

Division(s): All

CABINET – 16 JULY 2013

ADDENDUM TO THE PROPOSED HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

Report by Director for Children, Education and Families

Introduction

1. The legal basis for providing home to school transport is set out in sections 508A, 508B, 508C, 508D and 509AD and Schedule 35B of the Education Act 1996 (as amended by Part 6 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006) and where appropriate the Equality Act and English and European case law. In addition local authorities are required to have regard to the most recent statutory guidance published by the Secretary of State.
2. The statutory guidance requires local authorities to consult upon any proposed changes to the published Home to School Transport Policy.

Background and context

3. The statutory guidance published by the Secretary of State in March 2013 states that a consultation should last at least 28 days. Oxfordshire's consultation opened on 5 June 2013 and was originally due to end on 3 July 2013. It was then extended to 5 July 2013 and a further extension was then agreed to 15 July 2013. This means that the consultation took place over 141 days.
4. The consultation documents were placed on the County Council's public website and were accessible through the Consultation Portal. Links to the documents were sent to all state funded schools in Oxfordshire as well as to, neighbouring local authorities, the Oxford Diocese, the Archdiocese of Birmingham, district councils in Oxfordshire, and parish councils within Oxfordshire. The consultation was also publicised in "Schools News" which was sent to all state funded schools in Oxfordshire. In addition all primary schools were provided with a letter to use to alert parents to the consultation.

Summary of consultation responses

5. The responses centre around the potential reduction in the choice of schools available to families, the likely increase in costs for families, the impact on popular schools and the perceived need to match transport arrangement.
6. There has been strong support for retaining the current policy and for rejecting proposals 1 to 7. The response to Proposal 8 was more evenly balanced but as with the other proposals a majority of respondents were against its adoption.
7. The most unpopular proposal was Proposal 5.
8. Copies of the responses have been placed in the Members' Lounge.
9. The overall breakdown of responses is shown below and overleaf.

Responses to Proposal 1 – 1740
Responses to Proposal 2 – 1711
Responses to Proposal 3 – 1722
Responses to Proposal 4 – 1685
Responses to Proposal 5 – 1770
Responses to Proposal 6 – 1669
Responses to Proposal 7 – 1630
Responses to Proposal 8 - 1632

There were 1460 online responses to each proposal of the consultation. There were 310 paper questionnaires completed in response to the consultation. There were 239 letters and emails received regarding the consultation.

Petition

10. A petition was submitted with 29 names opposing the proposed changes to home to school transport. The petition specifically mentioned opposition to paying £800 per annum per child for transport to school, opposition to the ending of free travel to the catchment school unless it is the nearest school and concern regarding the impact on the future of Burford School.
11. A second petition was submitted specifically opposing Proposal 5. This had 157 signatures.

Issues raised in letters and emails

12. Comments received:

<i>Proposal 3 is shameful</i>

<i>Proposal 5 is ill thought out</i>

The proposals will reduce the intake to Burford School but this school has recently had £4.5 million spent on its accommodation

The charges will increase to £800 and a family with 3 children will need to spend £2,400 per annum on travel to school

The proposals will effectively remove the ability to choose a particular school

The proposals will lead to increased traffic congestion and an increase in road accidents

A casual and existential threat to Burford School

It will undermine the links between a school and its catchment area.

There is no political mandate for this proposal

Can children be accommodated at nearer schools?

There has been no assessment of possible link between admission policies in schools and the transport policy

There has been no assessment of the impact of forcing children to attend Carterton Community College given that it does not have post16 provision.

There is a need for a greater examination of the possible effects of the proposed change

It will force children to attend different schools to their siblings

The questionnaire was impossible to read

There should be no cuts to home to school transport

The proposals do not assist disabled parents

The proposals will adversely affect rural communities

The funding crisis is an unintended consequence of the increasing number of academies

Parents of children at Leaffield CE Primary School will be denied a choice of secondary school

Parents of children in Standlake will have to send their children to Wood Green School rather than Bartholomew

Statutory walking distances should not be applied in rural areas

RAF families at RAF Benson will be disadvantaged

Garsington, Risinghurst and Kennington are being singled out for adverse treatment

Carterton Community College cannot cope with the additional children Travel should be free it would need to admit

Catchments should be respected

The consultation has been poorly publicised

Routes currently classed as unsafe walking routes should not be reassessed

The proposals do not take account of the need to safeguard children on their way to school

The route from Brize Norton to Carterton Community College is not safe because there is an inadequate cycle network and children should continue to receive free travel to Burford School

Reassessing routes that are currently regarded as unsafe walking routes is causing concern

There is a danger to children posed by paedophiles if they have to use isolated routes

The proposals could increase traffic congestion and so increase the danger to pedestrians and car users

The proposals as a whole are effectively a tax on rural areas

The proposals discriminate against religious families

Warriner School will be damaged by the proposals

The proposals will divide communities

Consider restricting the radius within which free travel will be provided to catchment schools

The proposals could lead to school closures

The proposals are contrary to the Military Covenant

Parents of children in Ambrosden already have to pay for travel to Gosford Hill School

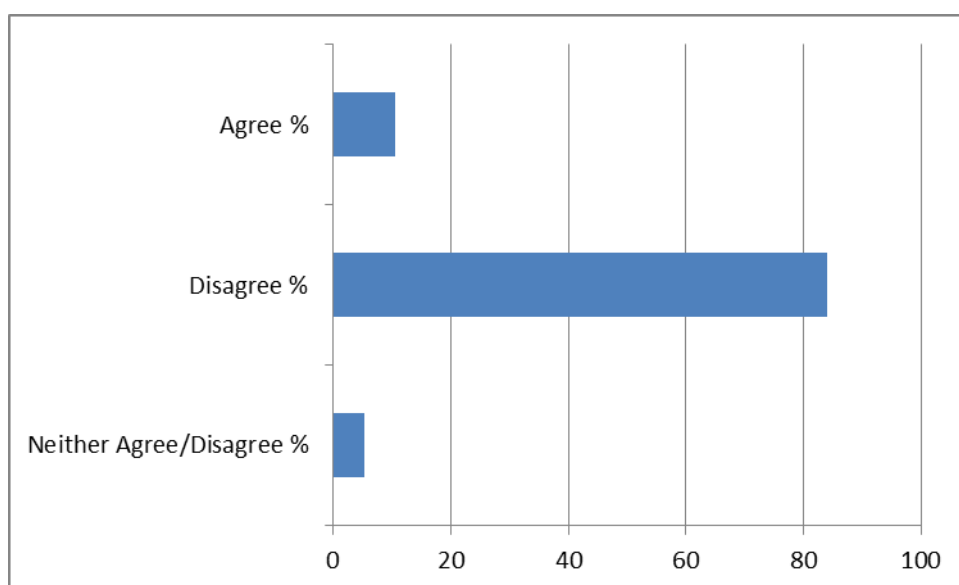
Burford School will no longer be viable

Issues raised by respondents using the questionnaire

13. (a) Proposal 1

To increase the charges for concessionary travel and post 16 travel in 2014/15 to £290.40 (£96.80 per two terms of the 6 term year) for those who live under 3 miles from the school attended and £541.20 per annum (£180.40 per two terms of the 6 term year) for those who live over 3 miles from the school attended

Concessionary seats are spare seats on home to school transport routes. These spare seats can be used by children whose parents have paid the concessionary fare.



There were a total of **1740** responses to Proposal 1.

Agree – **94** (5.40%)

Disagree – **1464** (84.13%)

Neither – **182** (10.45%)

Comments on this proposal:

Travel on school transport should be free for all children up to the age of 18

Oxford Bus Co and Stagecoach charge less and make a profit which suggests that the Council mismanages its home to school transport

Schools may close as a result of the increased charges

There will be a differentially high impact on rural areas

Government policy is to promote choice, for example through the creation of free schools, and this proposal will remove choice from a significant number of families

The proposal would have financial implications for parents who are already suffering owing to the economic cutbacks by central government.

Parents who need to pay the concessionary fare will move their children to less expensive service bus routes or will take them to school by car

There will be an increase in the use of cars to take children to school

The increase is a stealth tax

The increased concessionary charge will seriously impact on the right of parents to choose what is best for their children

Potentially the cost of sending three children to their catchment school could cost £24,000

People on benefits will not have to pay and high income families can afford to pay. Average hard working families will be the most seriously affected

Bus travel to school should remain free for all

The increased charges are a tax on middle income families

Children should not be expected to walk over 2 miles on their own, or in a group, from the age of 11 because they are vulnerable and will be put at risk.

The buses serving schools already run half empty and fewer children will now travel on them

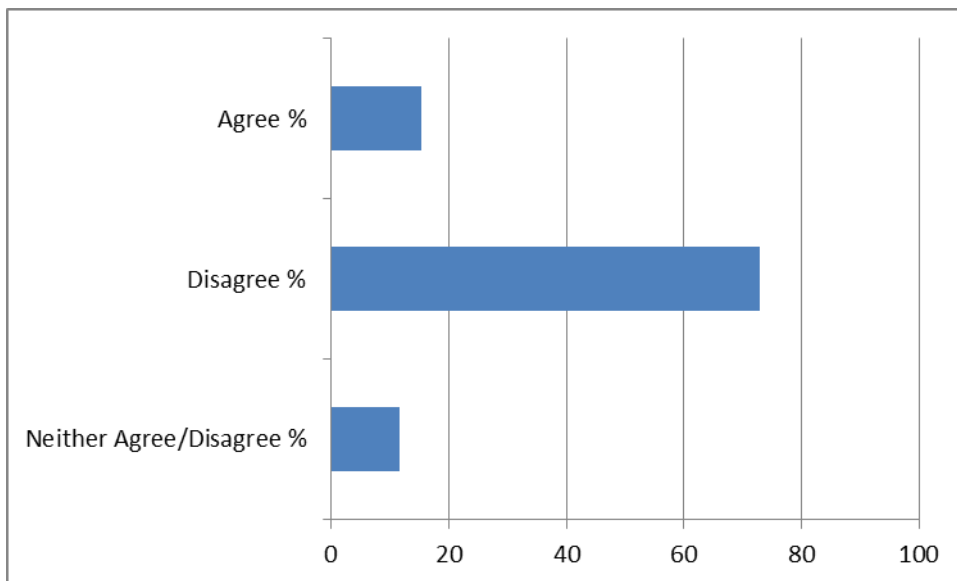
Children's education will be affected

(b) Proposal 2

To increase the concessionary fare by 2% per annum each year from September 2015

The Council includes an annual inflation increase of 2% in new home to school transport contracts. Increasing fares annually by 2% would therefore maintain the ratio between the contribution made by the parent and the subsidy provided by the Council. If accepted the 2% price rise would take

effect in September of 2015 and would be followed by a 2% increase in September of each successive year.



There were a total of **1711** responses to Proposal 2.

Agree – **200** (11.68%)

Disagree – **1249** (72.99%)

Neither – **262** (15.31%)

Comments on this proposal:

I agree since this is about the rate of inflation

A fair system

The Council must at least protect the tax payer from inflation and rising fuel costs.

Fix by inflation or other measure is sensible, but not a big jump now.

The proposal will lead to more children being taken to school by car.

Look at cost savings and better value for money in 'personalised' transport.

£6-10 per year is an acceptable rise in instances where charging is fair

The fare will increase by 10% over 5 years (the time a child is typically in school)but we do not know what the actual inflation rate will be over that period.

Guaranteed increases will reduce the incentive for the County and officers to try and reduce their costs.

Use RPI instead

The charge should be the real cost of the seat. There should be no subsidy.

This proposal would have financial implications for parents who are already suffering owing to the economic cutbacks by central government.

Is it likely that if costs fall as a result of more efficient vehicles that fares would be reduced? I suspect not and this would then again penalise those families in rural environments who have no access to public transport to facilitate their personal choice of school.

Future price increases should be debated and should not be auto-escalated because this is undemocratic.

Transport to school should be free

Limit the increase to 1% per year

The Council is trying to encourage parents to drive their children to school

If this increase is greater than the increase in average disposal income then it should be reduced to that same percentage figure.

Limits the choice of school

Fixed increases do not work

Parents pay taxes and this income should be used to provide free travel to school

Commercial service offer cheaper fares

Pure greed

Why would anyone agree to an increase?

Travel to school should be free

An above inflation increase

2% is above the national average wage increase for most people in the UK.

An automatic increase will discourage innovation

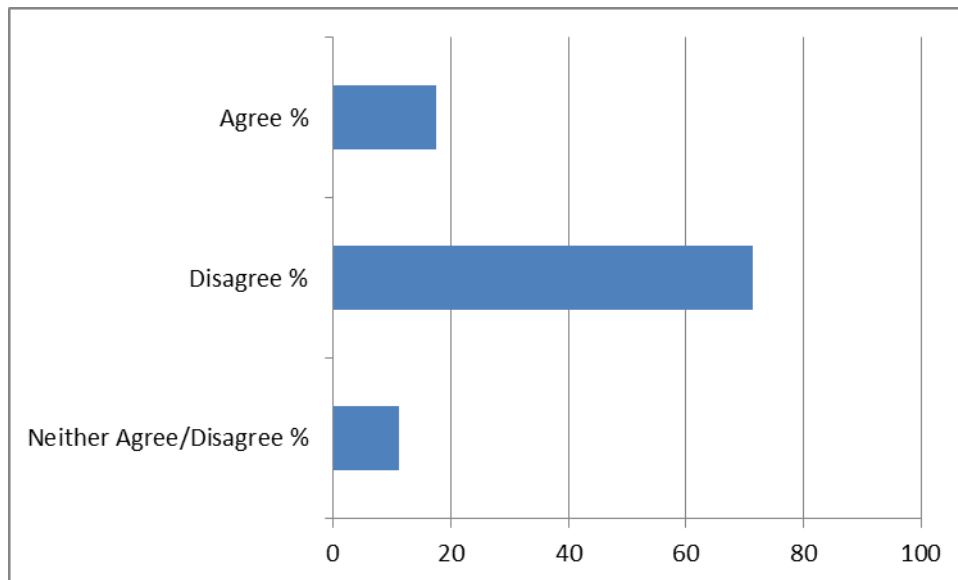
An unacceptable proposal considering the increased pay for senior County Council members

As an alternative reduce internal management costs.

(c) Proposal 3

To end the waiving of the concessionary charge for the third and subsequent children of those families who have more than two children using the same home to school transport service

Currently families that have more than two children using the same home to school transport service receive an additional subsidy of £784.70 for every further child they have who uses the same home to school transport service.



There were a total of **1722** responses to Proposal 3.

Agree – 193 (11.20%)
Disagree – 1229 (71.37%)
Neither – 300 (17.42%)

Comments on this proposal:

It seems unfair for families with fewer children to have to subsidise parents who choose to have more than 2.

Having a larger family is usually a choice which has been exercised by individuals for which they should pay their way if it is affordable.

There seems no logic in reducing the charges simply because the parents have more children. They made the decision to have the child.

Why should some children travel free because their parents already pay for travel for a brother or sister?

I do not agree with charging but can see the fairness of charging equally for each child.

OCC needs to look at current school transport where children from areas not entitled to free transport are boarding buses and travelling, even though they shouldn't be

Discriminates against larger families

The proposal will penalise low income families

Travel to school should always be free

The charges for three children will be more than a person's council tax

This is a tax on families

Infringes human rights

The Council is mismanaging its bus services

The marginal cost is nil and therefore the proposal is invalid

A grossly unfair cost saving measure

There is a risk that the proposal is discriminatory on religious and cultural grounds.

The average hard working family will be most affected by this proposal

This will place a significant burden on families in Kennington

The actual cost of transporting an additional child on the same bus is zero - the bus is going anyway.

*There is a significant risk that children will have to be sent to different schools
You cannot charge for children to be able to attend school*

It will encourage more travel by car

This proposal would have financial implications for parents who are already suffering owing to the economic cutbacks within central government. The government have revised social funding agreements and this may exclude some children from attending school.

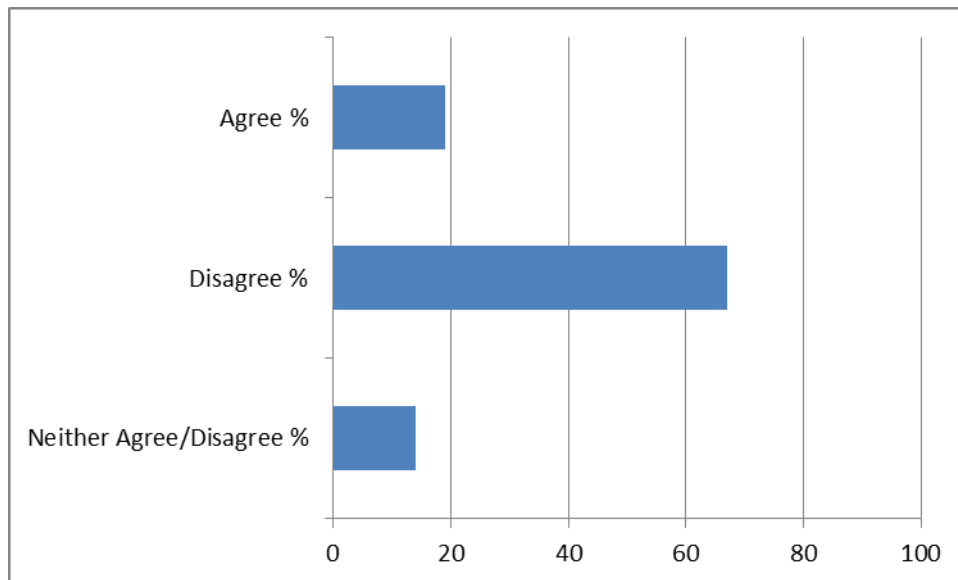
Taking an average of 50 seats on a standard bus that means that the council/bus companies would make £9235 per year between them

Education is free and transport should be provided for all that the county must educate

(d) Proposal 4

To only use the guidance issued by Road Safety GB when making risk assessments of walked routes to school

Road Safety GB is a national road safety organisation that includes representatives from groups across the UK, such as local government road safety teams. It aims to reduce the number and severity of road accidents.



There were a total of **1685** responses to Proposal 4.

Agree – **235** (13.94%)

Disagree – **1128** (66.94%)

Neither – **322** (19.10%)

Comments on this proposal:

A thorough risk assessment needs to take into account street lighting, isolation, under foot surface and traffic.

Fair as all routes will be assessed under the same criteria. also will give parents rights to appeal

The opinions of local people are more valuable than those of a national body

Roads should be assessed on their safety for a child over the age of 11 to be unaccompanied.

It will impact on family life, parents ability to work and the safety of our children

“Stranger danger”

The local knowledge of parents / teachers who know the area should be taken into consideration

This is a thinly disguised cost saving measure.

A simple look at routes and whether walking along roads and tracks with a suitable pavement should be a sufficient indicator

All policies should ensure maximum protection /minimum risk for our children

Walking children to school will conflict with the need to get to work

The council will shortly have blood on its hands.

It sounds like this is trying to shorten the process of producing risk assessments and as such something could be over looked.

There are other factors which need to be included in the assessment.

It is essential that a variety of sources are used in assessing a route. This point has been argued and won at appeal and therefore the Council should not see itself as being in a position to even consider this proposal.

These safety guidelines were deemed insufficient by the appeal hearing last year, the decision to remove transport was made using these and then it was decided the route was unsafe.

Personal safety of pupils should be paramount. Road safety is only one element.

We are part of the EU and these guidelines should also be used.

Road Safety GB will potentially cause significant risk to some children

Using a single document to assess a route is not acceptable - one size does not fit all. The RSGB guidelines do not match the DfES guidelines which must be considered.

Why is the assessment being made on the presumption that children will be accompanied by an adult?

The status quo should be maintained

A blanket rule will not work and is unfair.

Are the County seriously suggesting that parents ask their employers to allow them to have approximately 3 hours a day to encompass the 90 minute round trip to walk to Wallingford?

Common sense risk assessment is needed

Country roads are not safe at any time.

The council should take into account all evidence relating to a walking route - in some cases there may have been additional studies/ information not included in the Road Safety GB.

National guideline should not override the concerns of the local communities?

We have to consider the road safety along with their safety in general. Proposed changes would lead to a massive increase in traffic congestion and represent a real road safety risk.

Paths across fields may become acceptable - which they are not.

This will lead to children walking unsupervised down dark footpaths in winter and force responsible parents who do not want their children to be in danger to give up work

Snatching is every parent's nightmare

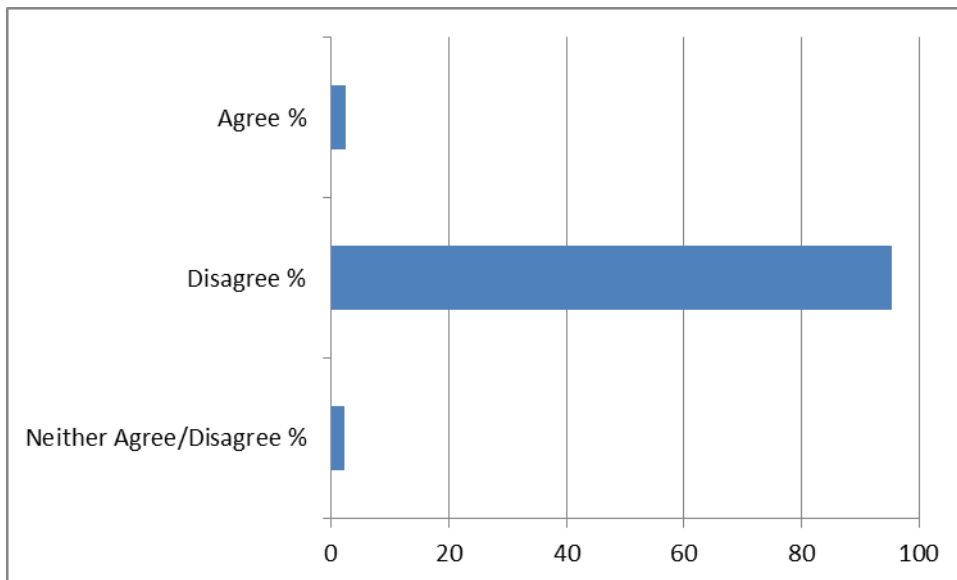
It is incomprehensible to expect our children to walk or cycle to school

Parents will not feel their children are safe and feel forced into taking the children to school by car, thus increasing traffic congestion around schools not to mention the environmental impact

(e) Proposal 5

To agree to the phased ending of free travel to the designated (catchment) school if the distance from home to school is over 3 miles if aged 8 or over, or 2 miles, if less than aged 8 and of school age, unless it is the nearest available school.

Those children aged 8 to 16 who live over 3 miles from their nearest available school, or 2 miles if they are of school age and under the age of 8, would be unaffected.



There were a total of **1770** responses to Proposal 5.

Agree – **38** (2.14%)

Disagree – **1687** (95.31%)

Neither – **45** (2.54%)

Comments on this proposal:

If they choose to have their child educated outside their local community the family should bear the cost.

Travel to the catchment school should be free irrespective of whether it is the nearest school

Discriminatory

Unfair to families living in rural community

This policy would increase travel to the schools by car

This would significantly affect children living in Brize Norton, with an unacceptable cost placed on them going to their catchment school of Burford.

This proposal would have financial implications for parents who are already suffering owing to the economic cutbacks made by central government

Forces parents to send their children to schools that are not their first choice of school

Removes choice

*Threatens the continued viability in its present form of some of the best performing schools in Oxfordshire such as Burford School
The budget is being mismanaged*

The ability for children to attend a school of their choosing within the catchment area is a fundamental right

*Cut wasteful CCTV and useless consultations instead
Minimal cost saving*

Breaks the links with catchments

The proposal will increase rural traffic

*This is another tax on the low to middle income families
Make the required cuts in expenditure by taking the equivalent reductions in the over heavy bureaucracy in the Oxford School governor service*

The proposal will increase rural poverty

The plans to charge for transport to Burford, the catchment secondary school, are an additional tax on Leafield and Ascott residents.

It would be totally wrong to make a rural community go to school in the inner city environment and this is what would happen if children from Garsington were forced because of transport costs to attend an alternative school.

I will have to send my children to the school which is not my catchment school

More traffic will mean more traffic jams, accidents, more delays, making Oxford a less desirable place to do business.

Fragmenting communities on an ability to pay basis is immoral. It is a tax on education.

This is severely unfair for people like myself whom have chosen to bring our children up in a small rural village

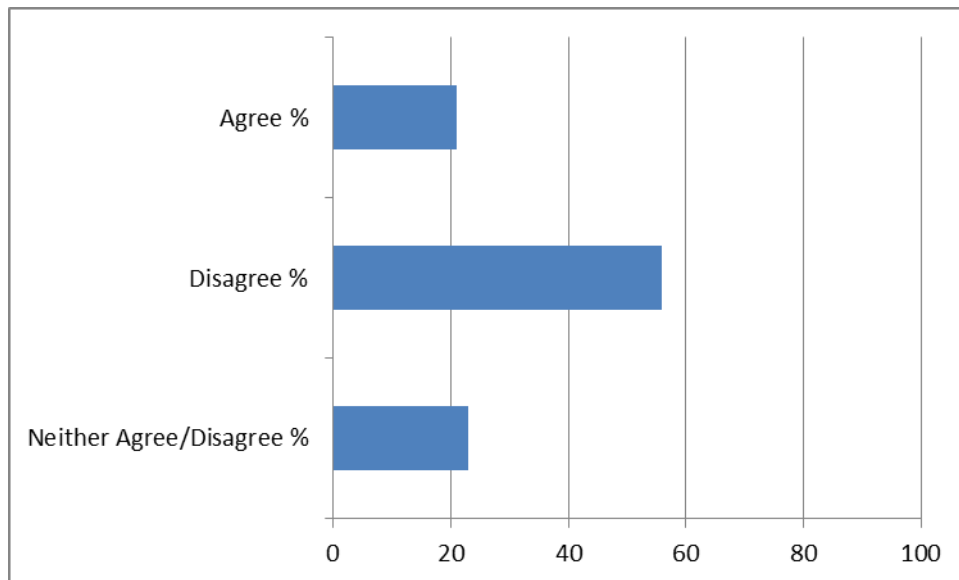
Each child should have the opportunity to attend the most appropriate school within catchment, without that choice being influenced by cost savings

It will result in an increase in car traffic to schools,

(f) Proposal 6

To reassess routes designated as “unsafe walking routes” against the guidance issued by Road Safety GB over 2013/14 and 2014/15

If the Council formally agrees to the use of Road Safety GB guidance in assessing the safety of walking routes (Proposal 4) the relevant routes can then assessed against this common standard.



There were a total of **1669** responses to Proposal 6.

Agree – **385** (23.06%)

Disagree – **932** (55.84%)

Neither – **352** (21.09%)

Comments on this proposal:

The county council should spend to make the routes safe

Fair for all schools and parents would have the right to appeal

As long as an assessment is carried out by a suitable person/panel on a case by case basis.

If the roads are already designed as unsafe, it is because they are

This implies the routes have not been properly assessed. It seems that OCC are changing the guidelines to suit them more favourably so that many routes are assessed as 'safe' and the free transport subsequently withdrawn.

Personal safety should be considered an equally important issue and taken

into account.

Local determination using the National guidelines is the most appropriate way ahead as our county has specific risks

It would be a waste of resources and money to reassess these routes.

The school bus is a social part of the school day.

Listen to the local communities about the safety of the routes and not apply a & quote generic national safety assessment

Why waste time and cost going over old reports

The last time the route from Benson to Wallingford came up it was deemed unsafe by the panel. To cross the busy A4074 now that the Agrigate recycling plant is fully functional in rush hour is not safe.

These routes need to be tried and tested in all weathers and with children

None of the routes are suitable for young children and that is a fact. Are they going to be policed in winter months when it is dark and cold and wet? I doubt it with making redundancies to our police forces.

Re-assessment would need to include more than just the road safety gb guidance

A walk of 45 minutes each way is unacceptable

Delegation of safety to simple guidance is lower quality and therefore higher risk for children.

Local knowledge should be taken into consideration.

The views of local schools and relevant authorities need to be considered, overriding national guidance does not consider local issue

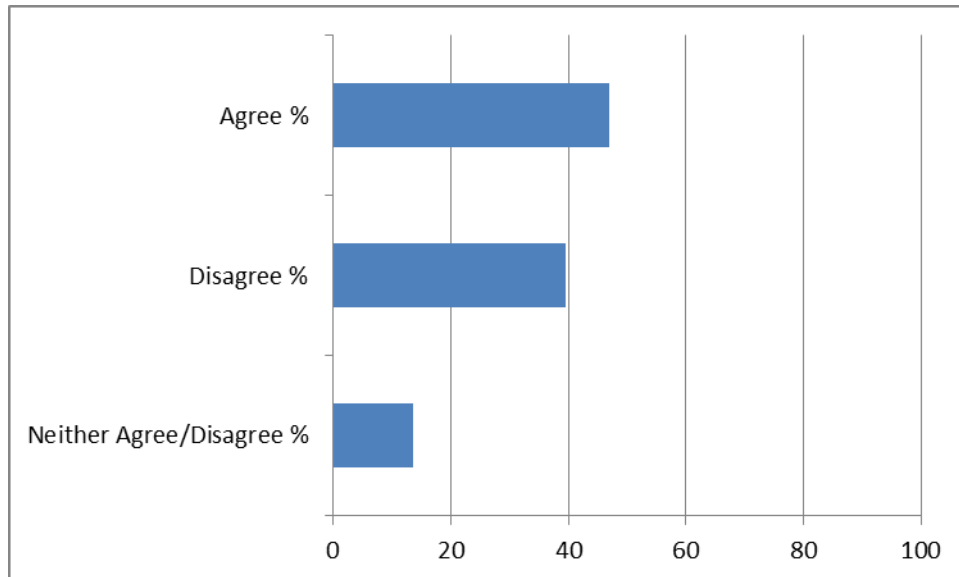
If a route is currently deemed unsafe it should remain so unless a material change has taken place to alter that state.

Child safety in rural areas needs to be protected - this is rural discrimination again

The routes also need to be assessed for personal safety and for lighting and under foot surface suitability.

(g) Proposal 7

To remove references to collaborative learning transport from the Home to School Travel policy



There were a total of 1630 responses to Proposal 7.

Agree – **222** (13.61%)

Disagree – **644** (39.5%)

Neither – **764** (46.87%)

Comments on this proposal:

If parents are forced into paying for transport then there will be a huge increase in pupils being dropped off by car in the mornings and picked up at the end of the school day

The wording is irrelevant

The status quo should be maintained

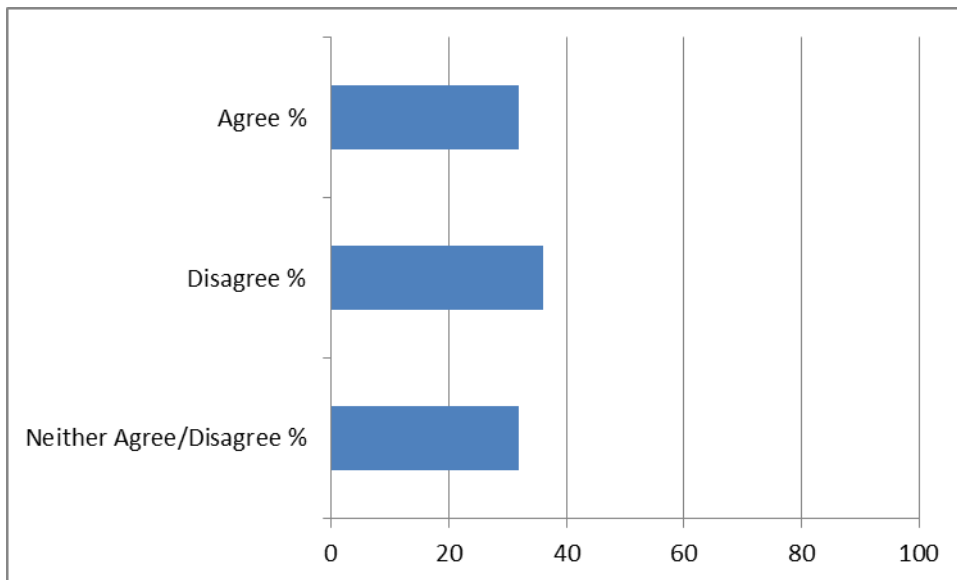
This is plainly ridiculous. WOSP and Marlborough and the primaries have a highly effective system of working in a collaborative fashion.

Leave the safety of our children alone

It is unacceptable for the decision to be forced upon parents when an adequate system exists today.

(h) Proposal 8

To adopt a two stage review/appeal process from September 2013 in accordance with the Department for Education Transport and Travel Guidance of March 2013



There were a total of **1632** responses to Proposal 8.

Agree – **521** (31.92%)

Disagree – **590** (36.15%)

Neither – **521** (31.92%)

Comments on this proposal:

Again a fair system for all and parents would have more opportunities for appeals

I would fully support a chance to challenge such decisions.

This will be good as long as the voices and opinions of the parents are actually listened to.

Fair enough as far as it goes.

This should be done with an independent review board rather than have local authority involvement.

At least once the appeals came in OCC had to look at each case and so the appeals were instrumental in getting the decisions reversed and keeping the bus routes

It is insulting to the tax payers of Oxfordshire to be told the services, they must pay for year in year out, are portrayed as free when they are given back to us by OCC. There is nothing free about my Council Tax bill

I don't know anyone who has succeeded in appealing the decision of who pays and who gets a place on the bus so to me the whole system is completely flawed.

Let's just see when it's time to vote

The proposals as they stand are unfair and detrimental to almost every group you can mention and with the exception of most of the pupils they are also the electorate!

This service could be swamped with referrals should the proposal to charge for travel that is currently free be adopted

Shipton under Wychwood Parish Council have asked me as parish clerk to note re the School bus consultation - the proposals could result in a significant contraction to Burford School because of cost implications to families who live further out

Fines for taking children on holiday in term time (the only time some parents can afford it) would have made the council enough money without having to put children at risk on their daily school journey

If it ain't broke dont fix it. this is all about money nothing else

Free education for all is important given write of this nation, this proposal is not required and not requested

The appeal process is unfit for purpose already and i do not trust that the council has the ability to manage a fair appeal process. Any appeal process should be entirely independent of county council staff policy and procedures. The appeal process must allow additional evidence to be considered outside the council's own guidelines - this is just common sense.

Transport from Kennington to Matthew Arnold is essential and should not be charged for