



22 July 2024

Title	School Transport Assistance Policy 2024-2026, including changes to Chiltern Edge School Transport arrangements
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Brian Grady, Director of Education
Lead Councillor	Cllr Ruth McEwan Cllr Wendy Griffith
Corporate priority	Thriving Communities
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That ACE Committee agree the following School Transport policy clarifications: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel assistance entitlement means an offer of a bus pass or school bus at a pickup point, with an expectation for active travel as part of a child's healthy development; • Clarification of the exceptional circumstances and appropriate evidence required to access any exceptional additional support in addition to travel assistance; • That parents are liable for costs incurred by Brighter Futures for Children on behalf of Reading Borough Council if children do not access travel assistance provided; • That students are not entitled to travel assistance post-16 except in appropriately evidenced exceptional circumstances. 2. That ACE Committee agree School Transport policy changes to remove free transport entitlement for pupils attending Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School. 3. That ACE Committee agree to transitional protections to be in place for the next three academic years to support previously eligible pupils, including pupils starting at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School in September 2024 4. ACE Committee agree that officers ensure that families who will continue to qualify for transport (due to distance to their nearest suitable school, and families who do not have a safe walking route to the school), are supported to apply for ongoing transport assistance in the coming academic year. 5. ACE Committee note officer engagement with the Department for Education and Oxfordshire to request an update on school place plans for South Oxfordshire, and offers to assist in the planning process regarding South Oxfordshire schools, to further support Reading families.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school. This means they must take all the action necessary to enable their child to attend school. For most parents, this includes making arrangements for their child to travel to and from school. The Statutory Guidance makes clear that Local Authorities must make arrangements, free-of-charge, for eligible children to travel to school.
- 1.2. School Transport has been a significant budget and growth pressure in Reading for the past two years. Local Authorities across England are experiencing continued demand and cost pressures regarding school transport and local pressures are in line with these national increases in demand and cost increases. These include continued increases in numbers of children with SEND, leading to an increase in the number of children needing transport assistance to school, including children needing to go further afield to be provided with an appropriate education placement. These demand and growth pressures mean action needs to be taken to make savings across the School Transport budget.
- 1.3. Chiltern Edge secondary school is a 6 form of entry school in Sonning Common, Oxfordshire, which has been providing school places for Reading pupils aged 11-16 unable to secure a local Reading school place for many years. In recognition of the need to support Reading pupils access a school place, school transport arrangements have been provided for Chiltern Edge pupils since before Local Government reorganisation, with Oxfordshire establishing arrangements before 1998.
- 1.4. With the opening of the new River Academy secondary school in Reading from September 2024 securing sufficient local secondary places for all Reading children, it has been appropriate for us to review the free transport provision for Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge. This paper recommends that following consultation on revising the School Transport Policy, that ACE Committee remove free transport entitlement for pupils attending Chiltern Edge school, but ensuring transitional protection for currently eligible pupils remain for the next three academic years
- 1.5. To help deliver savings and to promote the most active and independent forms of travel, increasing and promoting independence for young people on their journey to adulthood and independent living, in line with the Council's policies and strategic aims to promote independence, following consultation it is proposed to change the School Transport Policy for 2024, with changes aiming to clarify language and promoting the most active travel for Reading pupils.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. As set out in HM Government's Department for Education (DfE) Statutory Guidance: *Travel to school for children of compulsory school age* (updated June 2023), parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school. This means they must take all the action necessary to enable their child to attend school. For most parents, this includes making arrangements for their child to travel to and from school. The Statutory Guidance makes clear that Local Authorities must make arrangements, free-of-charge, for eligible children to travel to school.
- 2.2. A child is deemed eligible if they are of compulsory school age, attend their nearest suitable school and: live more than the statutory walking distance from that school; or could not reasonably be expected to walk to that school because of their special educational needs, disability or mobility problem, or would not be able to walk to that school in reasonable safety, even if they were accompanied by their parent.
- 2.3. As well as these legal obligations, the Statutory Guidance confirms that Local Authorities are able to make discretionary arrangements to fund wider school transport. Such arrangements were agreed by Reading Borough Council and last ratified at Reading Borough Council Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee in October 2020, including the following arrangements:

- 2.3.1. Provision for children beyond statutory school age (post 16)
- 2.3.2. Supporting the most vulnerable children access schools through taxi transportation rather than a personal budget or bus routes.
- 2.3.3. Chiltern Edge School transport.

3. Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge

- 3.1. There has been a long-standing historical need for Reading families to access Chiltern Edge School, due to the lack of local secondary school places in the north of the borough and oversubscription of Highdown School in Caversham. Following school admissions boundary changes, Oxfordshire agreed to pay transport costs for Reading pupils attending Chiltern Edge School from two areas of Caversham – Caversham Park Village on the east side of Caversham and a number of roads on the far west side of Caversham.
- 3.2. Reading Borough Council altered the designated catchment areas for the Caversham area, and made all of the Borough north of the river (RG4 postcodes) into one dual catchment area shared between Highdown School and Chiltern Edge. It was agreed at the time of this boundary change that Reading would assume responsibility for the pupils Oxfordshire had been paying for and that this would be phased in over 5 years as each new Year 7 started. This historical context is important, as when Chiltern Edge and Highdown schools academised, they will have taken ownership of their own catchment areas and admissions arrangements and Reading Borough Council ceased to be the admission authority at this time.
- 3.3. Originally, the routes were covered by buses procured by Oxfordshire. Reading took over the transport provision for the Reading pupils and Reading Buses were able to provide double decker buses out of their network provision. The buses became part of the Reading Buses timetabled services and pupils were issued with Reading bus passes and could use not only any of the three public bus services but also the public bus service to Sonning Common, giving them the option of travelling out of normal school hours e.g. to attend after school clubs.
- 3.4. In 2022, the most recent contract was awarded to Reading Buses to operate three double decker buses from the RG4 Caversham area to Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge. The original specification was to convey 245 pupils but the total number of passes issued was 290. Further to the contract award, the admissions round for September 2023 saw 100 places offered for Reading pupils, which required additional bus capacity. For 2023-24 a contract variation has been put in place for Reading Buses to provide a 4th bus.
- 3.5. As Highdown has been oversubscribed for several years, the school transport policy has allowed free transport to Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge for any pupil living within the RG4 postcode area. However, with the opening of the River Academy in September 2024, there is an opportunity to revise this policy and reduce or remove the cost of transporting pupils to an out of borough school.
- 3.6. The policy change would remove eligibility for children not yet currently in receipt or eligible for transport. Two options were presented to ACE Committee for consideration and were consulted upon:
 - Fully removing eligibility from September 2024. This would achieve a full saving of £264,000 per year. This was the recommended option to ACE committee, due to the current savings required on School Transport budgets.
 - A planned reduction of between one and two buses a year, to cancel all four buses within a three-year period. A three-year reduction would lead to projected savings of £90,000 per year from September 2024.

- 3.7. Reading Buses have been engaged in discussions regarding proposed options for change and advise that tranches of 80 pupils per bus would be the planning approach taken by Reading Buses to test viability of any parent-funded route. Options considered include season tickets versus direct pay, and open public buses versus coach travel, with volumes and phase options informed by feedback. The vast majority of parents are keen to continue with a school bus specific service, with some parents expressing a preference to pay for this option rather than any change to a publicly-accessible route. The plan therefore for academic year 24/25 is to continue with the current bus route service, reduced as appropriate to reflect reducing demand.

4. Travel assistance entitlement

- 4.1. Policy language has been clarified to focus on how BfFC on behalf of Reading Borough Council will provide travel assistance to school where there is clear statutory eligibility, and the criteria applied to determine eligibility.
- 4.2. The policy language confirms that travel assistance for almost all children will be enabled through the provision of bus passes and/ or access to school buses with local pick up points.
- 4.3. A number of operational changes are being tested this academic year to enable this policy clarification to be successful, including the reintroduction of bus transport routes with drop off points to promote independent travel.
- 4.4. A clearer focus on assisting more active travel and personal transport budgets is included in updated policy language, to combine to both meet children's current needs whilst also encouraging greater independence.
- 4.5. As reported to ACE Committee in the School Place Planning Strategy 2023-2028, the development of more local provision for children with SEND, including through Additionally Resourced Provisions designed to create more inclusive mainstream options for children with SEND, will ensure that more children with SEND are able to walk and cycle to an appropriate local school place.

5. Post 16 transport

- 5.1. Statutory school age begins with the start of term following a pupil's 5th birthday and ends on the last Friday in June in the academic year in which they turn 16.
- 5.2. Under national legislation, students are required to be in education, employment or training until their 18th birthday. This could involve mixing full-time work with study, following an apprenticeship, continuing full-time in school or college, or combining part time training with volunteering. There has not, however, been any change to statutory school age which ends at the end of the academic year in which the student turns 16
- 5.3. Under the current law, there is no automatic entitlement to travel assistance or to another educational setting once a student is 16 and over. However, the Company is required to facilitate the attendance of all those of sixth form age i.e. those students in school years 12- 14 who started their programme of learning before their 19th birthday. This may involve travel assistance, but the Company does not need to provide this assistance free of charge. Responsibility for attendance lies with the student and their parents/carers.
- 5.4. Post 16 travel is currently being provided for approximately 100 young people at an annual cost of £320,470. Travel is provided to students attending Reading College, Newbury College, Henley College, New Meaning/Bucks College, UTC and Berkshire College of Agriculture. The updated Policy clarifies that BfFC on behalf of Reading Borough Council will confirm arrangements for post 16 assistance in an annual Post-16 Transport Policy Statement by 31 May each year. The consultation proposed confirming that the arrangements for assistance from academic year 2024/2025 will remove a

presumption of funding for travel, to providing support to access travel funded by the family or the student. The process of decision making (if the policy is adopted) will be needs-led, through the statutory annual review for each individual young person – with personalised plans developed on an individual basis.

6. Consultation

- 6.1. Adults, Children's and Education Committee on 17 January considered two reports related to the published School Transport Policy. Committee agreed to consult on proposed changes to the Policy as follows:
 - That a consultation on School Transport policy changes to remove free transport entitlement for pupils attending Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School and to change current transport arrangements be undertaken.
 - That consultation on School Transport policy clarification be undertaken, as follows:
 - Travel assistance entitlement means an offer of a bus pass or school bus at a pickup point, with an expectation for active travel as part of a child's healthy development;
 - Clarification of the exceptional circumstances and appropriate evidence required to access any exceptional additional support in addition to travel assistance;
 - That parents were liable for costs incurred by Brighter Futures for Children on behalf of Reading Borough Council if children did not access travel assistance provided;
 - That students were not entitled to travel assistance post-16 except in appropriately evidenced exceptional circumstances.
- 6.2. The format and process of consultation was delegated to the Executive Director, Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Children's Services and the Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health.
- 6.3. The initial plan was to consult in January and February. This would have enabled conclusions of the consultation to come forward with recommendations for consideration by members in time for March ACE committee. However, new statutory guidance was published 25 January 2024, which required a review against policy proposals, delaying the commencement of consultation until mid February, with the revised date for the closing of the formal consultation 30 March.
- 6.4. In addition, Reading Families Forum requested more engagement time to develop a coproduced approach to independent travel training and pick up points for buses, in accordance with the new policy proposals. This was a positive and welcome development, helping make policy language clearer and more understandable to parents, as well as enhancing plans for pick up points and enhancing the independent travel training offer for the coming academic year.
- 6.5. The results of the 2024 secondary admissions round has also helped inform the impact assessment of the policy change. On national offer day, many Reading parents held two offers for children starting secondary school in September 2024, as River Academy offered places outside of the coordinated admissions round. Parents confirmed by 15 March which offer they wish to accept. Following this date, the picture has become clearer both on preferences but also on the numbers of spaces available across the borough, and levels of interest remaining In Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge.
- 6.6. For the September 2024 admissions round, 46 children have accepted places at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge, which compares to 120, 91 and 100 children in the three preceding years. For the first time in a number of years, there are also places available at Highdown School in north Reading, which has a long history of oversubscription. This does evidence that, with the opening of River Academy, parents are increasingly able to access a local Reading school place. Children who have accepted an offer of a place at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge live between 1.989 miles and 6.086 miles of the school, with the vast majority of children living between 2 and 4 miles from the school.

- 6.7. 120 individual responses have been received to the consultation, from parents of pupils currently receiving free transport to Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge. Engagement sessions have been held with parents of pupils at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge, Reading Families Forum and Special United (Reading's forum for young people with SEND).
- 6.8. Whilst the large majority of responses confirm the wish of parents for free transport to continue to Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge, the following issues have been identified from the consultation:
- A misperception from some parents that Reading Borough Council made Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge the designated local school for north Reading.
 - A misperception that RBC initiated the universal free transport offer, as opposed to this being initiated previously by Oxfordshire prior to Local Government Reorganisation.
 - Concerns of parents that public buses may not be as safe, and worries about behaviour on current buses, and requests to seek assurances in any plans on this.
 - Local poor experience of the reliability of bus services to Henley College, and again reassurances being sought.
 - Long term acceptance of potential changes, but requests for phasing of any change to be phased over 1 and 5 or 6 years, with the large majority of responses wanting longer phasing.
 - Confusion regarding recent Reading Buses investments in new bus routes and the funding for school transport.
 - Families currently accessing transport to Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge unaware that they would likely be protected under current terms of the policy, due to distance to their nearest suitable school, and families who did not have a safe walking route to school.
 - A lack of safe walking routes for a number of north Reading communities including a lack of pathways from the Oxfordshire border.
 - Some support for parent subsidised or funded routes, if protections are in place for disadvantaged families.
- 6.9. In making a recommendation and preparing this report, officers have considered the position of students who do not have the option to move to the River Academy from September 2024; those who may not wish to take up the option (particularly those with exams coming up); and parents who may have been unaware of the proposed changes at the point of selecting a school.
- 6.10. Analysis undertaken during the consultation has identified that the vast majority of current Reading resident pupils attending Maiden Elegh Chiltern Edge are likely to be eligible under the current Transport policy criteria of safe walking routes and walking distance to nearest suitable school. It is therefore expected that removal of universal entitlement to free travel to Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge from the policy will still allow for pupils currently accessing transport to continue to do so, with any impact focused on parents making decisions on applying for secondary school places from September 2025, where Reading now has sufficient local school places to offer Reading resident children. The policy eligibility terms are included in the updated policy attached to this report, and are included below for convenience:
- **Pupil lives beyond the statutory walking distance to their nearest suitable school.** Travel assistance will be provided free of charge for those pupils of statutory school age who are travelling over the statutory walking distance to/from the nearest open entrance gate of their nearest suitable school. Pupils will normally be required to use public transport and, in these cases, they will be provided with a free bus pass in order for them to use the service.
 - **Pupil is from a low-income family.** Secondary school age pupils from low income families who attend schools between 2 and 6 miles from their home will be eligible for travel assistance even if the school they attend is not their nearest suitable school, providing it is one of the three nearest schools which the pupil is

qualified to attend (for example a mainstream pupil is not qualified to attend a special school even if it is one of the 3 nearest schools and therefore it would be discounted).

- **Pupil's walking route to school is unsafe.** If the route to school is unsafe to walk, and if the pupil lives within the statutory walking distance of and is registered at the nearest suitable school, the Company will fund suitable travel arrangements. All walking routes are assessed in accordance with the Road Safety GB and RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) guidelines.

6.11. Table 1 below summarises the number of Reading resident pupils by year group, and projected numbers of pupils who we anticipate would remain entitled under nearest available school, low income and safe walking distance criteria over the coming three years.

Table 1: Current Reading resident pupils attending Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge expected to be entitled transport assistance

Year Group	Total on roll 23/24	Reading pupils			
		23/24	24/25	25/26	26/27
7	110	77	47	25	15
8	105	72	77	47	25
9	85	58	72	77	47
10	70	53	58	72	77
Total	370	260	254	221	164

6.12. Regarding proposals for wider changes, engagement sessions with Special United and Reading College Students identified consistent themes:

- Students expressed interest in transport being seen as part of their life path plan to adulthood, helping learning practical life skills, including finance management, bill payments, and independent living arrangements.
- Accessibility issues, such as the absence of slopes in certain locations, were raised by students with physical disabilities, underscoring the need for support in navigating public spaces.
- Concerns about limited opportunities for independent travel due to parental apprehension were voiced, indicating a need for travel training initiatives.
- Teachers noted parental reluctance to allow students to venture out independently, citing concerns about safety.
- They highlighted gaps in their knowledge regarding support providers, social workers and transition processes.
- Desire for formal weekly support to facilitate transportation and independence.

6.13. Pupil and student suggestions regarding support for independent travel has informed plans to implement additional travel assistance, support and advice. Working is being undertaken with Reading Families Forum and Special United to co-produce an independent travel training support offer which will go live from September 2024, alongside the new Transport Policy.

7. Recommendations and next steps

- 7.1 It is recommended that the updated policy is adopted by ACE Committee for the September 2024 academic year, with protections put in place for pupils currently receiving free transport for the academic years 24/25, 25/26 and 26/27. This would include pupils starting at Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge in September 2024.
- 7.2 Families currently accessing free transport to Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge who would qualify for transport due to distance to their nearest suitable school, and families who did not have a safe walking route to the school, will be encouraged to confirm their applications for transport assistance under our standard policy terms. Confirming for families their entitlements will be a key action for the coming academic year.
- 7.3 Engagement with Maiden Erlegh Trust has also identified potential options for families applying for a school place from September 2025, to support continued pupil access for disadvantaged families to Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge, through the use of Trust pupil premium funds. Work to explore this option is informing future arrangements.
- 7.4 The updated policy allows for clearer approaches to sustainable travel for the new academic year 2024, with implementation based on the updated statutory guidance, and ensures that families fully understand the policy before any families are making their decision for primary and secondary admission rounds, in autumn to December 2024.
- 7.5 The following improvement areas will be actioned by officers to support the implementation of the new policy from September 2024:
- Independent Travel Training: an enhanced in-house programme will be available for children from September 2024, to help develop plans for children to travel independently to school. Work with Reading Buses is progressing to explore enhanced training for bus drivers to help support more independent travel for children with SEND.
 - School Travel Assistance process and systems are being updated to ensure parents are signposted to support and advice on travel, rather than just focusing on providing dependent travel options, supported by specialist SEND Travel officers.
 - Developing more sustainable modes of travel: an increased number of non-public bus routes, working in partnership with Readibus, will provide increased pickup and drop-off points for families from September 2024
- 7.6 The Table in 6.11 above identifies that there is a wider priority regarding strategic planning for secondary school places in South Oxfordshire; with the majority of current Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge pupils residing in Reading rather than South Oxfordshire. Officers have engaged the Department for Education and Oxfordshire to request an update on school place plans for South Oxfordshire, and offering to assist in the planning process regarding Reading pupils and access to South Oxfordshire schools. This may provide an opportunity for Oxfordshire to consider subsidising routes, if support is required to maintain the viability of Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge for South Oxfordshire families.

8. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 8.1. The Council's new Corporate Plan has established three themes for the years 2022/25. These themes are:
- Healthy Environment
 - Thriving Communities

- Inclusive Economy

8.2. These themes are underpinned by “Our Foundations” explaining the ways we work at the Council:

- People first
- Digital transformation
- Building self-reliance
- Getting the best value
- Collaborating with others

8.3. Full details of the Council’s Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council’s website](#). These priorities and the Corporate Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

8.4. The opening of River Academy supports the Council’s ambitions for local, high quality school places for Reading children, and actively supports the Corporate Plan theme of Thriving Communities. In addition, any reduction in road traffic will support the Council’s actions in response to the Climate Emergency and the ambitions set out in our Corporate Plan under Healthy Environment.

9. Environmental and Climate Implications

9.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).

9.2. The model of prioritising active travel and school transport through buses will encourage reduced emissions. The proposed policy changes will promote Reading children to attend local schools within walking distance, which will have a further positive impact on the Climate Emergency, reducing transport emissions in and around Reading.

10. Community Engagement

10.1. Statutory Guidance sets out what Local Authorities should do when consulting on school transport arrangements. This guidance is quoted below.

10.2. *“Local Authorities should consult locally with: schools whose pupils will be affected by the proposed changes, parents whose children will (or may) be affected by the proposed changes, and those whose children may be affected in the future – for example, because they live in the catchment area of, or attend the feeder school of, a school affected by the proposed changes; and the local Parent Carer Forum.*

10.3. *Consultation should last for at least 28 working days during term time.*

10.4. *Local Authorities should give careful consideration to the impact proposed changes to their policy will have on parents’ choice of school, the financial impact the changes will have on affected families, paying particular attention to the potential impact of any changes on children from low-income families and the impact the changes will have on people with protected characteristics.*

10.5. *Wherever possible, local authorities should phase in changes so that children who begin attending a school under one set of travel arrangements continue to benefit from those arrangements until they leave that school”.*

10.6. Engagement with Reading Buses has been undertaken ahead of the formal consultation, to establish whether a publicly available bus service could be provided to mitigate the risk of the removal of dedicated school buses to Chiltern Edge.

10.7. Statutory Guidance required a 28-day consultation period in term time. The proposed timeline across January – March 2024, with any implementation of policy changes from September 2024, was amended to the following:

Milestone	Timescale
Decision by ACE Committee to proceed with statutory consultation	16 January 2024
Commencement of statutory consultation period	14 February 2024
Closing date of statutory consultation period	30 March 2024
Review of feedback from consultation period	1 April-20 May 2024
Confirmation of final proposals published for Committee decision	12 July 2024
ACE Committee consideration of final proposals	22 July 2024

11. Equality Implications

11.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

11.2. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed, which has considered potential differential impact in particular for children with a disability, but also parents with any of the protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex (gender) or sexual orientation. Actions set out in section 7.5 of this report identify the actions being taken to ensure that there are no differential impacts for children with SEND accessing transport to support their education from the updated policy, including support for independent travel training, updating School Travel Assistance process and systems to ensure parents are signposted to support and advice on travel, support from specialist SEND Travel officers from September 2024 and developing more sustainable modes of travel with an increased number of non-public bus routes, working in partnership with Readibus, providing increased pickup and drop-off points for families from September 2024. Decisions regarding transport for children with SEND will continue to be needs led.

11.3. The consultation has identified families where a pupil is eligible for Free School Meals and paid particular attention to the need to mitigate pressure on families currently exacerbated by the cost of living crisis – with the proposed continuation of bus travel for families enabling those families not to suffer disadvantage. In terms of the Reading Borough Council reducing inequality priority, Chiltern Edge is the only school where families benefit currently from an extended universal entitlement.

12. Other Relevant Considerations

12.1. Impact on Public Health outcomes are expected as a result of more children being supported to travel actively and more children being able to walk and cycle to an appropriate local school place.

13. Legal Implications

- 13.1. Statutory guidance refers to the legislation governing travel to school for children of compulsory school age, in particular:
- Section 508A of the Education Act 1996: sustainable travel to school;
 - Section 508B of and Schedule 35B to the Education Act 1996: travel arrangements for eligible children;
 - Section 508C of the Education Act 1996: travel arrangements for other children;
 - The School Information (England) Regulations 2008: publication of information about travel arrangements.
- 13.2. Legal advice has confirmed that there is no statutory duty imposed on the council to provide free transport to Chiltern Edge to all children and the council is entitled to consider withdrawing provision which has previously been offered on a discretionary basis. However, in reaching and implementing the decision to withdraw existing provision Reading must comply with the duties which fall upon it as a public body, in particular duties to consult, to act rationally and based on relevant considerations, and to comply with statutory duties under Equality Act 2010.
- 13.3. The council is also required to act consistently with the statutory guidance. The challenges which the council may face as a result of the proposed changes correspond to the duties highlighted in counsel's advice and failure to comply with those duties could in principle give rise to a claim for judicial review of any decision to amend the policy to withdraw the provision of free transport to Chiltern Edge.
- 13.4. In making a recommendation and preparing this report, officers have considered the position of students who do not have the option to move to the River Academy from September 2024; those who may not wish to take up the option (particularly those with exams coming up); and parents who may have been unaware of the proposed changes at the point of selecting a school.

14. Financial Implications

- 14.1. The policy changes being considered are anticipated to make budget savings. The 2023/2024 costs for 4 buses is £1,356 per day (£339 each per day). The current annual contract cost equates to a total of £257,640 a year (based on 190 school days). It is anticipated based on reduced demand for school places that the contract value will decrease by one bus per year over the next three years, equating to an annual saving of £64,000 per academic year each year from September 2025.
- 14.2. Budget savings are also anticipated from an increase in independent travel for students aged over 16 in the forthcoming years. These savings will be contingent on the individual assessments for each student as determined through their annual review process, and their growing and increased confidence to independently travel. Budget savings have therefore been modelled at various levels of confidence regarding the numbers of young people able to independently travel, based on national data from other LAs who have been successful in providing effective independent travel support and advice.

Table 2: Projected savings based on implementing enhanced independent travel training for post-16 students

	Current Year	2025-26	2026-27	2027-28
Post-16 Pupils eligible for Transport	51	56	62	68

Potential candidates for Independent Travel Training	28	31	34	37
Potential Cost Savings *				
10% of potential pupils	£20,250	£20,250	£20,250	£27,000
50% of potential pupils	£94,500	£108,000	£114,750	£128,250

15. Timetable for Implementation

- 15.1. Implementation of the new policy is proposed from September 2024 with transitional protection arrangements in place for pupils currently eligible for transport to Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge. The contract terms for the current bus contract, which is in place until 2025, include a three-month termination clause.

16. Background Papers

[Agenda item - Home to School Transport Policy - Reading Borough Council](#)

[Agenda item - Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School Transport - Reading Borough Council](#)

[Travel to school for children of compulsory school age \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#) published January 2025.

Appendices

1. School Transport Policy 2024-2026.