



Policy for Allocating Spare Seats on Council School Buses

1. Introduction

Council organised transport is designed to serve the transport needs of children who are eligible for home to school travel assistance, in line with the Council's HTST [Policy](#). On certain larger routes, it is possible that there may be spare seats that the Council can, at its discretion, offer to non-eligible pupils on a chargeable basis. These spare seats will be limited in number and not provided to fulfil the transport needs for the full cohort of non-eligible pupils. This policy sets out the criteria and process for allocating spare seats on council school buses when capacity is available. The aim is to ensure a fair and transparent process that prioritises those with the greatest need, while adhering to the council's wider Home to School Transport (HTST) policy.

2. Eligibility and Prioritisation Criteria

When spare seats are available, applications will be prioritised in the following order:

A. Children living in the borough

Children whose primary residence is within the council's borough will be prioritised first. If any seats remain available after all in-borough applications have been allocated, children living outside the borough will then be considered.

B. Children without access to public transport

Children who do not have access to a direct public transport service to their allocated school (bus or rail) within 1 mile (walking distance) of their home address will be given priority. A direct route is defined as one that requires no change between public transport services and terminates within 0.5 miles of the school in question. Distances will be measured in line with the Home to School Transport policy's guidance for determining pick-up points and will require the walking route to adhere to the council's definition of a safe-walking route.

C. Children who had a seat in the previous year

Priority will be given to children who were allocated a spare seat on the school bus in the previous academic year. This helps to maintain continuity for families. If a seat was cancelled during the previous academic year, the student will be ineligible for prioritisation based on this criterion.

D. Children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM)

Children eligible for Free School Meals will be prioritised to ensure equitable access to transport services. Proof of eligibility must be given when applying for a spare seat (i.e. the parent's name, date of birth and National Insurance number).

E. Sibling connections

Siblings of children already allocated a seat will be given preference to support families and simplify transport arrangements.

F. Distance from School

Remaining seats will be allocated based on the furthest radial distance from the child's home to the school. Radial distance is the straight-line measurement from home to the nearest entrance into the school.

It is important to note that some services are substantially oversubscribed and fulfilment of one or more of the above criteria does not guarantee a seat allocation. Ultimately, in cases where there are fewer seats available than applications who meet the first five criteria, seat allocations between these qualifying applications would purely be based on the sixth (tiebreak) criterion alone.

3. Application Process

- **Application Period:** Applications for spare seats must be submitted by the published deadline (shown on the application form). Late and 'in-year' applications may be considered but will be subject to seat availability after on-time applications have been processed. Late and 'in-year' applications will be allocated on a 'first come, first served' basis.
- **Supporting Documentation:** Applicants may be required to provide proof of eligibility (for example, proof of address, evidence of FSM eligibility, or sibling information).
- **Notification:** Applicants will be notified if they have been allocated a seat on school transport for the next academic year by the 31st of July of the current academic year. If they have not been successful in being allocated a seat, they will be added to the waiting list.
- **Waiting List:** Applicants will be placed on the waiting list, ranked in order of the prioritisation criteria, if the application is received before the published closing date. Late and 'in-year' applications will then be added to the waiting list based on the date an application is received. Spare seats do become available after the 31st July notification date and parents are offered spare seats by e-mail. Parents will have 72 hours to respond to an offer of a spare seat before it is offered to the next student on the waiting list.

4. Terms and Conditions

- Spare seats are allocated on a **yearly basis** and are not guaranteed for subsequent years. A new application must be submitted each year.
- The availability of spare seats may change throughout the year due to fluctuations in demand.
- **The council reserves the right to withdraw a spare seat if it is required for a child who is eligible and the Council has a statutory duty to transport.**

5. Fees and Charges

The cost for a spare seat will be published on the application form. Parents may choose to either pay this amount in one lump sum or by 10 (monthly) direct debit payments. If joining during the academic year, monthly payments will be adjusted so that the fare (adjusted *pro rata*) is paid in full by the end of the academic year of travel.

Fares are charged by the whole term. Below is a table setting out the cost of the fare for in-year spare seat allocations.

Term when spare seat transport starts	Fare Charge
Autumn Term	100% of the annual fare
Spring Term	66.6% of the annual fare
Summer Term	33.3% of the annual fare

6. Cancellations and Refunds/Credits

A spare seat can be cancelled at any point during a school year. However, refunds/credits are calculated by the whole term. Below is a table showing what will be charged based on when a spare seat is cancelled **and** the cancelled bus pass has been received by the CTU team;

Date when spare seat is cancelled	Refund/Credit amount
1 st September – 25 th December	66.6% of the annual fare
26 th December – Easter Sunday	33.3% of the annual fare
Easter Monday – last day of the Summer Term	No refund/credit is due

7. Monitoring and Review

This policy will be reviewed annually to ensure it continues to meet the needs of families and aligns with the council's wider transport objectives.