

Scrutiny Review Terms of Reference Document

Scrutiny Review	<i>A Scrutiny Review of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training in School Transport</i>
Responsible Committee	People Scrutiny Committee
Author	
Version	V1
Date	

1. Background

1.1 Following previous discussions on pressures in Home to School Transport, the People Scrutiny Committee undertook an initial scoping exercise in May 2025 to better understand the issues and existing work underway. The Scoping Board concluded that a review into some specific cost avoidance measures could add value and agreed to consider this further in the autumn once additional information was available.

1.2 The Scoping Board met again on 29 October 2025 and considered the growing pressures on the Home to School Transport system, driven by rising demand and policy uncertainty, particularly around SEND reforms. Officers presented data on service demand, budget pressures, and cost avoidance strategies, and highlighted opportunities to improve uptake of Personal Transport Budgets (PTBs) and Independent Travel Training (ITT). The Board also explored legal constraints, procurement challenges, and alternative transport models.

1.4 As with any scoping exercise, the Scoping Board not only had to determine whether there were significant issues which were not already being addressed, it also had to consider the likelihood of a potential scrutiny review delivering realistic recommendations that are within the power of the Council to take forward.

1.5 The Board took into account several limiting factors, including current legislation, the Council's statutory responsibilities, and the anticipated impact of the forthcoming School White Paper. While the details of the White Paper are still unknown, officers expect it to emphasise inclusion in mainstream education for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), alongside potential changes to education, health and care plans (EHCPs). It is also expected to address the high costs of Home to School Transport by promoting national best practices such as public transport, active travel, enhanced Personal Transport Budgets (PTBs), and Independent Travel Training (ITT)—all of which offer benefits to pupils and families, as well as opportunities for cost savings. The Board also considered that speculation about the reforms was causing anxiety amongst parents, schools and local authorities, and noted the importance of the Council communicating key information and engaging with parents and schools.

2. Scope of the Review

2.1 The Board concluded that in light of the current statutory framework the Council is required to work within, and pending national SEND reforms, a broad review of Home to School Transport would be unfeasible, however there was value in conducting a focused scrutiny review on Personal Transport Budgets (PTB) and Independent Travel Training (ITT) where there is potential for the Council to develop local practice. The Board agreed that the scrutiny review should explore what the Council could do to increase the uptake of PTBs and ITT and that this should be explored through the following **key lines of enquiry**:

1. Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training policies

- How effective are current PTB and ITT policies and do they deliver value for money?
- Are there best practices from other local authorities that could be adopted?

2. Barriers to uptake

- What are the key reasons families decline PTBs or ITT and how can these be addressed?

3. Communication and engagement

- How does the Council currently articulate the availability and benefits of PTBs and ITT to parents, pupils and schools and how effective are those strategies?
- How can elected members, through engagement with their communities, raise awareness of the availability and benefits of PTBs and ITT?

2.2 The Review will be based on the following **principles**:

- It will be forward looking and exploratory
- It will focus on what can be done locally in East Sussex (as opposed to changes requiring national action)
- It will focus on the specific role of the Council, what is within the Council's sphere of influence and what can be achieved within available resources

2.3 The Review will have a focus on what can be done to increase the uptake of PTBs and ITT in East Sussex, whilst recognising the wider national context of increased demand for both SEND support and Home to School Transport, significant cost pressures, and upcoming changes to SEND support in national reforms. The Board recognises that PTBs and ITT are not appropriate for all pupils and will therefore focus on the Council's role in encouraging uptake amongst eligible pupils.

3. Review methods

3.1 It is anticipated that the Review Board will consider documentary evidence, question witnesses and undertake research in order to gather evidence to inform its recommendations. This will include:

TBC

3.2 The review will also draw on information already gathered at the scoping stage.

4. Review Organisation and Responsibilities

4.1 The scoping for this review was undertaken by Councillors Cross, Howell, Shing and Ungar and John Hayling (Parent Governor Representative).

4.2 Review Board

- The Review Board is: *to be appointed by the Committee*
- The Chair of the Review Board is: *to be appointed by the Committee*

4.3 The Review Board is responsible for:

- making decisions regarding the scope and direction of the review;
- monitoring and control of the overall progress of the review;
- agreeing how Board members will undertake evidence gathering activities as required by the review;
- considering and providing challenge to all evidence presented to it; and
- developing and agreeing the final report, including the findings and recommendations of the review.

5 Scrutiny Review Support

5.1 Support for the review will be provided by the Policy Team to:

- manage the review process;
- undertake research as agreed by the Board;
- draft the final report.

5.2 The Lead Officer who will support the review from the Policy Team is Rachel Sweeney, Senior Policy and Scrutiny Adviser. Their role is to manage the review, ensuring its aims and objectives are met and that the final report is delivered to the People Scrutiny Committee within the agreed timescales.

6 Scrutiny Review Completion

6.1 When the review has been completed the Lead Officer will co-ordinate the production of a final report outlining the findings and recommendations for agreement by the Review Board. Once agreed, the Review Board will present this to the People Scrutiny Committee for it to agree the recommendations.

6.2 The report will then be presented to Cabinet for comment and County Council for approval. Progress updates on how the recommendations are being implemented by the Department will be presented to the People Scrutiny Committee in due course (usually six and twelve months after the review has been approved by County Council).

Review Timetable

Based on the initial scoping of the review, the Review Board aims to submit the final report to the People Scrutiny Committee at the meeting to be held on 12 March 2026.

An initial timetable of the meetings and activities required to complete the review is outlined below. *[The number of review board meetings is not fixed and there can be more or less depending on the nature of the review. The Review Board will agree the number and content of the meetings and review activity].*

Activity	Timescale
<u>Initial Review Board Activity (remote via email)</u> • Consider lines of enquiry/terms of reference • Review evidence gathered at scoping stage • Agree further evidence gathering requirements	November 2025
<u>Review Board Activity/Meeting</u> • Evidence gathering	December 2025
<u>Review Board Activity/Meeting</u> • Evidence gathering	December 2025
<u>Review Board Activity/Meeting</u> • Evidence gathering	January 2026
Draft scrutiny review report and findings and recommendations of the review	January- February 2026
<u>Final Review Board Meeting to agree Report</u> Review Board meeting to agree draft report, findings and recommendations with input from key officers.	Mid February 2026
Deadline for Report Dispatch	4 March 2026
<u>Report to People Scrutiny Committee for agreement</u>	12 March 2026
Report to Cabinet	21 April 2026
Report to Council	21 May 2026