

Kirklees Council to slash school transport funding for vulnerable pupils by £1.65m

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Cash-strapped Kirklees Council is looking to make a £1.65m saving after spending £2.6m on school transport for sixth form age students with additional needs in the last financial year.

Today's meeting of [the council's](#) Children's Scrutiny Panel received an update on the council's plans for school transport for students over the age of 16 with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). Three hundred pupils of sixth form age are currently eligible to have their costs covered by the local authority and this worked out at around £8.6k per student in the year 2022/23.

As costs of transport are rapidly rising, with a 23 percent increase for students over 16 between the years of 2022/23 and 2021/22, the council is reviewing its Transport Statement. This sets out arrangements for eligible students within this age group. The council says its new proposals would cut costs to £950k.

At present, the council contracts private hire and public service vehicle operators to provide minibuses and taxis for students with SEND who are both pre and post 16. Previously, the Local Democracy Reporting Service revealed that between April and October 2023, Kirklees Council had spent [£54k each day of term](#) on school taxis for around 3,000 students.

The council also provides free transport in the form of buses to eligible pupils, or a bus pass where this is appropriate. On top of this, 188 Passenger Assistants are employed to support pupils with the greatest need. The total cost for all students who were eligible for free transport in 2022/23 exceeded £12m.

The new policy would see eligible post 16 students receiving a flat rate payment as travel support, with the amount being based on distance of the educational setting from a home address. These are as follows:

Up to three miles – £300

Between three and 10 miles – £1,000

Between 10 and 20 miles – £2,000

Over 20 miles – £3,000

However, the council acknowledges that this approach may not fit all pupils, especially those with the most complex needs, so has factored in provision for council-organised transport where the personal travel payment would not be appropriate.

A period of consultation was carried out on the plans at the end of last year with feedback from 130 respondents. Concerns were raised around the financial impact of the plans, the impact on family, and around safeguarding.

At the meeting, Cllr John Lawson (Cleckheaton, Lib Dems) also raised concerns around the potential impact on safeguarding, as well as the impact the plans could have on parents in terms of price hikes.

In response, the council's Head of Service for Public Protection, Martin Wood, said: "I think the key thing is to get that message across to parents around the vetting that taxi licensing do on drivers and the training that they do, the level of DBS and our convictions policy follows national best practice and is very robust, and that's the message that we need to get across to parents to try and offer that reassurance.

"We're as confident as we can be that they're using a Kirklees licenced driver with the wider West Yorkshire region their children are going to be safe in those vehicles."

On the matter of cost, a council officer said: "I've spoken to colleagues up and down the country and often it is the case that when a local authority is booking transport, they're charged one price and when it's a private booking, they're charged another price. Now, I'm not commenting on that locally but that is seen in other areas."

[Source: West Yorkshire News]