

**PaCC Connect Event**  
**Home to School Transport Re-Procurement 2023**  
**Themed Question and Answers**

**Applying and re-applying for home to school transport**

**Q. Do I need to re-apply for home to school transport?**

**A.** If your child is under 16 and you already receive home to school transport from us, there's no need to re-apply each year.

You do need to re-apply if:

- you or your child's circumstances change, for example a change of placement or change of address.
- you already receive a free bus pass from the council
- if your child is over 16 and going into Year 12
- if you are an adult learner (aged 19 and over) moving from Year 14 to Year 15 with an Education, Health and Care Plan.

If you already receive free transport, your child will still be taken to school from September 2023, unless your circumstances have changed in anyway. There might be a change in crew and or travelling companions as new children join the service, but we will let you know if there are changes as soon as possible. Being able to tell you about this quickly depends on when new applications come to us.

**Q. When do I need to apply?**

**A.** If you would like to have home to school transport from September 2023, you need to apply by:

- 30 April 2023 - if your child is under 16 years of age
- 31 May 2023 - if your child is over 16 years of age
- 31 May 2023 - if you are an adult learner, over 19 years of age with an Education, Health and Care Plan

**Q. How do I apply?**

**A.** You can apply through the online form - [Apply for Home to School Transport online](#). You can also talk to us on 01273 293 501. or at [HometoSchoolTransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:HometoSchoolTransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk)

**Q. If a child gets a EHCP mid-year and receives a specialist placement can travel be awarded mid-year?**

**A.** Yes. Transport can be given at any time during the year. The Transport Panel meets weekly to consider new applications.

**Q. How will I know if my application has been successful?**

**A.** We consider all applications at a weekly Transport Panel. We will tell you of the Panel's decision within:

- 7 working days during term time
- 14 working days outside of term time.

We will contact you if we need more information to support your application.

**Q. Can I appeal if I think you have made the wrong decision?**

**A.** Yes. You can ask for a review of the decision. Any request for review should be made in writing or by email to us within 20 working days of our decision. Within 20 working days of receipt of your request a senior officer within the team will review the decision. If you are unhappy with the outcome of the review you may within 20 working days appeal further to an independent panel of officers. The panel will be made up of three officers of the council who were not involved in the original decision to refuse help with transport. The appeal panel will review the appeal within 40 days of receipt of the request. You can read the Appeals Policy here - [Learn more about Appeals](#)

**Q. If my child's travel arrangements change from September 2023, when will we be told?**

**A.** During June, the service will plan all the journeys (but obviously this is hard if new applications are coming in during that time). Then the journeys will go out for bidding on and then awarded in early July.

Once they know which route they are going to provide, Operators will look at all their drivers and match them up, thinking about distance from where the crew lives to the first pick up point. The Operators will determine the pick-up order and times based on their own route planning software and in discussion with you. The intention being to reduce children's travelling time and pollution.

By August, either we or your Operator will have made contact with you to tell you about any changes. If you haven't heard anything by mid-August, please do get in touch with us.

**The Contract & contract monitoring**

**Q. What is a 'Route Return'?**

**A.** This is when an Operator bids on a Route (a journey) and then returns it because they no longer want to do it. This practice can cause delay and disruption to pupil travel. It is important to stress that overbidding and returning routes is inevitable and unavoidable. This is because Operators are private businesses, and they will want to maximise profitability. The service has introduced an 'admin charge' to try and prevent Operators from overbidding and handing back routes too frequently.

**Q. What leverage is there to sustain the original contract price given the Routes don't start until September 2023?**

**A.** Very little. Given the current economic climate, we are expecting that contract prices will be higher following re-procurement. Whilst re-procurement shouldn't be seen as an opportunity to excessively inflate contract prices we anticipate that contract prices will again increase.

**Q. Is consistency of provision also taken into consideration in comparing bids, or is contract award just on price?**

**A.** All the Operators are given key information for each route. This includes the street name and postcode (the full address is only shared with the winning Operator), type of vehicle required, all specific travel requirements and a plain English description of the SEND profile and needs of all children on the route.

Operators can bid on any journeys they want by naming their price to deliver the route. In most cases, the Operator with the lowest bid will be awarded the route. The only exception would be where another Operator better meets the needs of the child or children, for example, a driver who can sign to transport children or young people who are deaf.

All Operators must comply with the same contract, service standards and performance measures. All crews must adhere to the same Code of Conduct, undergo enhanced DBS checks and complete full training. There should be consistency of approach whichever Operator or crew provides home to school transport for your child or young person.

**Q. If it's not broken, why fix it. Why are you re-procuring home to school transport services?**

**A.** The council has a legal responsibility to renew its Home to School Transport contract every four years. The current contract started in 2019 so must be renewed by August 2023, with businesses bidding for the routes they want to operate. The council must follow procurement law and best practice.

**Q. What is the likelihood of having the same crew/ Operator from next September?**

**A.** We absolutely recognise that for many of children and young people changes to their routine can be incredibly difficult for them and for parents and carers. If a different Operator to the one who provides your service currently is the successful bidder, it will mean your child would have a new crew taking them to and from school. Even if the same Operator continues to provide the service, they may choose to use a different crew. It's also possible that the existing Operators will win their bid for the routes they run now and choose to use the same crew – in which case there may be little to no change. We are not able to predict the outcome of the bidding in advance. What we do know, is that once the routes have been allocated, they will become the baseline for the service and much like the current service, there should be some broad continuity year on year over the next four years, although the movement of students in/out of the service does mean that changes do happen.

**Q. Is there a minimum number of routes that will be applied to each Operator?**

**A.** Usually, an Operator will not hold more than 40% of the routes during the initial bidding phase in September 2023. If this happens, we will determine which of the routes they will deliver. If an Operator has 40% of the routes, they will usually not be permitted to bid on further routes. This is so we don't become dependent on one Operator, which could leave us vulnerable if they decided to mass return routes, leave the contract, or inflate their contract costs.

**Q. What if no one bids on my child's route?**

**A.** From September 2023 we will have even more Operators working with us, they will have a range of fleets from saloon cars to 16-seater minibuses. We hope this means we will have even more flexibility in the home to school transport system. If no one bids on the route, we will put it out again. If once again it is not bid on, we will talk to you about alternative options, for example a Personal Travel Budget for you to book your own taxi (which is often at a much cheaper cost than the council can procure). It is very rare that routes are not bid on.

**Q. Typically, how many Operators get changed each time the contract is up for re-tendering? Or do they tend to keep the same routes.**

**A.** It is not possible to predict this. Each year the service grows as more children and young people become eligible for travel support than the number of children and young people who leave the service. This means more routes are put out to tender year on year. This makes comparisons difficult. More Operators joined us in 2019 (the last re-procurement round) and even more are joining us this year. This means that routes will go out to tender across all the Operators, which each Operator having equal opportunity to bid on and win the routes.

**Q. How do you ensure that the Operators meet the Key Performance Indicators that are set out in their contract?**

**A.** For the new contract starting in September 2023 we have amended the set of measures we use to monitor the quality of the service. These are called Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and they relate to complaints, reliability, punctuality, continuity of crew and communication.

It's important that we keep an eye on the performance of our operators:

- Firstly, and most importantly, our priority is to protect the safety, wellbeing and dignity of children and young people using our service
- But we also need to make sure we are getting value for money on behalf of the public.

The Contract and Service Development Manager leads on KPI monitoring. KPIs are monitored through:

- Spot Checks: We make regular unannounced visits to schools during drop off and pick up times Spot checks are a great way for our team to meet with Transport Crews and your children and young people, and to see and hear from them first-hand about how the travel arrangements are going.

- Contract Review Meetings: held once per term with each Operator. At the meeting the Contract and Service Development Manager discusses any contract issues and performance against Key Performance Indicators.
- Satisfaction Surveys (Parents carers and education settings).

When the new contract starts, the Contract Review Meetings will require a data return to support the conversation around KPIs The Council will provide a template for this to be completed. We hold Contract Compliance Meetings if we think performance or standards are slipping or have slipped.

## Route Planning

**Q. When a Route is designed, how is it determined and allocated? Do you score each child's need and work out what vehicle is best? What if I don't think the vehicle is suitable?**

**A.** It's really important that the transport that we set up is safe, suitable, and reasonably stress free and your children arrive at school ready to learn.

When we look out how the 200+ journeys run, we look at all the addresses of every child and their distance to school. The Transport officer and the SEND Officer look at ECHPs and the pupil travel information forms you give us and any other information we are given from schools or other professionals who support your child. This helps us understand your children's needs and travel requirements. We have just over 600 children on transport, and we take them to nearly 70 schools and colleges.

When planning the routes, we work to some principles that we co-designed with the Parent and Carers Council. Our top priority will always be to balance the comfort, safety, and wellbeing of children. Journey times will not be excessive, transport must always meet needs, it must also provide best value for public money and be fair and equitable across all 600 plus children and young people needing the service.

We carry out a Risk Assessment for all children and young people using home to school transport. This makes sure travel arrangements are suitable. We do this before the child's first journey.

We also take Vehicle Risk Assessments (VRAs). These assess the combination of children and young people travelling. They look at the medical needs and SEND profile of each child. Then we can see what support we need to provide to make sure the pupil mix is safe and manageable. We ask schools to give their views on the pupil mix as well.

We carry out VRAs in vehicles with four or more pupils travelling. We also assess any routes we feel would benefit from additional attention. For example, pupils who need to travel alone due to their complex medical needs, or vehicles with combinations of children that could present at a higher risk.

If you feel the vehicle that is provided is not suitable, please contact us.

**Q. Are there any routes that drop children and young people off at one school or college then go on to another setting? How long are children and young people in vehicles for?**

A. Generally we only transport to one setting at a time. There are some exceptions to this, for example where there are siblings at adjacent sites (e.g Hill Park Lower and Upper Schools). We follow government best practice and plan the journeys to make sure, far as possible, that no primary aged child is travelling more than 45 mins to their school, and no secondary school aged child more than 75 mins. There are some expectations to this, for example, when children are travelling to schools outside of the city. This is why we generally only travel to one setting at a time.

**Q. What is the back-up plan when a crew member is sick?**

A. If a member of crew is away from work for any reason the Operator is asked to supply a cover crew. This crew must have a recent enhanced DBS check and have completed our mandatory training. They must all work to the same Code of Conduct and be over the age of 18. Depending on the notice given the cover crew should introduce themselves to you and your child before travel. There is a national and local driver shortage currently which may mean that Operators are not able to find last minute cover crews. We will discuss this with you, if it happens.

Before any change of crew is agreed Operators must first tell us. Either they or we will confirm the new arrangements with you. Operators must tell us if they change the crew because we only allow them to do so up to three times per term, although the current driver shortage and illness can make this tricky. You have told us how difficult crew changes can be for your children and young people to manage and so we closely monitor the number of changes. Please do let us know if your crew changes.

**Q. How long will you wait for my child to board?**

A. Operators are asked to wait 10 minutes for a child to board. Most of the crews have other driving jobs outside of home to school transport and need to move onto other work. We know that sometimes children do need longer and we will discuss this with you once we have reviewed the Pupil Travel Information Form and completed our Risk Assessment.

**Q. What transport do you provide to colleges?**

A. The council has no legal duty to provide transport free of charge between the ages of 16 and 19, in the same way it does for 5-16 and 19-25 year olds with an ECHP. We currently do provide some transport for young people with SEND and where families are experiencing low income. You can read more here – [Post 16 Transport Policy Statement](#)

**Q. Do you pick up and drop off from alternative addresses, such as respite?**

A. Essentially, we are a home to school transport service. The legal definition of home is where the child is '*habitually and normally resident*', this does not include respite or dual addresses.

However, under our current policy we do try to be as helpful as possible. If respite provision or an alternative address is on the way, and it does not affect journey times, distance, other passengers, and does not incur additional costs to the council, then we do our best to accommodate respite stays, but we cannot always guarantee that we will be able to support these arrangements. If any of the factors listed above are adversely affected, then we cannot arrange this and there is no statutory duty to provide transport under these circumstances.

**Q. Will transport be provided around my commitments?**

**A.** There is no legal requirement for the council to make travel arrangements fit around parents work commitments or their other caring responsibilities. To do so for 600+ children and young people who use the service would not be feasible.

We recognise that although we do our best, we can't always meet every need of every child. Sometimes a bespoke arrangement organised by the parent carer can be a better option for that child/young person. This is why last year we introduced [Personal Travel Budgets \(brighton-hove.gov.uk\)](http://brighton-hove.gov.uk) (PTBs). Contact us if you would like to learn more about this.

**Q. Are the crew introductions in person?**

**A.** Ideally yes. However, crews do take the opportunity to go on leave over the summer (as they are providing your children's transport during term time). Another factor is your availability over the summer, but most crucially in transport terms, is in late August, which tends to be when Operators allocate their crews. They won't want to allocate crews until the last possible moment, once they know which children they are taking and all the addresses, and so if you are away, you might not be able to meet your crew face to face, but we do ask our Operators to think creatively about this, for example arranging facetimes, exchanging emails, texts or recording a video.

**Keeping children safe on transport**

**Q. How often do you carry out spot checks?**

**A.** We carry out spot checks every term. During these checks we make various checks including the Transport Crew IDs, confirmation that CCTV is working, evidence that car seats, booster seats or harnesses are in good order, that vehicles are clean and well ventilated, and that the crew are aware of what to do in the case of an emergency. We check what times the vehicle arrives and leaves. All checks must be passed before vehicles are allowed to proceed.

It's a brilliant opportunity for us to be able to see the interactions between the Crew and the children and young people, and we share our findings with operators and parents and carers.

**Q. Do you have CCTV on board, and can I watch it?**

**A.** All vehicles transporting children on our home to school transport have CCTV with audio fitted. This is a contractual requirement of all our Operators, and they must confirm CCTV is working at least once a year at Contract Review Meetings, but also

during our termly spot checks. The council has a Data Sharing Agreement in place with all Operators. You are not able to watch CCTV, only designated officers (and the Police) are able to view CCTV.

**Q. How does the crew know what to do if a child has challenging behaviour onboard?**

**A.** Before anyone takes your child or young person to school, they must complete our bespoke in-house training sessions. This is a very extensive training programme, and one that other councils have bought from us! The modules have been co-created with relevant health, medical, education and SEND professionals.

The modules include; Introduction to the Role, SEND, Safeguarding, Language and Communication, Autism, Behaviour, Epilepsy, Exploitation, and Equalities and the Equality Act. Training must be undertaken every three years.

We also provide additional ad hoc training, support, guidance, and advice sessions to crews in collaborations with schools, relevant professionals, and parents and carers where required.

Ready for 2023 we are also creating a crew handbook which will be sent to all crews after they have completed the training. This is a quick and easy read which cements what they will have learnt in training.

The SEND Officer is also on hand to provide guidance and support to any crews who may be finding children's behaviour on transport difficult to manage.

**Q. Can an Operator refuse take a child to school, because of the child's behaviour which is part of their SEND needs, how do you manage this to ensure children can stay on transport?**

**A.** By virtue of signing up to our contract, all Operators know that the work includes taking children and young people with SEND to and from school. The contract makes clear that crews may find behaviours difficult to manage and the training and support provided by the service is aimed at supporting crews to fulfil their work safely and with confidence.

If crews feel that they, or other passengers, may be put at risk or their wellbeing impaired due to a child's noticeably agitated or upset behaviour they can refuse to provide transport on safety grounds. If your child is really struggling and showing extreme agitation prior to boarding the crew may not be able to take them to school that day. If this happens, you may need to make alternative arrangements.

If your child is repeatedly dysregulated on transport, we will work with you, the school, and any other relevant professionals to consider support strategies to ensure your child is able to safely travel.

Support strategies could include:

- Temporary or permanent varying of seating arrangements
- A different mix of travelling companions

- Additional training for crews to support managing specific behaviours related to the SEND profile of those on board
- an alternative arrangement to facilitate a break in behaviours, with the aim of positive reintroduction to transport
- Distraction techniques, such as music, favourite comfort object/soother, headphones, ear defenders
- Parent/carer meetings to identify possible triggers
- 'Double back' routes for agreed periods – although this can lead to reduced education time.

We treat the safety of all passengers and crews as a very serious matter, and will investigate any matters reported to us that give cause for serious concern

Multiple or serious incidents may lead to a temporary exclusion or permanent withdrawal from transport. Exclusion and withdrawal of transport will **always** be as a last resort once all support strategies have been tried.

**Q. What do crews do if there is an incident on board?**

**A.** If there is an incident on home to school transport, crews are to carry out the following actions:

1. Stop the vehicle and try to resolve the situation
2. If the situation is not resolved and the crew feels continuing the journey could present as a risk to the passenger, other passenger or themselves, crews must contact the Home to School Transport Service for advice
3. If the crew feel the situation presents a high risk to anyone on board, they must call 999.

If there is a medical emergency on the journey, crews must:

1. Stop the vehicle in a safe place
2. Dial 999 and request an ambulance
3. Follow the instructions you are given on the phone
4. Record the time of the incident
5. Inform your office and ask them to inform the parents/carers, the school and the HTST team.

The only exception would be if the child is having an epileptic seizure and crews have been given an Epilepsy Care Plan, in which case they are to follow the guidance for transport staff in the Plan.

In the event of a road traffic accident or vehicle breakdown, no matter how minor, whilst children and young people are on board, the Operator must immediately inform the council, school, and wherever possible, the parents/carers. A back-up vehicle will usually be provided.

All incidents must be reported as soon as possible on the day. A full written report and incident form must follow within 24 hours of the accident or incident.

**Q. How long can children have a Vehicle Passenger Assistant? Can it continue if I think they need more support? Are they employed by the Council? And what training do they have, and are the VPA Coffee Mornings mandatory?**

**A.** Vehicle Passenger Assistant (VPA) may be provided on transport to support the needs of an individual or a group of children /young people and to help ensure their safe travel to and from school. There is no automatic entitlement for children to travel with a VPA and most of our children do not travel with one. All children are risk assessed prior to travel and it is at this point when we consider whether a VPA is required. VPAs are provided in exceptional circumstances and the continuation of VPAs are reviewed regularly with input from all relevant professionals.

To support decision making, we take account of the following:

1. Medical needs, particularly where rescue action may be required
2. Where there is evidence that the child/young person's SEND create a clear danger or health and safety risk to themselves and others on the vehicle
3. Where a VPA is required to help manage the journey and support a larger number of children and young people on the vehicle, particularly over a long distance.

VPAs are not trained doctors, nurses or health care assistants, and, in the event of a medical emergency, cannot and will not provide medical intervention beyond what is explicitly outlined in the risk assessment. They will call 999.

The Council directly employ some VPAs but the majority of them are employed by the Operator. All VPAs are expected to work to the same code of conduct.

All VPAs are required to complete all mandatory training prior to working with us. Council VPAs are also invited to attend six weekly Coffee Mornings with the team. Each session has a theme for discussion, such as Language, or SEMH. These are also a good way for everyone to ask questions in a non-judgemental setting, increasing everyone's confidence and skills.

**Q. Why do I have to complete a Pupil Travel Information Form, and can these be online?**

**A.** We ask you to tell us as much as possible about your child so we can ensure the Operator and their crew have really thorough, and up to date information about your child and their travel needs. This is through the completion of a Pupil Travel Information Form. The form asks you to list any equipment that needs to be transported, e.g. oxygen tanks and feeding equipment and the nature of your child's disability, medical needs, or allergies.

We also ask you to tell us:

- How does your child or young person communicate? How can we support them?
- Help us to help them, by understanding the communications, sensory needs and behaviours that are unique to your child.
- Tell us how we will know when your child is settled

- Tell us how we will know when your child is dysregulated or upset
- What are the triggers and what can we do to help?

We will not start transport until we receive this information. The Pupil Travel Information Form helps inform the risk assessment that we carry out when we set up your child's route. Each year we will ask you to tell us if your child's needs, including wheelchair specifications, have changed so that transport continues to be suitable. We are exploring opportunities to make this a web-based form.

**Q. My child's driver has said he is only allowed to communicate via text with me and not my 18-year-old, is this correct?**

**A.** Yes. Crews must not exchange phone numbers with children and young people using home to school transport. This is a safeguarding measure put in place to support crews and children and young people. All correspondence must be managed between the crew and the child/young person's responsible adult. Parents carers may exchange numbers with the crews.

### **Raising concerns with us**

If you are worried about anything, please do contact us on 01273 293 501 or at [HometoSchoolTransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:HometoSchoolTransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk)