

EAST RENFREWSHIRE COUNCILCABINET14 AUGUST 2025Report by Director of EducationPRIVILEGE TRANSPORT – PROPOSAL TO CEASE CHARGING FOR SERVICE**PURPOSE OF REPORT**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to remove charges for privilege transport due to compliance requirements under the Public Services Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) 2000.

RECOMMENDATIONS

2. It is recommended that Cabinet:
- a. Approves the cessation of charging for privilege transport from the beginning of the 2025/26 school session; and,
 - b. Approves the amended privilege transport scheme and agrees that this be incorporated into an updated Home to School Transport policy, applicable from the 2025/26 school session.

BACKGROUND

3. All school transport within East Renfrewshire is provided in line with the Education Department's [Home to School Transport policy](#), approved by Education Committee in [June 2023](#). Mainstream school transport is provided for pupils where they reside 2 or more miles from their allocated primary school or 3 or more miles from their allocated secondary school. All distances are calculated by means of the shortest safe walking route, with professional assessments undertaken by the Education Department's Health & Safety Advisor.

4. Where school transport services have any spare seats remaining once all eligible children have been allocated a place, these surplus places are able to be offered out to non-eligible families through the department's privilege transport scheme. The availability of privilege transport will vary depending on both the capacity of the vehicle as well as the number of pupils qualifying for free school transport. As such, there is no guarantee that privilege places will be available for each school. Where there are more applications than there are places available, a ballot is conducted to allocate places.

5. Over recent years, the department has seen a decrease in the number of privilege places which have been able to be granted on school transport services. This is due to ongoing efforts to increase the efficiency of school transport provision, for example by reducing

the size of vehicles where at all possible. The number of privilege places granted, and the revenue generated by the department in each of the last three years, is set out below:

Session	Number of Privilege Places Awarded	Total Amount Generated
2022/23	52	£14,199
2023/24	40	£18,417
2024/25	39	£17,453

6. A 43% uplift was applied to the charge from the 2023/24 session as part of the Council's annual charging for services exercise. This led to the increase in revenue despite the decline in the number of places being awarded.

7. Despite the decrease in the number of successful applications over recent years, the scheme has continued to provide revenue for the department, being one of the few areas in which the Education Department has been able to generate income. At the most recent consideration of the [annual charging for services exercise](#) in December 2024, Cabinet approved a revised fee of £3.20 per day to apply to privilege transport services from August 2025, up from £3.10 per day.

REPORT

8. The Public Services Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) were introduced in 2000 to require the provision of a baseline level of accessibility on buses and coaches designed to carry over 22 passengers on local and scheduled routes. Initially, the regulations applied only to new vehicles, with older vehicles given longer periods to comply in order that they did not need to be replaced before the end of their useful working life. The regulations have subsequently been implemented on a phased basis over recent years.

9. Whilst there are exemptions to the PSVAR for exclusive home-to-school transport services, these exemptions do not apply where at least one passenger pays a fare or has a fare paid for them. As those accessing privilege transport are required to effectively pay for a 'fare', all providers would therefore be required to comply with the PSVAR across all their vehicles were the scheme to continue in its current format.

10. Through ongoing discussions with our transport partner, SPT, we are aware that not all school transport providers are currently able to comply with all aspects of the PSVAR. Whilst many vehicles are fully compliant, this is not consistent across all services or operators, given the diverse range of vehicles operated on a daily basis. It is therefore not possible to continue with the current approach to privilege transport with a charge being levied where we are unable to guarantee that a service will be fully accessible on all days on which it operates.

11. Whilst the department could seek to continue to charge only on those services which are PSVAR-compliant, this would result in an inconsistency, with some parents being charged for privilege whilst others would receive the same service for free, based on the type of vehicle

being operated. This would also result in an additional administrative burden for the department.

12. It is proposed, therefore, that the charges for privilege transport are not applied from the beginning of the 2025/26 school session.

13. It is recognised that the privilege transport scheme can be a useful support to families in providing an option to access school transport where there is no entitlement to the service. Given the scheme utilises surplus, vacant spaces on existing vehicles, there is only a minimal administrative cost for providing this service. Therefore, in seeking to continue to allow families to access privilege places on existing school buses, it is proposed that the scheme will continue to operate, albeit with no charge being levied for use.

14. With this discretionary service now being offered on a no charge basis, it is recognised that there will likely be an increase in the number of applications but no corresponding increase in the number of places available. It is also anticipated that, with no charge being levied, the department will see more speculative applications, for example from families living in very close proximity to the school but perhaps see the offer of a place on a school bus as an additional convenience.

15. It is therefore proposed to amend the process by which places are allocated, removing the ballot and introduce a new distance-based ranking for all applications. This new process would see all applications received by the advertised closing date ranked in order of distance within the catchment area. This ranking would subsequently be used to allocate up to the appropriate number of places, ensuring sufficient reserved places were maintained for those who may require transport provision if moving into the school later in the session.

16. Subject to Cabinet approval, the existing Home to School Transport policy on privilege transport (appendix 1) will be amended to reflect this new process, with an amended provision (detailed in appendix 2). The associated terms and conditions for the operation of the scheme will also be amended to reflect these changes.

17. It should be noted that the above changes do not remove the ability of the Director of Education to be able to make discretionary awards of transport where deemed to be necessary to support with exceptional individual circumstances.

FINANCE & EFFICIENCY IMPLICATIONS

18. The ceasing of charges for the privilege transport scheme will result in an annual cost to the Council, based on the loss of income generated.

19. The current annual income target amounts to £16,700. Removing charges from August 2025 will result in an estimated under-recovery of income in financial year 2025/26 of around £13,000 which can be managed within the overall Education Department budget. Going forward the impact of removing charges will be considered as part of the annual budget setting process.

CONCLUSION

20. Following the implementation of the PSVAR, it is no longer possible for the Education Department to administer the existing privilege transport scheme on a consistent basis across all school transport services within East Renfrewshire. As such, it is proposed that the current charging arrangements for the scheme cease ahead of the beginning of the 2025/26 school session.

21. In seeking to continue to support families without an entitlement to school transport, it is proposed that an amended process is introduced for the granting of places. This new process would see all applications ranked by distance from the school, with those living furthest away given priority for any surplus spaces. Subject to approval, the Home to School Transport policy would be amended on this basis.

RECOMMENDATIONS

22. It is recommended that Cabinet:

- a. Approves the cessation of charging for privilege transport from the beginning of the 2025/26 school session; and,
- b. Approves the amended privilege transport scheme and agrees that this be incorporated into an updated Home to School Transport policy, applicable from August 2025.

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14 August 2025

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Appendices

1. Current Policy on Privilege Transport, Home to School Transport Policy
2. Revised Policy on Privilege Transport, Home to School Transport Policy

Appendix 1: Current Policy on Privilege Transport, Home to School Transport Policy

4. Privilege Transport

4.1. The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 enables local authorities to make any surplus capacity on any existing school transport available for purchase by pupils with no other existing eligibility. Within East Renfrewshire, this is known as privilege school transport. Privilege transport will only be made available where there is no additional cost to East Renfrewshire Council.

4.2. Privilege school transport is only available where there is surplus capacity on any existing school transport and, as such, is not available for all schools. Where privilege school transport is able to be made available, the capacity is limited and it is often not possible for all requests to be granted.

4.3. There is no right or guarantee to privilege school transport and it is always awarded on a temporary basis. Access to privilege transport does not confer any ongoing right to this service in subsequent years.

4.4. Privilege school transport is only made available after all pupils with an eligibility have been granted a place at the beginning of a new school session. Following this process, where surplus spaces are available, details will be advertised on the Council's website and communicated through individual schools. Applications for privilege school transport can be made directly to the Education Department's School Transport Service.

4.5. All pupils wishing to access privilege transport are required to submit an application for each school session. This includes pupils who have previously used the service.

4.6. Privilege transport is allocated by means of a ballot of all received applications. Full details on the allocation of places is available through the scheme's terms and conditions.

4.7. A daily charge is applied for pupils who access privilege school transport. Where this charge is not paid, the service will be withdrawn.

4.8. Any privilege school transport is allocated on a termly basis. Due to the need to ensure that those with an eligibility to school transport can be accommodated on existing school transport, it is not possible to guarantee that privilege school transport will continue beyond any existing allocation. In exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary for privilege school transport to be withdrawn during a school term.

4.9. The terms and conditions for the privilege school transport scheme are available on the Council's website and will be shared with all parents/carers accessing the scheme.

Appendix 2: Revised Policy on Privilege Transport, Home to School Transport Policy

4. Privilege Transport

4.1. Privilege school transport refers to the allocation of any surplus capacity on existing school transport services to pupils who do not otherwise meet the eligibility criteria.

4.2. Privilege school transport is only available where there is surplus capacity on any existing school transport and, as such, is not available for all schools. Where privilege school transport can be made available, the capacity is limited and it is often not possible for all requests to be granted.

4.3. There is no right or guarantee to privilege school transport and it is always awarded on a temporary basis. Access to privilege transport does not confer any ongoing right to this service in subsequent years.

4.4. Privilege school transport is only made available after all pupils with an eligibility have been granted a place at the beginning of a new school session. Following this process, where surplus spaces are available, details will be advertised on the Council's website and communicated through individual schools. Applications for privilege school transport can be made directly to the Education Department's School Transport Service.

4.5. All pupils wishing to access privilege transport are required to submit an application for each school session. This includes those who have previously used the service as prior use does not confer any priority for future access.

4.6. Privilege transport is allocated by means of a ranked list of all applications, based on the walking distance between the applicant's home address and the entrance to the school grounds, with those living further away given highest priority. All applications will be ranked on this basis, with the number of surplus places allocated to that number of applicants at the top of the ranking. Full details on the allocation of places is available through the scheme's terms and conditions.

4.7. Any privilege school transport is allocated on a termly basis. Due to the need to ensure that those with an eligibility to school transport can be accommodated on existing school transport, it is not possible to guarantee that privilege school transport will continue beyond any existing allocation. In exceptional circumstances, it may be necessary for privilege school transport to be withdrawn during a school term.

4.8. The terms and conditions for the privilege school transport scheme are available on the Council's website and will be shared with all parents/carers accessing the scheme.