

Home to School Transport Consultation Oxfordshire County Council

Introduction

Oxfordshire County Council's budget is being reduced as part of the government's plan to get the nation's finances in order. Between 2010/11 and 2017/18, our government grant will have been reduced by 40%. As a result we need to reduce spending on services, including Home to School Transport, which currently costs about £15 million per year.

Background

The current Oxfordshire Home to School Transport Policy is more generous than the national 'statutory minimum' (what we must provide by law) and therefore the council spends more than it is legally obliged to. In addition, current charges to families for 'concessionary fares' on Home to School Transport (i.e. where spare seats on school bus services are paid for by children who are not entitled to free transport) do not cover the full cost to the council i.e. they funded by public subsidy. This level of spend is not considered sustainable given the on-going pressure on public finances and the need for Oxfordshire County Council to identify large savings across all service areas.

Following extensive feedback during the summer, when the council deferred its decision on potential changes to the policy, revised proposals now being put forward. The proposed changes set out in this consultation document do not affect parents' or carers' rights to express preferences for any three schools, nor will they reduce the rights of low income families to receive free transport to any of the three nearest secondary schools within 2 to 6 miles or end the general entitlement to free travel to the nearest school with an available place if it is over the statutory walking distance (3 miles for those aged 8 to 16 and 2 miles for those of school age who are below the age of 8).

Supporting information

We have produced a series of maps and some frequently asked questions about our Home to School Transport Policy proposal to accompany this consultation.

Information about the council's current provision for home to school travel is available on the county council's website.

Public meetings

The council is also holding a series of public meetings to support this consultation. All meetings run from 7:00pm to 8:30pm.

- Monday, 11 Nov: Carterton Community College, Carterton
- Thursday, 14 November 2013, Matthew Arnold School, Cumnor
- Friday, 22 November 2013, Bartholomew School, Eynsham
- Friday, 29 November 2013, The Marlborough CE School, Woodstock
- Monday, 2 December 2013, Icknield Community College, Watlington
- Wednesday, 4 December 2013, Wheatley Park School, Holton
- Tuesday, 10 December 2013, Larkmead School, Abingdon-on-Thames
- Thursday, 12 December 2013, The Warriner School, Bloxham

Have your say

Read the consultation document and supporting information and complete the online form. The deadline for your response is Friday 20 December 2013.

If you require a hard copy of the consultation document please contact the council by telephone on 01865 815175 or email admissions.schools@oxfordshire.gov.uk

What happens next?

All consultation responses received by the closing date will be collated and analysed. The results of the consultation will be reported to Cabinet on 28 January 2014.

Councillors will weigh the views expressed in the consultation against a wide number of other factors when making decisions including statutory requirements, government guidance, cost, risk, demography and other issues captured as part of the council's service and community impact assessment process. In light of all the evidence presented to them, Cabinet will decide whether or not to take the proposed changes forward.

Section A: To which school(s) should free travel be provided?

Oxfordshire County Council is proposing to change its Home to School Transport Policy.

At present the council provides free travel to *either* the nearest school *or* the catchment school when they are over the 'statutory walking distance' of two miles for children under 8 years and three miles for children aged 8 - 16.

The law only requires that free transport be provided to the nearest school that could accommodate the child (the 'nearest available school'). If the nearest school is full, the entitlement to free transport transfers to the next nearest school with a spare place, and so on.

There are two proposed options for change.

Option A1: Provide free transport to the nearest available school only

This is the nearest school to a child's home address at which a place could be allocated at the time that school places are allocated. It may not necessarily be one of the three preferred schools chosen by families on the application form, but it is the only school to which they would be entitled to free transport.

This option:

- Is the 'statutory minimum' that the council can provide
- Is estimated over time to save the council between £1 million and £2 million per year
- Reduces the financial risk to the council from additional transport costs caused by schools changing their admission arrangements.

Option A2: Provide free transport to the nearest available school but introduce adjustments to the policy to avoid splitting villages

This is the nearest school to a child's home address at which a place could be given when school places were allocated. However, children living in a particular 'travel area' would have a defined school to which free transport could be provided. For most children this would be the nearest school but for a minority, this could also be to the second nearest school – for instance, where opposite ends of a village are nearest to different schools.

The school may not necessarily be one of the three preferred schools chosen by families on the application form, but it is the only school where they would be entitled to free transport.

This option:

- Is slightly more generous than the 'statutory minimum' that the council can provide
- Is estimated over time to save the council between £1 million and £2 million per year
- Reduces the financial risk to the council having to meet additional transport costs caused by schools changing their admission arrangements.

Q1. Which of these options do you prefer?

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

Option A1

Option A2

None

Don't know

Comments:

Q2. If you have an alternative suggestion, please put it in the box below.

Comments:

Section B: When should the policy change be implemented?

There are two proposed options for when either of the policy changes described in section one of this consultation could be implemented.

Option B1:

Introduce the new policy from September 2015 for all children starting primary school or transferring to secondary school and change the entitlement for all other children in September 2017, including those currently in receipt of free travel.

- Parents expressing preferences for school places in September 2015 would be able to take account of whether free transport would be provided when making their choice.
- Parents of children currently in receipt of free travel would have time to prepare for having to pay for this if their children are not attending their nearest school.
- This option would enable the maximum saving to be made from September 2017.

Option B2:

Introduce the new policy from September 2015 for children starting primary school or transferring to secondary school and phase the policy change in year by year as children start schools. Children in receipt of free travel to the school they currently attend would not be affected by the policy change.

- Parents expressing preferences for school places in September 2015 would be able to take account of whether free transport would be provided when making their choice.
- Parents of children currently entitled to free transport would be unaffected.
- This option would enable the maximum saving to be made from September 2019 for secondary aged children and September 2021 for primary aged children.

Q3. Which of these options do you prefer?

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

Option B1

Option B2

Neither

Don't know

Comments:

Q4. If you have an alternative suggestion, please put it in the box below.

Comments:

Section C: Concessionary Fares Scheme

Oxfordshire County Council is proposing to change the Concessionary Fares Scheme within its Home to School Transport Policy to reduce the subsidies and save money.

The Concessionary Fares Scheme sets out the prices and terms for seats on Home to School Transport routes operated by the council that can be used by children and young adults not eligible for free travel.

Low income families do not have to pay the concessionary fare. All other seats for children and young adults using the concessionary fares scheme are heavily subsidised by the council.

In 2013/14 the typical cost to the council of a seat on a mainstream Home to School Transport vehicle is £700 per year. The council charges families with children aged up to 16 travelling using the concessionary fares scheme

- £264 per year for each child who lives up to three miles from the school
- £492 for those who live over three miles from the school.

For post-16 students, the charge to families is based on whether or not they attend their catchment sixth form. The council charges families with young people £264 per year for those that who live within the catchment area and £492 for those who live outside the catchment area, irrespective of whether it is over or under three miles.

The overall cost of the contracts used to run the Home to School Transport service increases at a rate of 2% a year. Between 2009 and 2012, the council chose not to pass on these costs to families using the Concessionary Fares Scheme. Charges were however increased in September 2013.

There are three proposed options for changing the Concessionary Fares Scheme within the Home to School Transport Policy.

Option C1:

From September 2014, to introduce a 10% increase in the price of concessionary fares and post16 fares to £290.40 for those who live under three miles from the school attended and to £541.20 for those who live over three miles from the school attended.

- This increase in fares would reduce the overall amount Oxfordshire County Council subsidises the concessionary fares scheme by at least £18,000 in 2014/15 only. This option would not reduce year on year the amount of subsidy from the council.
- This would involve ending the current practice of charging the lower fare to post16 travellers who live in a school's catchment area. Post16 and those in younger year groups would all be charged according to the distance travelled.

Option C2:

From September 2015 to increase concessionary and post-16 fares by 8% per year for the next three years

- This on-going increase would reduce the amount Oxfordshire County Council has to subsidise the concessionary fares scheme year on year by £14,000 per year from September 2015.
- Assuming an increase to £290.40 in 2014, fares for those living less than 3 miles from the school/college attended would increase to £313.63 in 2015, £338.72 in 2016 and £365.82 in 2017.
- Assuming an increase to £541.20 in 2014, fares for those living over 3 miles from the school/college attended would increase to £584.50 in 2015, £631.26 in 2016 and £681.76 in 2017.

Option C3:

From September 2015, to increase concessionary and post-16 fares by 5% each year for the next five years

- This on-going increase would reduce the amount Oxfordshire County Council has to subsidise the concessionary fares scheme year on year by £9,000 per year from September 2015.
- Assuming an increase to £290.40 in 2014, fares for those living under 3 miles from the school/college attended would increase to £304.92 in 2015, £320.17 in 2016, £336.18 in 2017, £352.99 in 2018 and £370.64 in 2019.

- Assuming an increase to £541.20 in 2014, fares for those living over 3 miles from the school/college attended would increase to £568.26 in 2015, £596.67 in 2016, £626.51 in 2017, £657.83 in 2018 and £690.72 in 2019.

Q5. Which of these options do you prefer?

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

Option C1

Option C2

Option C3

None

Don't know

Comments:

Q6. If you have an alternative suggestion, please put it in the box below.

Comments:

Section D: Collaborative Learning Transport

Oxfordshire County Council is proposing to remove all reference to Collaborative Learning Transport from its Home to School Transport Policy.

Collaborative Learning Partnerships were part of an initiative by the previous government which envisaged groups of secondary schools working together to provide pupils with access to a broader curriculum, particularly including access to a range of specialist vocational courses that no one school could provide on its own.

The current government does not support this approach and Collaborative Learning Partnerships are not operating in Oxfordshire.

Removing reference to Collaborative Learning Transport from the Home to School Transport Policy will have no material implications for schools, pupils or parents; however the council is required to consult on any change to its Home to School Transport Policy.

Q7. What are your views on the proposal to remove references to Collaborative Learning Transport from Oxfordshire County Council's Home to School Transport Policy?

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

- Agree
- Disagree
- Don't know

Comments:

Section E: General Comments on Home to School Transport Proposals

Q8. Do you have any other comments you would like to make about the proposed changes to the Home to School Transport policy?

In this section, you may wish to specifically comment on the impact of the proposed changes on different groups of people and in particular the nine 'protected characteristics' specifically referenced in the Equality Act 2010:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership
- Maternity and pregnancy
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Comments:

Section F: About You

It would be helpful to know a bit about you so we can check whether views differ across the communities we serve.

Q9. Are you responding to this consultation as a member of the public or as a stakeholder? *(By stakeholder we mean a councillor, representative of a school, group, organisation etc.)*

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

Member of the public Go to Q10

Stakeholder Go to Q13

Q10. Where do you live? Please tell us your postcode.

Why do we want this information? Your postcode will allow us to map where the respondents come from and to check if all communities are represented.

Q11. Do you or does any child/ children in your household currently receive free or subsidised Home to School Transport from Oxfordshire County Council?

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

Yes

No

Don't know

Q12. If you are a stakeholder, are you responding as a...

- | | |
|---|------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Councillor | Go to Q13a |
| <hr/> | |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Representative of an early years setting or school | Go to Q14 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Representative of a group or organisation | Go to Q14 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | Go to Q14 |

Q13a. If you are councillor, are you responding as a...

- Parish/Town Councillor
- District Councillor
- County Councillor

Q13b. What is the name of the area, ward or division you represent?

Q14. If you are another type of stakeholder, please provide details:

Role:

Name of school, setting, group or organisation:

Thank you for responding to the Home to School Transport Consultation.