

## 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. We would be particularly interested in local views – please use the comments box to refer to named villages.

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. 4

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)

|                                     |            |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Option A1  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Option A2  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | None       |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Don't know |

**Comments:**

There is no detail to suggest which villages would benefit from the change in policy.

Living in the school catchment area would no longer guarantee free school transport.

There is not enough detail about Garsington either about safe walking routes or the cost savings that would be made.

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

**Comments:**

We suggest the Council develop 'school catchment transport areas'.

This would mean Oxfordshire County Council would create a zone around each secondary school which matches the current catchment area. The Council would commit to provide free transport within this area. This would protect the Council from Academies and Free Schools setting their own, wider catchment areas and would protect the current school partnerships in place.

**Section B: When should the policy 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.

**Question 3**

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

|                                     |            |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Option B1  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Option B2  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Neither    |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Don't know |

**Comments:**

Option B1 would mean children currently in Y7 losing free school transport on entering Y11. This would have a huge effect on families who are just above the threshold for free school meals and cost them £600 per year. In effect this would be a rural tax on that would pull many families into hardship.

The proposals will not save the money the Council claim, as you assume that not a single parent will take up a free bus to their nearest school. These proposals will also massively disrupt access to catchment schools. It is irrelevant *when* they are phased in, as they should not be phased in at all.

**We note that there are no calculations involving Garsington and we request confirmation on whether this is an oversight, whether the Council lacks the knowledge about savings related to our school, or whether in fact there are no savings to be made for Garsington.**

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

**Comments:**

Our suggestion is for the County Council to meet with the Wheatley Park School partnership, including Chairs of Governing Bodies from the feeder primary schools, and Parish Councils to create a way forward that meets the needs of local parents, schools, the local community and the Council and ensures the safety of children getting to and from school without disrupting their education.

**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)

|                                     |            |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Option C1  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Option C2  |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Option C3  |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | None       |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Don't know |

**Comments:**

The proposed policy affects anyone, of any age, who might one day choose to stay on at school post-16. We note that from 2015, it is compulsory for young people to stay in education or training until their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. It seems a nonsense and inequitable to increase fares for this group. It will again affect those families who are struggling with the rising costs of living.

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

**Comments:**

Our suggestion is that students aged 16-18, attending their catchment area school, qualify for a reduced fare as under the current policy.

We suggest that fares should not rise faster than the rate of inflation.

**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.

(Please tick ✓ ONE box only)

- |                                     |            |
|-------------------------------------|------------|
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> | Agree      |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Disagree   |
| <input type="checkbox"/>            | Don't know |

**Comments:**

The Council no longer runs this initiative.

## 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:

The proposed policy changes will impact on students aged 16+, who will be charged more for attending their catchment area school. Students will face a choice of asking their families to pay the increased costs, or changing to a nearer school at a critical time in their educational life.

The policy will disproportionately affect families living in rural areas and will in effect be a rural tax. There is no evidence that rural families, whose children attend state schools, are any better off than those in urban areas.

The information provided omits any indication of what are deemed safe walking routes to school. Garsington School Governing Body understands that:

- The route from Garsington to Wheatley Park is deemed unsafe by the Council and the route from Garsington to Unipart is *currently* deemed unsafe. We would like to state categorically that both routes are unsafe for children to walk along, and would like to remind the Council of the speed and volume of traffic along that stretch of road at peak hours.
- High volumes of traffic including HGVs enter and turn at Unipart as well as high volumes of trade vehicles entering and leaving Buildbase opposite. The wide entrance at Unipart is unsuitable for crossing on foot by children.
- An alternative route to Oxford via Kiln Lane/ Watlington Road is initially along a remote, unlit bridle-path and would mean young people walking along the narrow un-kept pavement adjacent to the B480. This stretch of road is busier than the Oxford – Garsington – Wheatley rat run, and the speed of vehicles regularly exceeds the 50mph speed limit. The road itself is narrow and cars pass very close to the pavement. There is no adequate crossing at the Grenoble Road end. At the complex series of junctions off the B480 adjacent to Greater Leys, none of the road crossings have pedestrian lights.
- Both routes are unsafe walking routes for children.