

Home to School Transport Consultation 2012-13

This consultation is for proposed changes to mainstream home to school transport services. If your child needs to attend a school that specifically caters for children with special educational needs (SEN) or disabilities, the proposal will not affect you.



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Introduction

Cuts to public sector funding mean that all councils are having to make difficult decisions about where to target scarce resources. At Buckinghamshire County Council, we need to reduce our expenditure by £55m over the next three years, which will have a significant impact on the services we are able to offer.

To help us achieve this level of cost reductions, we are looking in particular at any areas where we offer a service level which is over and above the minimum statutory requirements.

Home to school transport is one of these areas. At the moment, Buckinghamshire County Council's approach is more generous than both the current statutory requirements and that of most other local authorities.

Four years ago, we were spending £17.4 m on home to school transport for mainstream pupils. Since that time, we have taken a number of steps to try to reduce this budget whilst minimising the impact on parents.

With inflation, our spend on school transport could have reached £19.3m, but we have reduced it to £16.2m, a saving of £3.1m.

We have done this by using a contractor to manage home to school transport, improving route planning and reducing the number of taxis we use.

This year we will save a further £1.3m by changing the policy for 16+ pupils, making total savings of £4.4m, but we still need to make further cost reductions of £1.4m.

This means that we cannot continue to offer the current level of service and we will need to make changes to our existing policy. Whilst we appreciate the impact of changes to our home to school transport policy upon parents, the financial pressures facing the Council mean that we cannot put off changes any longer. The stark reality is that if the

cost reductions don't come from home to school transport they are likely to impact more directly on children's services.

The Council's aim is to develop new arrangements which enable us to meet our statutory responsibilities and which are cost effective and fair to parents and council tax payers across the county.

What have you told us so far?

We held an earlier consultation on this issue last spring, and also talked to parents and teachers over the summer, to find out your views and priorities on home to school transport. You told us:

- That you did not want to pay, but that if there was to be a charge it should be spread over as many people as possible
- That charges should be phased, and introduced for the new annual admissions round only
- That charges should be made clear before admissions choices are made
- That the proposed charges for non-entitled pupils to purchase spare seats were too high
- That the Council should continue to make transport available for non-entitled pupils who are not entitled for free transport

All of the information gained through this consultation and the subsequent discussions has helped to form a new set of proposals. We now want to seek wider views on these

proposals which is why we are running this further consultation.

Your responses will help us decide the final details for the new home to school transport policy, so it is really important that you let us know what you think.

Any new proposals will be implemented from 1 September 2012.

Proposals

Our key proposal is that Buckinghamshire County Council will no longer subsidise transport for pupils who have made a choice of a mainstream school other than their nearest² eligible¹ school. So a choice of grammar school, upper school or faith school which is not your nearest qualifying school would mean that you no longer have an automatic entitlement to a place on a school bus (even if you have an older sibling at the same school). This does not effect your ability to express a preference for a school further away. The county council, however, will not fund transport to that school. We may be able to offer you the opportunity to purchase places on a bus if there are vacant seats but there will be no guarantee that this will be the case.

An extension to this key proposal is also under consideration – that the nearest secondary school should be defined as the nearest grammar school for those who qualify for a grammar school place.

The minimum statutory requirement for free transport is based upon distance and/or special circumstances (including special needs or disability, low income and safety of walking route). There is no statutory entitlement to free transport linked to catchment or type of school, including denominational (religious) or selective (grammar) /non-selective (upper) schools. We generally consider that an upper school is able to provide an adequate education for a grammar qualified

pupil. If your child needs to attend a school that specifically caters for children with SEN or disabilities, the proposal will not affect you.

¹ 'Eligibility to a school is determined by age, gender and grammar qualification. In this instance, a qualified grammar school pupil is 'eligible' to attend an upper school. Eligible schools' are defined as your closest school, whether in or outside of Buckinghamshire, that a pupil is eligible to attend.

You should also be aware that transport entitlements do not affect admission entitlements and that statutory transport entitlements are not affected by County boundaries.

How would the proposals affect you?

If your child is under 8 years old and:

- lives over 2 miles from their nearest school, and attends that school, we will continue to provide free home to school transport²
- if on admission allocation your nearest school is full and we have to place your child at a school further away (over 2 miles), then we would provide free transport to that school
- if you choose an alternative school (including a catchment school that is further away than your nearest school or a school based on religion), you may be able to purchase a place on a bus, provided that there is suitable route and that sufficient spare places are available
- is from a low income family (who is entitled to free school meals [FSM] or whose family is in receipt of maximum working tax credit) or has special educational needs, disability or mobility problems or who is eligible on specific road safety criteria – we will continue to provide free home to school transport where the statutory criteria are met

If your child is aged 8-11 years old the criteria are the same except the distance rule changes to 3 miles.

If your child is aged 11-16 years old (secondary school age) and:

- lives over 3 miles from their nearest secondary school, and attends that school, we will continue to provide free home to school transport
- lives over 3 miles from their nearest secondary school which is a non-selective school, and your child qualifies for a grammar school place and you choose to attend a grammar school, under the extension to this proposal, we will continue to provide free home to school transport to your nearest grammar school
- if on admission allocation your nearest school is full and we have to place your child at a school further away (over 3 miles), then we would provide free transport to that school
- if you choose an alternative school (including a catchment school that is further away than your nearest school or a school based on religion), you may be able to purchase a place on a bus, provided that there is suitable route and sufficient spare places are available
- is from a low income family (who is entitled to free school meals or whose family is in receipt of maximum working tax credit) or has special educational needs, disability or mobility problems or who is eligible on specific road safety criteria – we will continue to provide free home to school

transport where the statutory criteria are met

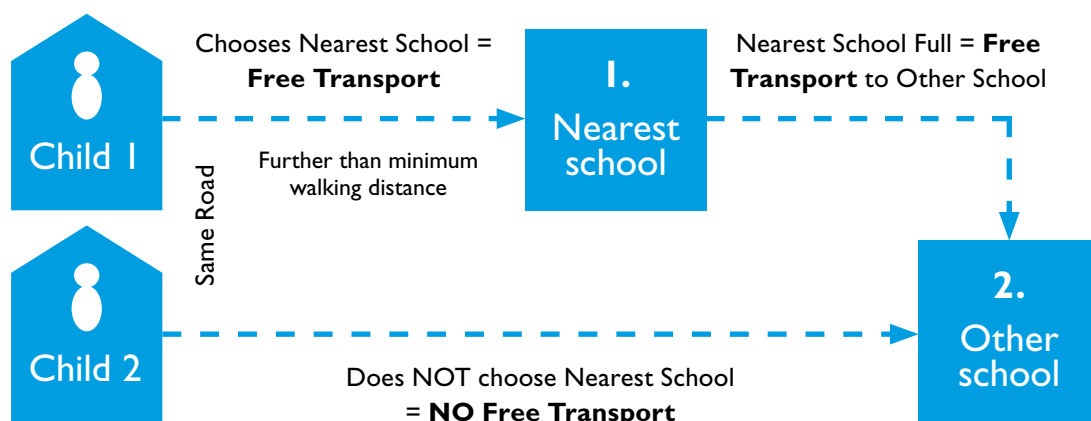
Having your say

There are a number of ways that you can let us know your views about these proposals:

- Fill in the survey on-line at:
www.buckscc.gov.uk/haveyoursay
- If you need a printed copy of the survey, your child's school will be sent copies which you can request
- Attend one of the local drop in sessions

We have arranged a series of 2 hour drop in sessions to give as many parents as possible the opportunity to come along and ask questions. You will shortly be receiving more information via your school and can also find details of the events on the Council's website. There is space within the consultation to add your suggestions and comments on the proposals.

The illustration of the key proposal below shows how families who choose for their child to go to their nearest school (nearest school 1) receive free transport, even if their nearest school is full and they are placed at another school by us (other school 2). But a family who chooses for their child to go to an alternative school that is not their nearest (other school 2) doesn't qualify for free transport. Please note that your nearest school could be situated in a neighbouring authority.





Next steps

The consultation starts on 15 November 2011 and will close on 31 January 2012. Feedback from the consultation will be analysed and presented to the County Council's Cabinet on 27 February 2012 (as well as being made available to the public online at www.buckscc.gov.uk/haveyoursay), and the Cabinet will be asked to take a decision on the home to school transport policy.

² Nearest schools are all primary (Infant, Junior and Combined), Upper and Grammar schools both within and outside of Buckinghamshire.

For a guide as to which is the nearest school, parents can visit the government's website which gives an online calculator:
<http://schoolsfinder.direct.gov.uk>

If you do use it you should be aware that it is based on straight line distances and that for the purpose of transport eligibility the Council uses the actual route of travel (in most cases this will make little difference to which is the closest school).

If you have any queries regarding the consultation or the proposals, please review the Frequently Asked Questions document at www.buckscc.gov.uk/schooltransport. Alternatively, please call us on 01296 383250. To send us specific general questions please email schooltransport@buckscc.gov.uk. Please do not email with individual enquiries as we are not able to comment on individual circumstances at this stage.

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Survey

How should the policy be changed and introduced?

Children who live more than 2 miles (up to 8 years old) or more than 3 miles (8-16 year olds) from their nearest school and choose to attend that school will continue to receive free home to school transport.

These questions are about proposals for changing the current entitlement for children who do not choose their nearest school. This doesn't apply to children qualifying for free home to school transport due to special needs or disability, low income or specific safety criteria.

Families whose children don't qualify for free home to school transport will be able to apply for spare seats on buses (subject to availability). This proposal could result in a spare seat costing between £10 and £12.50 per school week, per child.

Q1.

Our proposal is to only provide free home to school transport to your nearest eligible³ school (the national requirement). Do you support this proposal?

Yes No Don't Know

³ 'Eligibility' to a school is determined by age, gender and grammar qualification. In this instance, a qualified grammar school pupil is 'eligible' to attend an upper school. Where a grammar school is your nearest² school, a 'grammar qualified' pupil will be entitled to free home to school transport, a 'non grammar qualified' pupil will be entitled to free home to school transport to their nearest² non-selective (upper) school. 'Eligible schools' are defined as your closest school, whether in or outside of Buckinghamshire, that a pupil is eligible to attend.

Q2.

An extension to this proposal is that the nearest secondary school should be defined as the nearest grammar school for those who qualify for a grammar school place⁴. Do you support the proposal with this extension?

Yes No Don't Know

⁴ Please note that if this extension is implemented, the cost for those paying for home to school transport could double from an estimated £10-£12.50 per school week to £20-£25 per school week, per child.

£A = Parents whose children are no longer eligible for free transport under the new policy and are in years 2-6 or 8-11 from September 2012 will pay an administration fee ⁵

£B = Parents whose children would no longer be eligible for free transport can purchase a spare seat on the bus (if a seat is available). This cost would be significantly higher if an administration fee is not charged.

Q3.

How should changes to the new policy for free home to school transport⁵ be introduced?

(Please tick one box only)

- The policy should be changed for children in all year groups from September 2012 – **GOTO Q5**
- The policy should be changed incrementally year group by year group (starting with the new year 1 and year 7 intakes in September 2012) – **GOTO Q4**
- Don't know – **GOTO Q5**

⁵This doesn't apply to children qualifying for free home to school transport due to special needs or disability, low income or specific safety criteria.

Q4.

Should all other year groups not affected by the 'incremental changes' pay an administration fee of approx £2.00-2.50 per school week per place, as set out in the table below?

Note that a charge doesn't apply to children receiving FSM, with a SEN or disability or mobility problems, or under specific safety criteria.

- Yes No Don't Know

The tables below illustrate who would pay an administration charge under this proposal⁴:

Primary School Age	SEPT 2012	SEPT 2013	SEPT 2014	SEPT 2015	SEPT 2016	SEPT 2017
Year 1 – 5 to 6 year olds	£B	£B	£B	£B	£B	£B
Year 2 – 6 to 7 year olds	£A	£B	£B	£B	£B	£B
Year 3 – 7 to 8 year olds	£A	£A	£B	£B	£B	£B
Year 4 – 8 to 9 year olds	£A	£A	£A	£B	£B	£B
Year 5 – 9 to 10 year olds	£A	£A	£A	£A	£B	£B
Year 6 – 10 to 11 year olds	£A	£A	£A	£A	£A	£B

Secondary School Age	SEPT 2012	SEPT 2013	SEPT 2014	SEPT 2015	SEPT 2016	SEPT 2017
Year 7 – 11 to 12 year olds	£B	£B	£B	£B	£B	£B
Year 8 – 12 to 13 year olds	£A	£B	£B	£B	£B	£B
Year 9 – 13 to 14 year olds	£A	£A	£B	£B	£B	£B
Year 10 – 14 to 15 year olds	£A	£A	£A	£B	£B	£B
Year 11 – 15 to 16 year olds	£A	£A	£A	£A	£B	£B

Costs

The Council may be able to continue to sell spare seats on its bus network, to non-eligible children, on a discretionary basis to those who apply. Currently there are 8 fare bands charged by distance which does not reflect the true cost of providing a seat on the school bus.

We propose to introduce a single flat rate charge regardless of how far a child travels, because the seat needs to be reserved for your child for the full distance, regardless of whether a child gets on at the first or last pick up point. Please note paid for seats are applied for and allocated on an annual basis, and having a seat on the bus the previous school year does not guarantee a seat for the next year.

Many pupils who use school buses also come from the same families and this section asks you to consider if families should pay the same for each child, or whether there should be discount for larger families.

⁶ Note that we will only sell spare seats on a return journey basis.



Q5.

Whilst we cannot guarantee the availability of a service, if spare seats are available on a bus, we may be able to sell them. We estimate that each seat will cost between £10 to £12.50 per school week per child, but this cost could double if the extension to provide transport to the nearest grammar school (for qualified pupils) was also implemented.⁶

If your child was not eligible¹ for free transport, would you wish to purchase a spare seat?

- Yes – for my child aged 5 to 8 – **GOTO Q7**
- Yes – for my child aged 8 to 11 – **GOTO Q7**
- Yes – for my child aged 11 to 16 to attend an alternative non-selective (Upper) school – **GOTO Q7**
- Yes – for my child aged 11 to 16 to attend a Grammar school – **GOTO Q7**
- No – I would make alternative transport arrangements – **GOTO Q6**
- No – I would change my choice of school to my nearest eligible school – **GOTO Q7**
- Not applicable (eg. don't need home to school transport or would qualify for free transport) – **GOTO Q7**
- Don't know – **GOTO Q7**

Q6.

How strongly do you agree/disagree that the County Council should work more closely with bus and rail operators to ensure that public transport services are available for all or part of your child's journey?

- Strongly agree Agree
- Neither agree / disagree Disagree
- Strongly disagree Don't know

Q7.

How strongly do you agree, or disagree, that there should be a single flat rate charge for non-entitled pupils regardless of how far a child travels? ⁵

Strongly agree
 Agree
 Neither agree / disagree
 Disagree
 Strongly disagree
 Don't know

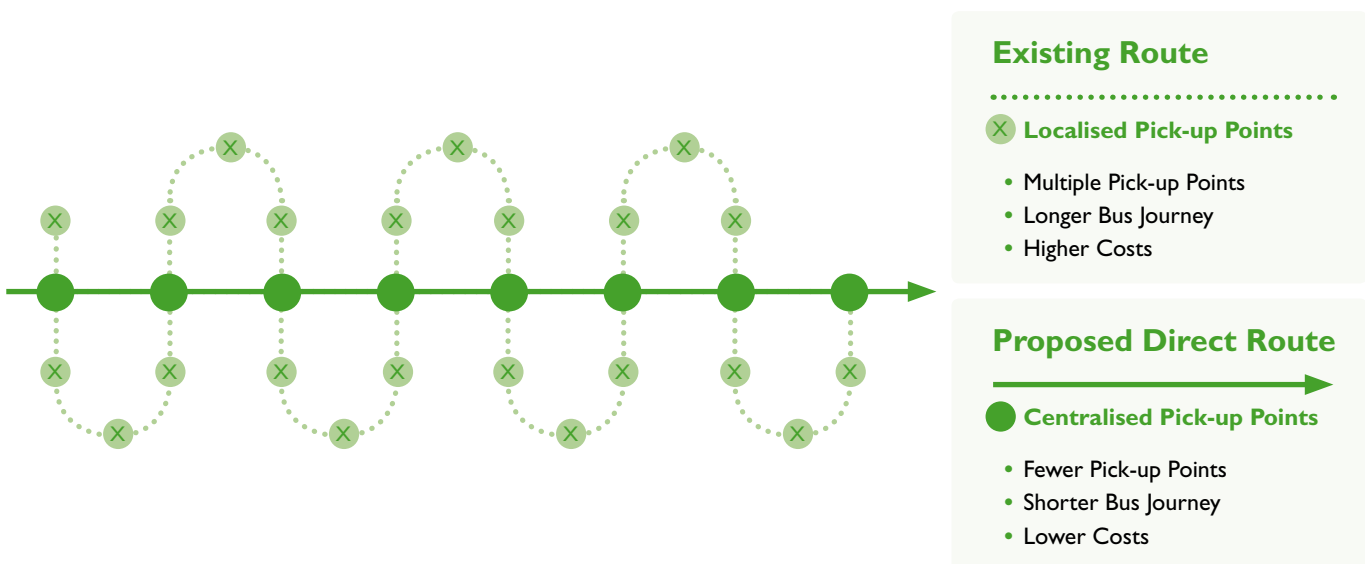
Q8.

How strongly do you agree, or disagree, with the following home-to-school transport charging proposals for families with more than one child? ⁷

Proposal	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE / DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DON'T KNOW
No discount – all children from household pay full price	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1st Child full price, 2nd child full price, 3rd child (and more) free ⁷	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
1st Child full price, 2nd child ½ price, 3rd child (and more) free ⁷	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

How transport is organised – getting to bus stops

When catching a school bus, most children have to walk to the bus stop. If we are able to reduce the number of pick-up points and miles covered, we can run fewer buses which will be significantly cheaper and help to reduce the costs of charging for any available spare seats by £1 per school week per child and this saving will be passed directly to parents.



Q9.

How strongly do you agree, or disagree, that in order to reduce the costs of the bus service, children should be prepared to travel up to 2 miles to their bus stop?

Child Age	STRONGLY AGREE	AGREE	NEITHER AGREE / DISAGREE	DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE	DON'T KNOW
Up to 8 years old – Infant School Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8 to 11 – Junior School Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
11 to 16 – Secondary School Age	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

About You

Q10.

Do you have any children in your household that are affected by these proposals?

Yes **No - GO TO Q12**

Q11.

How many children do you have living in your household that attend any of the following schools? *(Please tick all that apply)*

Children in your Household	1 CHILD	2 CHILDREN	3 CHILDREN	4+ CHILDREN
Infant schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Junior schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Combined schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Upper schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Grammar schools	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
None of these – child aged 0-4	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attends an independent school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Attends a special school	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Q12.

What is your full home postcode? _____

Thank you very much for taking part in this survey. Your views are very important to us.

If you have any queries regarding the consultation or the proposals, please review the Frequently Asked Questions document at:
www.buckscc.gov.uk/schooltransport

Alternatively, please call us on:
01296 383250

