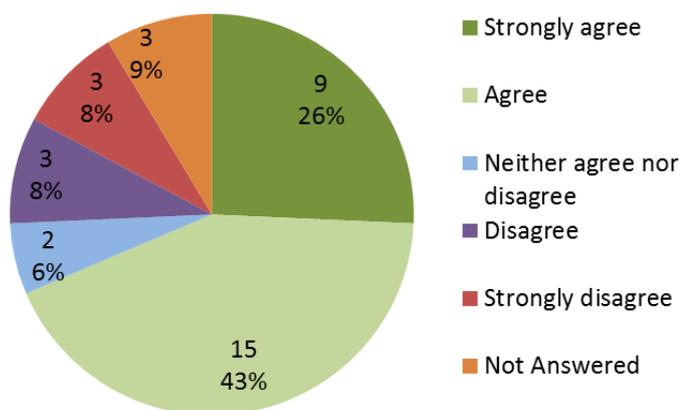
The survey was introduced with a summary of the proposed changes, with the full Lead Member report available to respondents as one of the supporting documents.

Respondents were provided with a list of anticipated Frequently Asked Questions to help them to further understand the proposals (included at the end of this appendix).

Respondents were asked whether they understood the proposal, and a question about potential impact was then asked, with an opportunity to respond with any further comments. A number of key themes emerged, and the themes and corresponding numbers for each have been summarised. Some respondents made more than one point in their response; others made no response to some questions.

Proposal 1: Offering support to those demonstrating the ‘highest level of need’ only by introducing tighter ‘exceptions’ criteria for post-16 SEND students and offering the most cost-effective support

A. Do you understand this proposal? - The changes that are proposed have been clearly explained



79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the changes had been clearly explained.

B. In your opinion, how might the introduction of these revised criteria for post-16 SEND travel support impact on your own family / other families

Comment or concern	Number	%
Concern regarding use of Motability information	6	17
Agree that priority should be given to YP with highest needs (reasonable)	6	17
Concern regarding how we judge if parent available / impact on work	6	17
Concern that some YP will no longer be able to access post-16 education	4	11
Concern that transport will be removed from most needy	4	11
Concern regarding ITT	3	9
Need to consider public transport availability	3	9
Concern regarding consideration of other children in family	2	6
Would prefer fewer criteria, with option to pay for service if wanted	2	6
Believe that family would qualify anyway	1	3
Concern that will influence placement decisions	1	3

Examples of statements

1) Concern regarding use of Motability information

‘Some families, have more than one child or young person, and could not take one to one school and one to another. I have two young people with disabilities. The mobility car is for the benefit of the young person but the cost of fuel to take them everywhere, as they can’t travel independently is hugely expensive’.

'Just because a family has a Motability vehicle does not mean there are not other reasons, such as my daughter's obsessive compulsive behaviour, which make this proposal unworkable'.

- 2) Agree that priority should be given to young people with highest needs (policy is reasonable)

'I do believe that some parents are incredibly lazy. There are several children on my daughter's (special) bus who would be very capable of being taken to school by their parents. Priority must be given to those like my daughter who are completely unable to travel on public transport'.

'I think this sounds like a reasonable proposal. I would only mention that often students with a SEND find it stressful travelling by bus for various reasons. Often it is the bus driver that is unable to respond to their needs/communication'.

- 3) Concern regarding how we judge if parent available / impact on work

'Please define "there is not a parent/carer who could make themselves available to take them". If the parent/carer works, does this fall into the category of 'unable to take them'?'

- 4) Concern that some YP will no longer be able to access post-16 education

'Post 16 education cannot be accessible to some students if the criteria are limiting'.

'It will mean that my stepson will not be able to continue at his current school post-16 as we don't drive and public transport does not arrive in the village where his school is before 9am'.

- 5) Concern that transport will be removed from most needy

'All of the families I work with have severely physically disabled children with medical needs. None of them can walk 3 miles or use public transport safely with/without an adult. None would be suitable for Travel Training. Parents would therefore have to transport them themselves, many travel up to an hour each way to get to the school'.

- 6) Concern regarding ITT

'I would worry about ITT pushing for my child to 'graduate' though as she would be incredibly vulnerable. Bus route is not suitable'.

'Whilst I agree with making more explicit the criterion setting out exceptional circumstances, I am concerned that ITT assessment might be used to reduce numbers entitled rather than reflect accurately a person's ability to use public transport safely'.

- 7) Need to consider public transport availability

'As we are a rural county often public transport is unavailable in isolated areas'.

'Consideration should be given to families such as my own who live in rural areas without good transport links to anywhere let alone to their placement schools'.

- 8) Concern regarding consideration of other children in family

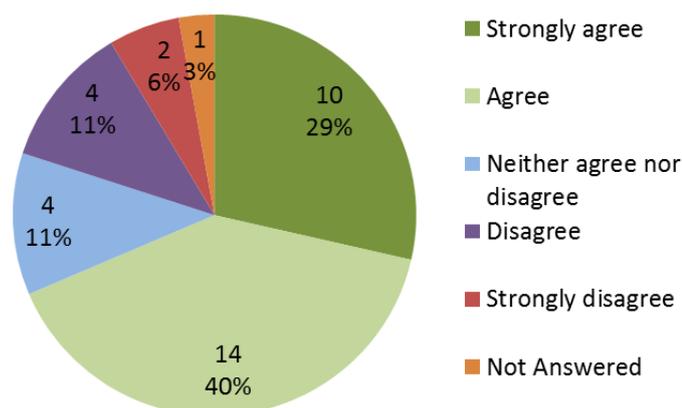
'This would impact on our other child as she needs to be taken to school and collected'.

- 9) Would prefer fewer criteria, with option to pay for service if wanted

'I would rather see a system open to all SEN students, with the option of payment if you wish to access it'.

Proposal 2: Increasing the current post-16 transport contribution from £370 to £608 (the 2015 cost of a bus Freedom ticket).

A. Do you understand this proposal? - The changes that are proposed have been clearly explained



79% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the changes had been clearly explained.

B. In your opinion, how might the increased contribution towards travel support for 16-19 year old students with SEND impact on your own family / other families

Comment or concern	Number	%
Concern about coping (as a family with a YP with SEND)	10	29
The increase is very large / unreasonable	10	29
Concern about families experiencing financial pressures	8	23
SEND children have additional expenses	6	17
The proposal is fair	5	14
YP may not access appropriate post-16 provision	3	9
Unfair as often no local SEN provision so parents have no choice	2	6
Would like monthly DD payments / concern about one payment	1	3

Examples of statements

1) Concern about coping (as a family with a YP with SEND)

'Will negatively affect families of young people with SEN who already have massive financial and practical constraints/ challenges on their lives'.

'This increase is unjust and doesn't consider the additional emotional stress that you will be placing on families. This could impact whether our child now attends Further Education due to this additional cost. If that would be the case, how are we going to cope with no respite? How is our child going to cope with no independence away from us?'

2) The increase is very large / unreasonable

'I have no idea how I would afford this enormous increase. I was expecting to pay £370 and the increase is huge'.

This is a 62.3% increase in contribution per student. This is ridiculously above the rate of inflation and wage inflation.

3) Concern about families experiencing financial pressures

'It will increase the stress within in our family to find the extra income when family budget is stretched to the limit'.

'This would impact on our tight budget. It would also impact on quality of life for our children'.

4) SEND children have additional expenses

'It will be another large expense to meet as caring for a SEND individual is already costly, taking into account equipment, extra laundry and special food requirements etc and budgeting for the large expense required to have a vehicle made wheelchair accessible, even with Motability'.

5) The proposal is fair

'It will make the system fairer for all families involved with education as most families have to make a contribution or pay in full for transport costs. This should be the case for all families'.

'I think it is fair, as low income families will still get help, but average-income families will be expected to pay the same as average-income families without SEND children'.

6) 'YP may not access appropriate post-16 provision

My daughter could not access appropriate further education'.

7) Unfair as often no local SEN provision so parents have no choice

'It is unfair that my child cannot attend school locally because there is NO school that meets his needs any nearer yet you penalise me for that by making us pay. Parents with children in mainstream schools and colleges have the choice to attend school locally, many chose not to so they have Freedom pass for them to travel'.

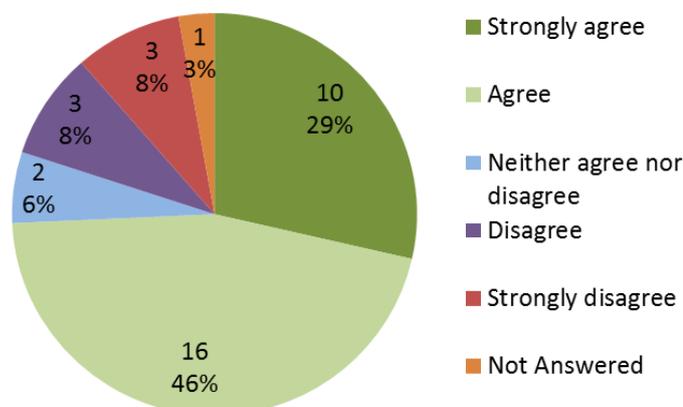
Suggestion

'...although the parents themselves may not qualify according to your criteria for 'low income', the outlay of £608 may present another financial commitment that is hard to maintain. On the other hand, there may well be parents who can afford over and above the £608 suggested contribution and would be willing to pay considerably more. However these options are not explored as a flat fee is being proposed'.

ESCC Response: the actual cost of transport to post-16 provision for young people with SEND varies enormously depending on the nature of their SEND and the distance they need to travel to get to their suitable placement. Parents and carers do not have any control over either of these factors. It is therefore considered unfair to penalise families as a result of the circumstances they face. The upper level of payment is considered a fair contribution for all families which are not low income, and in every case this will still not meet the full costs. In addition, this suggestion is not feasible due to the costly administrative process which would be required to implement it.

Proposal 3: Introducing a 50% rate of contribution for low income families, at £304

A. Do you understand this proposal? - The changes that are proposed have been clearly explained



75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the changes had been clearly explained.

B. In your opinion, how might the introduction of a contribution towards travel support for 16-19 year old students with SEND from low income families impact on your own family / other families

Comment or concern	Number	%
Concern about coping (as a family with a YP with SEND)	8	23
Concern about families experiencing financial pressures	8	23
YP may not access appropriate post-16 provision	6	17
The increase is very large / unreasonable	6	17
SEND children have additional expenses	4	11
Proposal is fair	3	9
Would like monthly DD payments / concern about one payment	1	3

Examples of statements

1) Concern about coping (as a family with a YP with SEND)

'It is WRONG that SEND 16-18 year-olds who are in GOVERNMENT-MANDATED education will have to pay this charge - ESPECIALLY those from low-income families'.

'These proposed changes are hitting the most vulnerable people in our society, and will contribute to making our already difficult lives steadily worse rather than better'.

2) Concern about families experiencing financial pressures

'I'm on the carer's allowance of £2500. We would have to go without food and electric'.

3) YP may not access appropriate post-16 provision

'It will mean families will probably have to withdraw their children from education - will have to make decisions about feeding everyone or paying for transport'.

4) The increase is very large / unreasonable

'we live miles away from the school and I couldn't find as a single parent this additional cost. I already maintain all her equipment at home, an electric ceiling hoist, car, electric chair, electric bath, electric toilet. How the hell would I find more money'.

'If families are on low income, then £304 will still be a significant outlay for them'.

5) SEND children have additional expenses

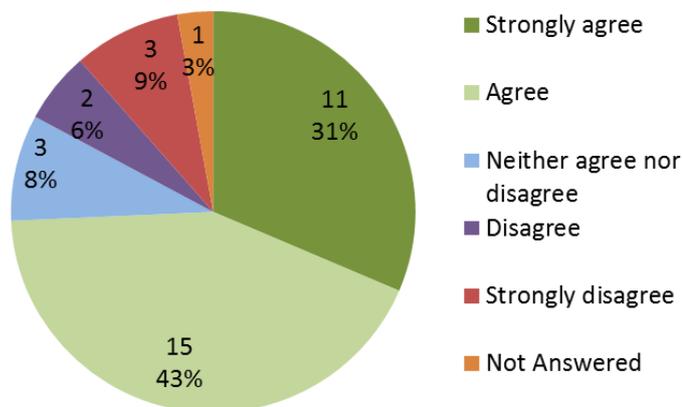
'As a parent unable to work as other parents do it is hard to make ends meet. Young people with disabilities cost so much more than their peers'.

6) Proposal is fair

'It should level the responsibilities that all families should have in transporting their children to school'.

Proposal 4: Introducing an annual contribution for pre-school SEND travel assistance at the same rates as post-16 travel (£608 / £304)

A. Do you understand this proposal? - The changes that are proposed have been clearly explained



74% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the changes had been clearly explained.

B. In your opinion, how might the introduction of a contribution towards travel support for pre-school children with SEND impact on your own family / other families

Comment or concern	Number	%
Concern about families experiencing financial pressures	7	20
Increase is very large / unreasonable	5	14
Does not affect our family (no other comments)	5	14
Child may not access appropriate pre-school provision	4	11
Proposal is fair	4	11
Will affect families without a car	1	3

Examples of statements

1) Concern about families experiencing financial pressures

'I would imagine the impact will be significant, requiring them to budget in other areas of life'.

'This proposal is deeply offensive to me as the parent and main carer of a child with a disability and special educational needs, and will directly impact the budgets and the ability of families with disabled children, to provide for and care for their children'.

2) Increase is very large / unreasonable

'This is a huge increase. I do not understand why in order to make savings you need to target the most vulnerable in our society'.

'I think it's unacceptable to make parents of pre-school children to pay anything. I think it will impact greatly on families financially'.

3) Does not affect our family (no other comments)

'All our children are above pre-school age'.

4) Child may not access appropriate pre-school provision

'It will not be affordable and may put parents off sending their child with SEN for preschool education, causing lack of progress, further disadvantage and missed educational opportunities'.

'It will affect families of children with SEND who do not have a car. It will affect the ability of the family to access support and pre-school socialisation and learning for their child'.

5) Proposal is fair

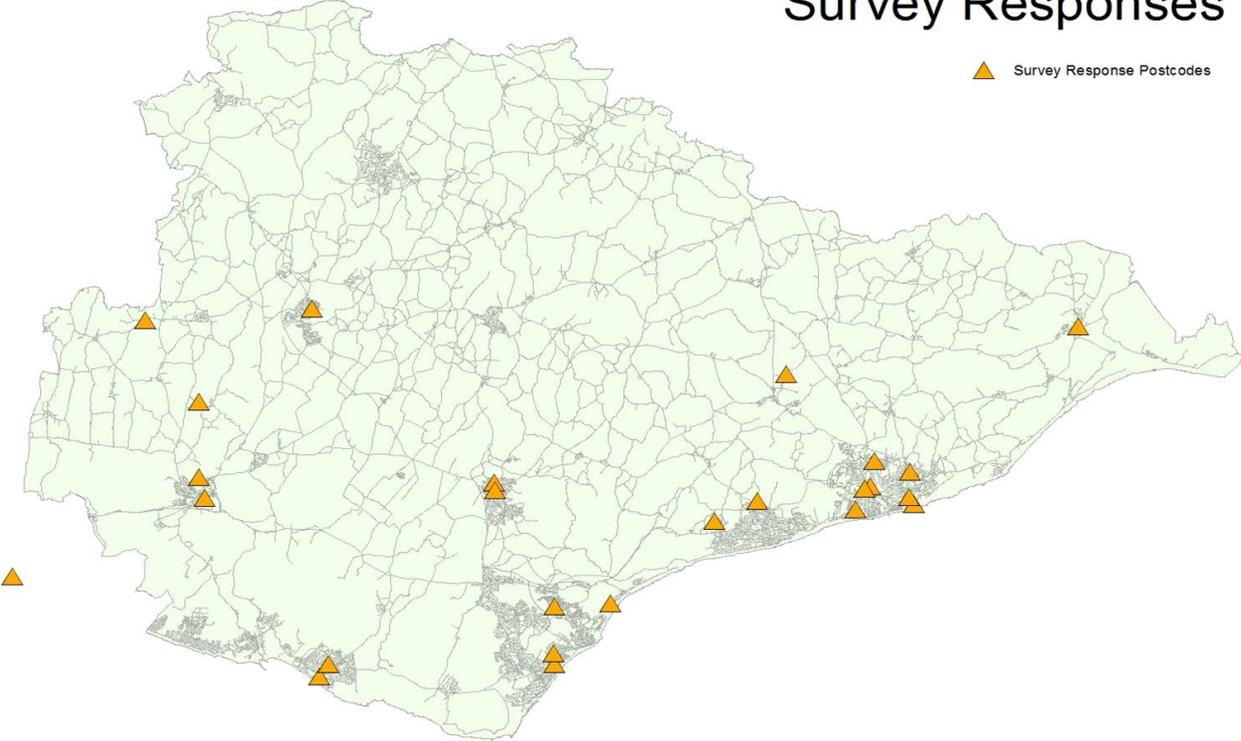
'Families of children with pre-school children should be made to pay. If I was a family with a mainstream child I would have to take them to nursery or other myself. I would not expect travel to be paid for by the Government or other for my child. I took my child to nursery (even with no sleep at night) and then school until he was 12 years old'.

Respondent equalities information

- 71% (25) stated that they were the parent, carer or family member of a child or young person who may be impacted by these changes
- 17% (6) stated that their family would qualify as low income, i.e. would meet the free school meals criteria
- 3% (1) identified themselves as a child or young person who may be impacted by these changes – which does not match the given age responses
- 3% (1) was a practitioner who works with families which may be impacted by the changes
- 80% female (most likely to be mothers of children with SEND), only 14% male, 6% preferred not to say
- Ages ranged from 22 to 60, with 14% not providing their age
- 83% white British, with the remainder not answering or preferring not to say
- 11% (4 people) identified as disabled as set out in the Equality Act 2010
- Responses matched the areas of high population in the south and middle of the county, with fewer than expected responses from the north of East Sussex.

Survey Responses

▲ Survey Response Postcodes



The following FAQs were provided to respondents as part of the information with the consultation:

Consultation on Discretionary Transport Consultation Frequently Asked Questions

Q. Why is the Council proposing these cuts, which may cause some young people to struggle to get to sixth form or college?

A. The Council is facing continuing reductions in budgets from central government, and all services which are not statutory are now being reluctantly considered for reductions in provision.

Q. Is school attendance now compulsory until a child / young person reaches 18 years (with Raising of the Participation Age or **RPA**)? If that's the case shouldn't help with transport between 16 and 18 years a statutory requirement for the Council?

A. There has been no change to the statutory school age, so although there is an expectation that young people will remain in education or training after the age of 16, there is no legislation requiring them to do so.

Q. How is '**Low Income Family**' defined?

A. We use the same criteria as for free school meals for younger students – currently this receipt by the parent/ carer or young person of any of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The Guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit only, provided your annual household income (as assessed by HM Revenue & Customs) does not exceed £16,190.
- During the initial roll out of the benefit, Universal Credit

Q. What other support is available to families on low income or vulnerable post-16 students?

A. The Council will continue to fund subsidies for transport (details) and the most vulnerable can also access the Education Funding Agency (EFA) [16-19 bursaries](#). These national bursaries are managed by sixth forms and colleges, and are intended to provide the necessary financial support to those students from the lowest income households. Where transport costs have been identified as a specific barrier to participation, the bursary can be used to help meet these costs. The 16 to 19 Bursary fund, has two parts, a discretionary bursary and a vulnerable bursary.

In order to be eligible for the vulnerable element of the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund, the student would have to fall into one of the defined categories, which are:

- in or recently left local authority care
- getting Income Support or Universal Credit in their own name
- disabled and getting both Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and either Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in their own name

If they do not fall into one of the above categories they could apply for a discretionary bursary. Institutions set their own criteria for discretionary bursaries. Student services can tell potential students about their criteria and any evidence needed.

Q. My child currently receives a taxi, minibus (or Personal Travel Budget) to get to college / nursery due to their SEN or disability. Will this continue next year?

A. The changes to eligibility for post-16 students with SEND will be for new starters only from September 2016, although the Council will continue to review all cases regularly and support may be ceased or altered if your circumstances change.

Q. Will the proposed increases to the post-16 contribution to SEND travel support affect everyone or just new starters in September 2016?

A. If approved, the proposed increase of the annual contribution from £370 to £608, and the introduction of a £304 contribution for students from low income families (who are currently exempt) will be for **all students** (post-16 or pre-school) receiving SEND travel assistance from September 2016.

Q. What happens if our family can't, or won't pay the contribution?

A. The Council will allow the payment of the £608 or £304 in six equal instalments of £101.33 or £50.67 (one at the start of each half term). Payments can be made electronically over the phone or by BACS, and paper forms can be used if necessary. If this is not paid, we will try and negotiate with the family; however if no adequate explanation is given then we will reluctantly need to stop the provision of transport as a last resort until the situation is resolved. Post-16 students may be able to access the following sources of financial help to make the contribution:

- Disability Living Allowance for the young person
- Other benefits claimed by the young person themselves
- Education Funding Agency (EFA) [16-19 bursaries](#)
- Grants for Individuals available via the [ESCC Funding Team](#) – many of which are targeted at young people with disabilities
- Other funding via the [Directory of Social Change](#), available in libraries

Q. How were these figures decided?

A. £608 is the current cost of an annual Freedom Pass (a bus ticket for children and young people at school or college) and this is therefore considered to be a fair contribution to the total cost of SEND travel support provided by the Council – which is on average over £7,000 per child per year.

Q. How much will families with pre-school children receiving travel support be expected to pay?

A. The same - £608, or £304 per year if low income. Families with a child with significant disabilities should be able to claim Disability Living Allowance ([DLA](#)) for children which should help to fund this contribution. The Council may consider a pro-rata reduction according to the family's circumstances, if a child at nursery is receiving transport for only one or two days a week.

Q. How is the distance to school or college measured (regarding the 3 mile criteria)?

A. The measurement of the “statutory walking distance” is not necessarily the shortest distance by road. It is measured by the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may **walk** with reasonable safety. As such, the route measured may include footpaths, and other pathways, as well as recognised roads. This is how all local authorities measure distance to school.

Q. What is the definition of ‘reasonable’ distance that I may be expected to take my child to their pick up point?

A. This will depend to some extent on your family's circumstances and availability of a vehicle; but we would expect this to be 2 miles or less if your child's needs have met the SEND travel criteria.

Q. What will the level of parent/carer involvement be in putting forward cases to the panel?

A. All information should be submitted in the application, which will include new questions for September 2016 applications. If there is not sufficient information in the application, parent/carers will be asked for more, for example, their availability to drop off/pick up their child at a pick-up point am or pm etc. The Council will also gather other evidence from relevant professionals who know the child/young person and their family and from the most recent SEN Statement or EHC Plan.

Q. Who will actually be making the 'exceptional circumstances' decisions?

A. Decisions will be made by the ISEND Travel Governance Panel, which chaired by a senior manager from Children's Services and is composed of officers from the SEND casework team, SEND transport (Children's Services), and the Transport Team (which manage the transport contracts). A Transport co-ordinator will present each individual case to the panel based on the documentation, which includes information from the family and additional information from professionals who understand the needs to the child and family circumstances. The panel will make a two part decision - firstly whether the case meets the eligibility criteria, and then if so, the type of travel assistance provided. The Council wants to ensure that within the context of reducing resources that we provide support to the most vulnerable young people who would not otherwise be able to travel to their educational placements. As a result if agreed, this proposal will mean that fewer families will receive support.

Q. Who will 'sign off' the assessment regarding Independent Travel Training (ITT) readiness?

A. ESCC has commissioned a specialist ITT Team employed locally via National Star College in Cheltenham, which uses the established 'LIFT Training' programme. LIFT is a multi-award winning programme, nationally recognised as an outstanding provider of travel training, based on intensive tailored 1:1 support. The first step is assessment of the safety of both the route and the potential ability of the young person to undertake the journey by one of the ITT team. If either of these is a concern, travel training is not recommended and this decision is passed to the panel. If assessment is positive, an 8-12 week programme follows with a high proportion of contact time on the young person's specific journey until they are assessed as being competent lone travellers. LIFT also involves the parents or carers with weekly home visits, as well as school or college contacts, in order to improve the level of support for the student and improve outcomes.

If circumstances changed, i.e. the young person changes school or moves house, transport will be reinstated if needed, with further ITT support for the new route as appropriate. Only once the YP is signed off as a successful independent traveller on the home to school/college route will approved travel support be ceased, and an 8 week free bus/train pass will be issued. In cases where the ITT team do not sign the young person off, travel support will continue.

Q. How does the offer of a Personal Travel Budget (PTB) work as part of this proposal?

A. Transport eligibility is assessed for new applications and then reviewed annually. If travel support is approved, a PTB may represent the most cost-effective option to allow a young person to get to their post-16 placement (a PTB is a travel allowance paid direct to the family). Having considered each case on an individual basis, and if a suitable vehicle is available, the Council may offer a family a PTB rather than transport if this is the most cost-effective travel solution. Post-16 transport support is discretionary, and this approach would ensure that the young person is able to get to post-16 provision whilst allowing the Council to support a greater number of families within the limited budget.