

My Ref: JP / TK 011

Date: 27 August 2020

Dear Colleague

My predecessor as Staffordshire County Council's Cabinet member responsible for Education wrote to you in July, detailing the challenges facing this authority and the whole school community regarding school travel in the Autumn term.

I write now to update you on the huge amount of work undertaken during the summer holidays and the arrangements being introduced from the beginning of September.

To put this in context, there are around 120,000 pupils travelling to and from school every day in Staffordshire. That figure includes 8,000 children entitled to free Home to School Transport which the County Council commissions on 800 routes to 150 schools. Of those 8,000 children, approximately 1,500 use public transport to make their journeys rather than dedicated school buses.

There are two main concerns.

First, that the number of people who travel to school by car may increase in the Autumn. If school run traffic does rise there will be more road congestion, increased parking problems outside already busy schools and greater air pollution.

Second, successfully delivering statutory Home to School Transport under current Covid-19-related limitations.

### **General travel to school**

Parents of pupils not entitled to free Home to School Transport are responsible for getting their children to school, whatever their circumstances. We have written to parents via schools before the end of Summer term asking them to plan ahead for the Autumn and currently there is a campaign through mainstream and social media targeting Staffordshire parents to reinforce the message that they should plan to avoid taking the car on the school run.

We are working with schools to encourage as many pupils as possible to walk or cycle to school. If a car journey is unavoidable, we are asking parents to 'park and stride', ie drop off their child at a distance from the school so that they can walk the rest of the way.

Staffordshire County Council's Active Travel team is working with 401 schools to produce local plans that can be shared with parents showing cycle and walking routes with safe crossing points, as well as park and stride locations. Schools are being urged to promote this with their communities through their websites and social media pages, while general Active Travel advice is also available for parents [here](#).

## **Home to School Transport**

Pupils entitled to free Home to School Transport in Staffordshire are effectively divided into two groups: those catching dedicated school services and those using public commercial services.

We have communicated directly with parents of these pupils during the Summer and all have been issued passes and updates for arrangements.

Government guidance says that each coach or bus can be its own 'bubble' and that social distancing need not apply on dedicated Home to School transport, as the overall risk from Covid-19 to children and young people is very low. Therefore, the County Council will continue to provide one return journey on vehicles on school days, commencing on the first day of term. It has also suspended the 'vacant seats' scheme to increase spacing on buses.

Pupils will board on the basis of distance from school so those who live furthest will board first and sit at the back, while those who live closest will board last and sit at the front. There is no requirement to sit in year or age groupings and pupils must only travel on the bus they are allocated to.

Vehicles will be ventilated, and operators will be undertaking additional daily cleaning. Parents are asked to provide children with face coverings to be worn during the journey, pupils to use the hand sanitiser provided at the entrance to the vehicle and to use the same seat each time. It is also recommended that pupils wash hands after arriving at school and before and after their journey home. We will of course, ask that pupils queue, board and disembark in an orderly manner.

For children entitled to free transport who catch public commercial services, some will continue to do so, but we have looked at the busiest public routes where there simply would not be enough space for pupils and commuters under current limitations and have temporarily duplicated 29 routes to create an additional 1,160 places across Staffordshire.

Duplicate services are being provided where necessary across the county including Burton, Biddulph, Stafford, Uttoxeter, Cheadle, Newcastle, Tamworth, Lichfield, Cannock and Coven. The full list is [here](#) (under the heading 'additional seats available on local bus services').

Parents of pupils in this category have been contacted and told how to check for the latest information.

There are only so many spare buses and drivers available at peak times so we have worked closely with operators to do the best we can. Duplicate services may run before or after the original scheduled service and entitled pupils are asked to

board the 'special' service rather than choose between the two to keep seats available for commuters on the original service.

By using larger vehicles on some routes and transferring pupils entitled to free transport to duplicate services and to rerouted school buses, the temporary changes also create additional space on commercial services for fare paying passengers, including pupils and commuters.

All those involved in this process are doing their utmost to provide a safe, reliable service for pupils in the most challenging circumstances. The situation will be kept under review and changes made where appropriate. If you would like to discuss any aspect of this please contact me.

### **General preparations for school**

Regarding returning to school in general, each school is responsible for producing its own risk assessment of how things will work in practice. Senior council education and health and safety officers have been on hand throughout the Summer to support that work and each school should publish its risk assessment on its website.

General government 'back-to-school' advice is available [here](#).

None of the information in this letter is confidential. I will provide further updates as I am able and if you do have other questions do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of fluid, connected strokes that form a stylized representation of the name Jonathan Price.

**Jonathan Price**  
**Cabinet Member for Education (and SEND)**