

Consultation on Oxfordshire County Council's home to school transport policy and post 16 transport policy statement (2025)

Introduction

We are consulting on proposed changes to our **home to school transport policy** (for compulsory school age pupils), and our **post 16 transport policy statement** (for pupils in post 16 education). These documents set out the statutory (legal) responsibilities that we have, to help with transport to school or another education setting for children and young people living in Oxfordshire.

It is some time since we last thoroughly reviewed and consulted on these policies. Since then, various wording and phrasing has been added or tweaked within the documents to clarify specific aspects or to provide information where this was previously missing. Amendments have also been made to reflect changes in the statutory guidance from the government's department for education (DfE).

Consultation focus

This consultation is seeking views on:

- **Review area 1:** Updates to the format and language used in our home to school transport policy and our post 16 transport policy statement to improve customer understanding, awareness and overall experience.
- **Review area 2:** Specific updates to the use and application of direct travel payments in our home to school transport policy to ensure the language is more user friendly and consistent with current government guidelines.
- **Review area 3:** Specific updates to our home to school transport policy for travel arrangements to Alternative Education Provision settings to meet current government guidelines and to reflect Oxfordshire's current alternative provision arrangements.
- **Review area 4:** Proposals to ask for a financial contribution for post 16 pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) for travel to post 16 settings.

As well as consulting on the proposed changes as mentioned above, we are also exploring views on the following discretionary elements of both policies **where proposals for change have not been developed**:

- **Review area 5:** Discretionary travel at split village locations
- **Review area 6:** Spare seat scheme

Discretionary elements are services that **we are not** required to provide by law. Exploring views and potential impacts of possible future changes to these discretionary elements now, helps us to understand different perspectives.

We understand that some children and young people's needs will mean they will always require travel assistance. Regardless of any future decisions made, we will continue to meet our statutory requirements in relation to school transport.

How to have your say

This consultation is open from Thursday 23 January 2025 and closes at 11:59pm on Sunday 9 March 2025.

You can have your say by:

Please complete our online survey: <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/hometoschool>

To request a paper copy of the consultation documents and survey, please email: school.transport@oxfordshire.gov.uk or you can call our customer service team on 01865 792422.

Why your views are important

We have a legal requirement to seek the views of parents, children and young people and others who may be affected by any proposed changes to these policies.

The views you share will be reviewed and analysed to inform changes to the policies and how travel support is delivered. They will also help the us to understand different perspectives on existing discretionary arrangements that we have yet to develop proposals for.

On 29 April 2025, the council's Cabinet will meet to consider and decide about changes to the home to school transport policy (for compulsory age pupils), and the post 16 transport policy statement (for pupils in post 16 education).

About the home to school transport and post-16 transport service

We currently arrange daily transport to school for approximately 9,500 children and young people, including those using the Spare Seat Scheme. Of these, approximately 8,000 attend mainstream school places and approximately 1,500 attend places that provide for their special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or other needs.

We are required by law to provide school transport, free of charge, to all children and young people of compulsory school age that meet the nationally set distance criteria, where any of the following apply:

- The child is of compulsory school age but under eight years old, and they attend the nearest qualifying schools, and the shortest available walking route is more than two miles.
- The child or young person is eight years old or over, but not above compulsory school age, and they attend their nearest qualifying school, where the shortest available walking route is more than three miles (this is reduced to more than two miles if the child or young person meets low-income criteria).
- Parents apply for a place at their nearest qualifying school and a place is not available. In this situation, assistance would be offered to the next closest school with an available place if the walking distance criteria above are met.
- The walking route to school is classified as an 'unsafe walking route'.
- The child or young person has extra health and education support needs and meets the distance criteria described above for school transport. This also applies where, for reasons of their special educational needs, disabilities or mobility problems, such children and young people cannot reasonably be expected to walk to their nearest suitable school.

Children and young people are of compulsory school age from the beginning of the term following their fifth birthday (or from their fifth birthday if it falls on 31 August, 31 December, or 31 March) until the last Friday in June of the academic year in which they reach 16 years of age.

For post 16 travel, support is available for those in post 16 education who attend their nearest suitable educational placement to their home address and have SEND and the following applies:

- The distance from their home to the educational placement is over 3 miles.
- The distance from their home to the educational placement is less than 3 miles and there is no available walking route.
- It would not be reasonable to expect the young person to walk to the educational placement because of their mobility problems or because of associated health and safety issues related to their learning difficulty and/or disability, or because of a temporary or long-term medical condition.

Part 1: Proposed changes to Oxfordshire County Council's home to school transport policy (for compulsory school age pupils), and the post 16 transport policy statement (for pupils in post 16 education)

Review area 1: Updates to the format and language used in our home to school transport policy and our post 16 transport policy statement to improve customer understanding, awareness and overall experience.

What is the current situation?

As part of the review of both policies, we have listened to feedback from families, schools, council officers and other stakeholders who have told us that our current published documents are difficult to navigate and understand.

What changes are proposed?

We propose to update both documents to:

- Improve understanding of our home to school transport policy and our post 16 transport policy statement amongst families/stakeholders.
- More clearly define requirements and explanations to minimise instances of misunderstanding/misinterpretation.
- Improve the overall customer experience of these policies.

Changes include:

- A new contents page to support easier navigation to key areas of interest for families/stakeholders.
- Clearly labelled sections and sub sections containing all key information in one location.
- Re-ordering content to follow the different stages of the Home to School and Post 16 Travel process that families/stakeholders follow.

All detail continues to reflect the previous agreed policies and existing practice, aligning with the Department for Education guidelines.

Review area 2: Specific updates to the use and application of direct travel payments in our home to school transport policy to ensure the language is more user friendly and consistent with current government guidelines.

What is the current situation?

We currently provide payment in the form of a direct travel payment for some children/young people who meet the agreed eligibility criteria. It enables families to make their own travel arrangements to best fit the family circumstances and the needs of the child/young person. If this travel option is offered to a family and they meet the statutory eligibility, then the family can choose to accept or decline this offer and if they decline, we will make alternative travel arrangements.

The current wording within the existing home to school transport policy and the post 16 transport policy statement is as follows:

“OCC may agree to the payment of a mileage allowance. The mileage allowance is provided for the child’s journey to school and the return to the child’s home. The mileage allowance is the HMRC “All Car Rate”. If, through a change in circumstances, the payment of the mileage allowance proves no longer to be the cheapest means of transporting the child to school, the alternative means of travel will be offered.”

What changes are proposed?

We proposed to refresh the wording in the home to school transport policy to align with current provision and updated guidelines from the DfE. We also propose to update the wording to:

- Improve understanding of direct travel payments related to mileage rates amongst families/stakeholders.
- More clearly define requirements and explanations of how decisions about how direct travel payments are made to minimise instances of misunderstanding/misinterpretation.

There will be no impact to anyone currently receiving direct transport payments as a result of the proposed changes to the policy.

Below is an extract from the updated policy outlining the considerations and structure of a direct travel payment to support access to and from education settings for pupils.

“To determine the appropriate Direct Travel Payments amount, the following factors, alongside discussion with the family, will be considered:

- the special educational needs and disabilities of the pupil/student
- the travel distance as measured by the council
- how the pupil/student might travel to their educational setting
- the time the journey takes
- whether the pupil/student is able to travel alone or if they need to

be accompanied

- the age of the pupil/student
- whether any specialist equipment might be required”

“The standard amount that would be awarded with a Direct Travel Payment (DTP) based on the straight-line distance (using the council’s transport software system) between the pupils home and their main school and calculated based on the mileage band. It is expected the value of the DTP will support the cost of two return journeys per day of attendance at their educational setting (i.e. all four legs of the journeys). Any variation to the standard amount will be considered as part of the pupil/student’s travel assessment. As a Direct Travel Payment can be used in many ways there is no expectation that the parent/carer will use the same route as measured by the council.”

“More detailed information on mileage banding and Direct Travel Payment values can be found on our [Direct Travel Payment webpage](#). Banding and values are reviewed annually and updated accordingly to ensure ongoing sustainability and value for money.”

Review area 3: Specific updates to our home to school transport policy for travel arrangements to Alternative Education Provision settings to meet current government guidelines and to reflect the Oxfordshire’s current Alternative Education Provision arrangements.

What is the current situation?

Alternative Education Provision arrangements have evolved significantly since the home to school transport policy was last consulted upon. With more Alternative Education Provision available within Oxfordshire the existing phrasing within the policies requires updating to reflect the current and future educational arrangements. This will help ensure clarity and consistency of approach when identifying what travel support is available for pupils attending Alternative Education Provision.

There will be no impact to anyone currently receiving transport to Alternative Education Provision as a result of the proposed changes to the policies.

The existing phrasing within the policies is as follows:

“Currently the main provider of alternative education for OCC is Meadowbrook College which is an academy and independent of OCC control. This determination will be made on the same basis as attendance at a mainstream school and the relevant criteria are shown in 20.1 of this policy. No free travel will be provided to school funded days at an alternative education provider.”

“Therefore, after permanent exclusion from school, a child allocated an OCC-funded, short-term place at Meadowbrook College (or a similar establishment) will receive free travel if that child:

- Lives over the statutory walking distance from the setting attended
- Lives under the statutory walking distance from the institution but the route is unsafe to walk, even if accompanied by an adult
- Meets the eligibility criteria related to family income”

What changes are proposed?

To reflect that Alternative Education Provision is now not solely based at Meadowbrook College, we proposed to update the wording in the policies as follows:

“Where a pupil’s placement has broken down and the pupil continues to be maintained on the school roll (of the pupil’s original school) pending next placement but attends an Alternative Education Provision to ensure continued access to education (similar to S61/S19) then assistance with travel may be agreed to the nearest suitable provision.”

“Both the school and the council must agree and confirm that the original placement has broken down, and this is confirmed by both the school and the council. Any support with travel in these circumstances will be reviewed and agreed on a case-by-case basis in consideration of the established eligibility criteria for Home to School Transport assessments.”

Review Area 4: Proposals to ask for financial contribution for post 16 pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to post 16 settings.

What is the current situation?

At present there are approximately 300 young people who have an education and healthcare plan (EHCP), in post 16 education who use free travel arrangements organised by us to access their nearest education setting. Currently we provide this free of charge, but by law, we have the discretion to request a contribution from families towards the cost of travel. This is whilst supporting continued access to education.

Many councils around the country now request a contribution from families for providing travel assistance for this age group. It helps them to offset travel costs which continue to be heavily subsidised.

Local authority areas with these arrangements include:

Council	Maximum contribution (per annum)
Central Bedfordshire	£801
Birmingham City	£1,028
Essex	£900
Hertfordshire	£1,632
Surrey	£908
Buckinghamshire	£1,021

Wiltshire	£950
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What changes are proposed?

We are proposing to introduce a contribution charge for young people in post 16 education that require provision of travel arrangements from the council and are keen to understand what the impact might be on families, schools, and wider community.

The proposed charge for Post 16 travel is as follows:

- Less than 3 miles from home to school/college £546.00 per annum (£182.00 per term)
- 3 miles and over from home to school/college £1,015.92 per annum (£338.64 per term)

The proposed rates would mirror the cost of the council's spare seat scheme, including the existing waiver of a contribution due to low-family income.

It is expected that the impact of the proposed introduction of a request for contribution towards costs could be offset partly by young people and families accessing available financial support, such as the 16-19 bursary fund for students in vulnerable groups. The value of the bursary is up to £1,200 and is available to young people who meet the following criteria:

- Young person is in or recently left local authority care
- Young person gets income support or universal credit because they financially supporting themselves
- Young Person gets Disability Living Allowance (DLA) in their name and either Employment and Support Allowance (ESA) or Universal Credit
- Young Person gets a Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in their name and either ESA or Universal Credit

Other bursaries and financial support are also available, and these continue to be identified within the existing transport policies and online.

The proposed change would align the financial contribution young people and families make in relation to travel costs for both young people with and without an EHCP, despite the vast differences in actual travel costs. The current average cost to the council for travel for a young person without an EHCP is approximately £1,015 per annum, for a young person with an EHCP it is approximately £18,000 per annum.

It is anticipated that this proposal, if accepted, would generate a contribution of approximately £207,000 per annum, offsetting our current transport spend of approximately £2m per annum

Part 2: Exploring potential future changes to discretionary elements of Oxfordshire County Council's home to school transport policy (for compulsory school age pupils), and the post 16 transport policy statement (for pupils in post 16 education)

Review area 5: Discretionary travel at split village locations

Exploring whether discretionary support should continue to be available for pupils living in 'split villages', where pupils are able to access travel support to either the nearest suitable school or the designated/catchment school for the village/area.

What is the current situation?

At present we provide travel support for children/young people where 20 percent or more of the addresses within that village fall within the designated/catchment school area to either their nearest suitable school or the designated/catchment school. All other locations in the county are assessed considering the nearest suitable school only.

This provision for split villages is discretionary and exceeds our legal duty. The current statutory position is that a child/young person is entitled to access travel support if they meet all the statutory eligibility criteria, this includes attending their nearest suitable school.

Only 14 villages within Oxfordshire are identified as a split village, with approximately 266 children/young people currently benefiting from this discretionary support. The current average cost to the council, of a child/young person using free home to school transport, is £1,015 per annum. The approximate proportion of cost for this split villages discretionary provision is estimated at £270k per annum.

What is the council seeking views on?

With limited funds available it is essential that we provide support only where it is necessary. This discretionary provision for split villages has been in place since the last consultation in 2014. In this consultation we now want to explore if this support continues to be necessary, and if it were to be changed or withdrawn, what the impact might be on families, schools, the council, and wider community.

As part of this early exploration, we are also asking for views on if the council should continue to provide discretionary transport support to two destinations or split villages (catchment school and nearest suitable school), whilst other locations in the county can only access this support from a single destination (their nearest suitable school).

No proposals for split villages have been developed. Should these come forward in the future, we will formally consult on them before any decisions are made.

Understanding potential impacts now will help us to see if any mitigation is required and what this might look like should any proposals be developed.

Area 6: Spare seats scheme

Exploring at an early stage whether the discretionary selling of spare capacity seats on existing home to school transport services (which we organise) should continue into the future.

What is the current situation?

At present we provide a spare seats scheme for some children and young people who do not meet the stated eligibility criteria for assistance with transport, where travel arrangements (contracted by the council) are already in place and spare capacity exists.

Demand for statutory travel support fluctuates and therefore the availability of spare capacity/seats also fluctuates throughout the year. Any spare seat that is provided to a child/young person is not guaranteed and may be withdrawn if the spare capacity no longer exists. This includes spare seats being withdrawn either mid-school year or during the summer holidays.

We have a statutory responsibility to provide free travel arrangements for compulsory age children who met the statutory eligibility criteria. We also make arrangements for some young people who are not compulsory school age (post 16) as per our current post 16 policy statement. This provision of the spare seats scheme is discretionary and exceeds our legal duty.

Where a spare seat is offered/provided we charge families between £546 and £1,015 per annum (dependent on distance from home to school) for the seat. The charge may be waived if low-income evidence can be provided.

The demand for spare seats often exceeds the availability of spare seats. The number of spare seats allocated over the last few years has been reducing as a result of transport routes being updated to reflect the demand and provision for entitled children/young people. This is shown in the following table:

	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Approximate number of spare seat passengers	1,200	1,100	1,300	900	600

What is the council seeking views on?

With limited funds available it is essential that we provide support only where it is necessary.

The discretionary provision for spare seats has been in place for many years. We are exploring, at an early stage, if this support should continue to be made available in its current format and approach. This includes whether the financial support

underpinning the scheme should be either adjusted to make the scheme sustainable moving forward, or whether financial support should be withdrawn.

As part of this early exploration, we also want to understand the impact if the spare seats scheme were to be changed or withdrawn, and what the council could do to lessen any impact.

No proposals for spare seats have been developed.

Should these proposals come forward in the future, we will formally consult on them before any decisions are made.