

Report to:	Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability
Date:	29 April 2025
By:	Director of Children's Services
Title of Report:	Post-16 Transport Policy Statement 2025-2026
Purpose of Report:	To approve the proposed Post-16 Transport Policy Statement for the 2025-2026 academic year

RECOMMENDATION:

The Lead Member is recommended to approve the Post-16 Transport Policy Statement ("the Statement") for the 2025-26 academic year as set out in Appendix 3 of this report.

1. Background

1.1 Once young people reach school leaving age, the assistance local authorities are required to provide with transport to school or college changes. There is no obligation to provide the free home to school transport that some younger children are entitled to (because of, for example, age and distance to the nearest school or because the walking route is not available). There is a duty, however, on the local authority to provide travel assistance to learners of sixth form age and adult learners if it is considered necessary to facilitate attendance.

1.2 The County Council exercises its discretion to determine what transport or financial support is necessary to facilitate young people's attendance at educational settings. To inform young people and their parent's what arrangements are available locally, the Statement must be published each year. The Statement aims to be a single point of reference that outlines the help that might be available through the County Council, schools, colleges and transport operators to help all young people of sixth form age and adult learners aged 19+ (up to 25) who have an Education, Health and Care plan ("EHC plan") to get to school and college. The Statement includes information about:

- fares and concessions.
- sources of financial help; and
- the Council's travel assistance policies for learners with an EHC plan.

1.3 The County Council is required to consult on the Statement annually before it is published, on or before 31 May.

2. Supporting information

2.1 The consultation asked for comments from secondary schools, colleges and special schools on the proposals. Additionally, they were asked to bring it to the attention of current Year 11 students as well as current sixth formers (and their parents or carers).

2.2 The consultation took place between 28 February 2025 and 28 March 2025 and sought views on the draft Statement which is set out in Appendix 1 of the report.

2.3 Changes in the draft Statement related to dates and contact details. Travel costs were correct at the time of consultation. It is permissible to update the document as and when changes are confirmed. This could either be prior to publication or after publication.

2.4 There were no substantial policy changes to the help from the County Council that is available to young people.

Consultation responses

2.5 There were 13 responses, and these are set out in Appendix 2.

2.6 Some comments related to rail concessions and for fares to be reduced. There is already a rail fare scheme which gives a 50% discount (the 16-17 Saver) and there are no proposed rises in the cost of bus fares which are already subsidised (detailed in paragraph 2.11 below).

2.7 Some users raised concerns about gaps in the transport network. The public transport network cannot cater for everyone's individual choices and timetables, and it is not feasible to provide more dedicated links to sixth form establishments due to limited funding and ongoing subsidy. The Council will bring specific examples to bus operators' attention for them to consider in any future review of services. The public transport options already available meet the needs of as many transport users as possible and most journeys can be completed. This might mean having to change buses or include a combination of bus, rail and walking i.e. not door-to-door.

2.8 There were comments relating to the operation of school coaches. Whilst places cannot be guaranteed, the criteria for offering places give priority to students who live in the area served by the school sixth form.

2.9 Some respondents felt that post-16 transport should be free. Students facing financial hardship can apply to their course provider for a discretionary bursary. The Statement signposts young people and their parents to sources of available financial help.

Coach prices, bus fares and contributions

2.10 The charge for a vacant seat on a school coach will remain at £188.70 per term. The amount reflects the true cost of seat on a coach under contract to the Council.

2.11 Since 1 April 2023, lower fares have operated on all bus services due to Government funding in response to the County Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan ("BSIP"). The Lead Member for Transport and Environment approved the BSIP2 on 17 March 2025 which included the continuation of all current BSIP fare reductions for a further 12 months. This includes the under 19s multi operator day ticket, the 19 to 29 multi operator day ticket and the Freedom weekly ticket.

2.12 Where assistance is agreed for a learner aged 16-19 with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities ("SEND"), a contribution towards the cost of travel is required. As the contribution is linked to the cost of a Freedom Ticket (£15 per week), the charge in 2025/26 will stay at £570. Low-income families are required to contribute £285 per academic year i.e. a 50% discount.

3. Conclusion and reason for recommendation

3.1 The County Council has carried out its legal duty to consult on the Statement.

3.2 The Lead Member is therefore recommended to agree the Statement as outlined in Appendix 3 of this report.

3.3 After publication, the County Council may amend the Statement to update prices or other information as considered necessary.

CAROLYN FAIR

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None