

Information on the draft Travel Support Policy

This leaflet provides information on a new travel support policy which will help Knowsley Council decide who can apply for support from the Council to enable them to travel to education, training or social care services. Knowsley Council recognises that travel support is the only way that some people can get to school or social care services, but the Government has reduced the amount of funding which it gives to us, which means that we have to find different and better ways to offer travel assistance to residents who need it most.

The first part of this leaflet sets out the general principles of the new draft policy, and the reasons for developing it. This is followed by a section which highlights the key changes that this policy will introduce, and states how it might affect people who currently use transport currently provided by the Council to get to school or social care services.

The Council believes the new Policy, which has been based on four key principles, will help us to ensure that we can still provide travel support to those residents in greatest need who have no other ways of getting to the services that they need to access, whilst encouraging those residents who can to travel independently.



Travel Support Principles

Principle 1

Local people should live as independently as possible

This means that residents will be encouraged to make their own travel arrangements, for example, making their own way to Council services by walking, cycling, public transport or own transport, or by seeking support from family or friends before asking the Council for help. The Council will only provide support where it is absolutely necessary, for example, where there is no other way for a resident to get to the services they need to access.

Principle 2

A range of travel support options should be available to meet the different needs that residents may have

There is too much dependency upon taxis or, private hire vehicles and Council vehicles as a means of transporting residents to Council services, and we believe there needs to be a much wider range of travel support options which can help people who need support to get to Council services. This might mean providing people with travel training advice and guidance so that they can travel independently; having escorts to assist people with using public transport so they can travel independently; arranging for a community mini bus to pick a number of people up; encouraging shared car schemes where residents and friends pick each other up and share the costs and/or as a last resort to book taxi or private hire transfers.

Principle 3

It should be clear who can get help with travel and the types of support that they can access

The new draft Travel Support Policy will help us decide who can get help with transport and will clearly explain how to apply for help. The policy will make it simpler for people to apply for help with travel, as well as making it clear in which cases residents will have to pay for that support or cases where support will not be provided.

Principle 4

The limited funds available for support should be targeted at residents who have the greatest needs

The Council currently spends £3m per year transporting residents to Council services and this level of spending is no longer sustainable given the £36m cuts that the Council must make over the next three years. Therefore, the Council believes that we need to carefully manage the costs of providing travel support. We need to be smarter at how we spend this money, remove any double funding in the system, utilise the Council's own transport fleet better and encourage community led transport solutions to ensure that the limited funding we have available supports those residents in greatest need.

These principles will help the Council to make a decision as to how we provide travel support services in Knowsley in the future, and this will mean the way that we provide travel support services will be different. The rest of this leaflet will highlight some of the changes to the services we offer, and how this might impact on current service users.

Under the current scheme

Changes in the way people can apply for travel support

The policy will introduce a new process for applying for travel support which should make it easier to apply for support if it is needed.

There are different ways for residents to access travel support depending on age and in some cases if people have a disability or additional needs. Currently, the process for applying for travel support for adults is different to the process for younger people, and there are different ways to apply for travel support to get to school if a child has additional needs. The Council believes to make it fairer that this process needs to change.

Changes in the way applications will be considered

Currently, some people who use free transport provided by the Council may not need or want that additional support. In future, anyone who applies for travel support will meet with an assessor to work out if they really need it, and what type of support will be most appropriate. The Council will expect residents to travel independently, and will ask applicants what support they already have to help them travel, how easy they find it to get around, and to assess their ability to travel independently to services.

Currently the Council has no way of assessing the type of help that people might need to travel to Council services. Some transport funding is being used to provide free transport to people who might not need or want any additional support to get about, such as people who have access to their own vehicle. This means that less funding is available to provide transport for people who have no other way to get to Council services.

Under the new scheme

There will be one travel support policy under which to apply for travel support. If a resident wishes to apply for travel support they will be able to find out who can get help with travel, and information on how to apply for help from the travel support policy. The policy will make it simpler to apply for help with travel, making it clear who can apply, what travel support is available and who can access it.

All residents who request support to enable them to travel to Council services will meet with an assessor who will work with them to determine if support is needed, and, if so, which support options will be most appropriate. The Council will only provide support where it is absolutely necessary, for example, where there is no other way for a resident to get to the services they need to access. When applying for help with travel we will consider what support applicants already have available to help them to travel. The Council will no longer automatically be able to provide free transport if:

- You have your own mobility vehicle; or
- You get the mobility component of Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payment and can travel on your own.

Consideration will be given as to whether these benefit payments already enable you to make your own arrangements to travel to the places where you need to go. Meeting with an assessor is not intended to remove travel support from residents who really need it. The assessment process will help us to ensure that the residents with the greatest needs, who have no access to other support, will receive the help that they need to travel.

Under the current scheme

Under the new scheme

Changes in travel support for children and young people

The Council is required by law to provide free travel support to children who apply and qualify for assistance to get to school. However, there is no legal requirement to provide free travel for children travelling to nursery schools or young people travelling to colleges. In future, parents will be required to make a contribution to these travel costs.

The Council is required by law to provide free transport to some children who live far away from their nearest school, or who have additional needs which mean that they need assistance to get to school. Guidance on how to do this is set by the Government and the Council must follow this. The Council also chooses to provide some free travel services which it is not required to do by law, such as travel for children going to nursery schools and young people going to colleges.

The Council will continue to provide free travel support to children who apply and qualify for assistance to get to school, as set out in Government guidelines, but children travelling to nursery schools or young people travelling to colleges will be required to make a contribution to their travel costs.

Changes in travel support for people who use social care services

The Council is not required to provide free transport to residents travelling to a social care service, but people can currently request help with transport, even if they have other ways of travelling to services. In future, all applications for travel support to reach social care services will now be assessed, and transport will only be provided to people who have no other way of travelling to these services, and charges will apply.

The Council is not required to provide free transport to residents travelling to a social care service, but people can currently request help with transport, even if they have other ways of travelling to services. There is currently no clear guidance to say who can get help with transport and this means that some people are also automatically provided with free transport, even if they don't require or want it. The Council believes that this is not a good use of funding so the process needs to change.

All applications for travel support to reach social care services will now be assessed, and transport will only be provided to people who have no other way of travelling to services, and charges may apply.

Under the current scheme

Changes to the types of transport that will be supported

The Council will seek to develop a range of travel support options. This might mean providing people with travel training advice and guidance so that they can travel independently; having escorts to assist people with using public transport so they can travel independently; arranging for a community mini bus to pick a number of people up; encouraging shared car schemes where residents and friends pick each other up and share the costs and/or as a last resort to book taxi or private hire transfers. In the future, any support provided will always be based on an individual assessment of travel needs which will help us ensure that the right support is made available to those who need it, in the most cost effective way.

Residents are currently offered a limited range of support options usually based on age or their ability to travel alone, which does not allow much personal choice or independence. Young people are usually offered help to buy a bus pass, while older people or people who cannot get around easily themselves are provided with transport using taxis or private hire vehicles.

There is no support available for people who might want to travel independently to services using public transport such as a bus or train, but who feel they require support to do this. The Council believes that in order to enable people to become more independent we need to change the options which are available and provide a range of support.

Under the new scheme

The Council will provide different support options which reflect individual needs; however, the main priority will be to encourage independent travel where possible.

This might mean:

- Providing people with travel training advice and guidance so that they can travel independently;
- Having escorts to help people use public transport so they can travel independently;
- Arranging for a community mini bus to pick up a number of people;
- Encouraging shared car schemes where residents and friends pick each other up and share the costs and/or as a last resort to book taxi or private hire transfers.

The Council believes that these options will promote independence and will be more cost effective. In some cases, residents currently using travel support might have to change the way they travel. For example, someone who currently receives travel support and uses taxis or private hire vehicles to get to certain destinations may, after meeting with an assessor, have to use public transport instead. In this case we would encourage a resident to purchase/apply for a public transport travel pass to travel to places, if this is more cost effective than the Council providing taxi or private hire journeys.

In a similar way, a young person who qualifies for travel support will now be offered advice on walking and cycling routes if their journey can be made in this way. Walking and cycling travel options will now always be the first option for all people who are able to use them to travel, and residents who are able to travel independently.

Under the current scheme

Charging for services

Knowsley Council needs to save up to £36 million over the next three years as a consequence of Government cuts. It is getting more difficult to afford all the services that we provide, which means some services will have to stop being provided, while others will be subject to a charge if a resident chooses to use that service. Therefore, where the Council is required by law to provide free transport, such as in the case of some school transport, and children's social care transport then this will remain free. However, where people choose to use Council provided transport to access services, such as specialist nursery schools, colleges and adult social care services, and the Council is not required to provide free transport to these services, then anyone who uses them will be required to contribute towards travel costs.

The Council is required by law to provide some types of free travel support, such as some school transport. It also chooses to provide free transport to other groups of people to enable them to access services, even when it is not required to do so, such as in the case of adult social care services. This means some people are automatically provided with free transport, even if they don't require or want it. For example, some people travel free on Council provided transport to social care services, even though they are already receiving some form of benefit to support their travel needs, such as Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

In addition, every year, the Council spends a significant amount of money paying for children to be escorted to school to ensure their safe travel by bus, taxi or private hire vehicle, even when in many cases a parent or carer could accompany them. As the Council is forced to make budget cuts, if we continue to provide free transport in this way then this might mean that we cannot provide support to people who have no other access to help with travel.

Under the new scheme

Where the law states the Council is required to provide free transport to enable people to reach services it will continue to do so. If there is no legal requirement for the Council to provide free transport, such as providing travel to access services such as specialist nursery schools, colleges and adult social care services, then transport will no longer be free and charges will apply. In future, people receiving travel related benefits like DLA, will have to use this to pay the above fee if they choose to use council provided transport, and parents or carers will be expected to escort children to school where possible, with Council funded escorts only provided in cases of greatest need.

Completing the questionnaire

Having read this leaflet, please take a few moments to complete the accompanying questionnaire.

To ask a question about the questionnaire, or if you have difficulty completing it, telephone 0151 443 3067 or send an email to council.survey@knowsley.gov.uk

You can also get this information in other formats.
Please phone Customer Services on 0151 443 4031,
or email customerservices@knowsley.gov.uk



Knowsley Council