



have
your
say...

...on the future of home to school/college travel assistance in Central Bedfordshire

Find Central Bedfordshire Council online at



www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/consultations

Central
Bedfordshire

Home to school/college travel assistance consultation

1. Overview

The Education Act 1996 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006 require the council to provide home-to-school travel to those who are eligible, and also to promote sustainable modes of travel.

The council supports sustainable travel by requiring each school to have travel plans in place and by supporting other initiatives such as introducing road safety and Bikeability training into schools, along with provision of support for walking buses (N.B. a walking bus is an organised group of children who walk to school together accompanied by volunteer parents. There is no actual bus as such, but it is likened to one, as the group will stop at certain points to 'pick-up' and 'drop-off' children).

Where they meet certain criteria, Central Bedfordshire Council currently provides transport assistance to pupils of school age and those attending post-16 education.

The Home to School/College Travel Assistance Policies for Central Bedfordshire are being reviewed. As part of this, the council has looked at what travel assistance we are required to provide within legislation.

This consultation seeks to understand the public's views on proposed changes to its Home to School/College Travel Assistance Policies. Responses to the consultation will help to inform the new policies before they are adopted by the council.

Any changes to our policies would come into effect for the September 2018 intake of pupil admissions, hence we are consulting with the public now so that the outcomes are available to relevant parents/carers ahead of the next round of school admissions.

Parents/carers will therefore be in a position to understand the new policy provision before submitting their Secondary/Upper school admissions applications by 31 October 2017, or Lower/Primary/Middle Transfer applications by 15 January 2018.

2. Why produce new Home to School /College Travel Assistance Policies

Like every other local authority in the UK, Central Bedfordshire Council has experienced reduced levels of government funding in recent years. Our grant from national government for this year is half the amount of money we received last year, and by

2019/20 this funding will disappear altogether. Meanwhile, we are facing increasing demands on our services as a result of changes to our growing population.

Because of this, the council agreed a budget plan which is designed to maximise cost-effectiveness so that we can deliver the best possible services within the resources that we have.

The review of our home to school/college travel assistance policy contributes to our wider budget strategy.

The Council currently provides more transport than is required by legislation. Currently, we transport over 5,000 children/students from home to school each year. In 2016/17 this cost the council over £8.4 million, a rise of over £1.1m from the previous year. Having reviewed the legislation, the council is currently offering services over and above the recognised statutory minimum.

The council's policies have been reviewed to ensure that the new Home to School/College Travel Assistance Policies meet the statutory requirements, whilst making the most efficient use of resources. This means we are reviewing our policies to be in line with legislative requirements, and to see if the travel assistance could be provided in a more cost-effective way.

The draft policy document explains the types of things we are considering introducing that will meet our statutory requirement to provide travel and transport for entitled pupils, while providing an affordable and cost-effective approach. We will continue to ensure that we adopt a fair, equitable and transparent policy to support eligible pupils and their families.

3. Responsibilities

Parental Responsibilities

The Education (School Information) (England) Regulations 2002 means that the Council needs to ensure that suitable travel arrangements are made, where necessary, to facilitate a child's attendance at school. The draft policy sets out who and how the Council will help residents with children travelling between home and school/college.

However, the law states that it is the parent/carer's responsibility to ensure that a child gets to school, including accompanying them if necessary. This includes how their child will get to school and may include making arrangements with a friend or a childminder to ensure that the child is accompanied, or submitting applications as necessary for home to school travel assistance to the Council. It is also the parent/carer's responsibility to ensure the reasonable safety of themselves and their child between home and the designated pick up points.

The Council's Responsibilities

The Council needs to assess and make travel arrangements to enable eligible children in the area to attend their nearest qualifying school.

The Council must also make travel arrangements for pupils who are unable to walk to school due to their special educational need (SEN), disability or mobility problems; or because their route to school isn't safe.

By adopting the proposed policies, the Council will continue to meet its legal responsibilities for eligible pupils. The draft policies also explain how the Council may help with travel for children who qualify for assistance as a result of specific special educational needs (SEN), disability or other mobility difficulties.

4. What are we proposing to change?

The Council is proposing to change the following elements of the Home to School Transport Policies adopted by Executive in 2014:

Changes to qualifying schools

1. Travel will be provided from home to nearest available school with a place for that child, rather than to the nearest or catchment school. Where there are 'pyramids' of schools then that will be to the next school in the pyramid, rather than to the nearest school. For children with a SEN, it will usually be the school named in their Education Health Care Plan (EHCP).

Changes to age range criteria

2. Transport will only be provided for children who are of statutory school age. The Council will no longer provide transport for children under 5 years old.
3. Students over 16 years old with an EHCP or a statement of special educational need (SEN) will be required to make a contribution towards the cost of their travel, unless they are from a low income family.

Changes to the travel assistance offered

4. The first offer of assistance for middle and upper school pupils (ages 9 -16) will be a travel pass for a public bus or train, rather than supplying contracted buses or taxis. This can help ensure the continuing viability of public bus routes, which can then be used by all members of the public. Buses and trains also help reduce congestion and the number of vehicles on the road, as well as parking issues.
5. Where a vehicle is provided to a family through the national Motability Scheme, we will provide parents/carers with a payment to cover the mileage, in order that they can use their specialised vehicle to transport their child to school or college.
6. Concessionary passes will be charged at a cost that better reflects the actual cost to the council of providing the transport. Concessionary passes are sold where there are spare seats on a council contracted route. The cost for concessions in 2016/17 was £157 per term. Under the revised scheme charges could vary from £100 - £300 based on journey cost.

7. Where a boarding school has been identified as the nearest available school to meet the child's needs, travel assistance will change for new applicants.

In future, parents/carers will be required to make their own travel arrangements, for which appropriate reimbursement will be made. The council will cover the costs when this is less than the costs of providing travel.

Travel assistance will no longer be provided to parents/carers attending one Statement/Education Health and Care Plan review per year at an out of council area school as this is a non-statutory provision.

Where a Motability vehicle has been provided for the child, travel assistance will be by way of a mileage payment to the parent/carer to attend boarding school.

If there are spaces on a bus to the boarding school provided through our travel assistance scheme, these spare spaces will continue to be offered to pupils who are not eligible for travel assistance, but they will be charged at a fee that reflects the cost to the council.

8. Where it is more cost effective, the council could commission the school to run their own bus instead of commissioning a private bus operator.

Some schools already run their own minibuses. It therefore makes sense for the school to also use them for pupils to travel to and from school. The schools would receive a payment for this, which in turn would help schools to fund minibuses which are also used for other aspects of school life, such as field trips and sports training/matches.

5. What is not changing?

For those currently receiving support, travel assistance will still be provided in line with the council's legal duty, however the type of assistance offered may change. For example, rather than commissioning dedicated transport services such as a private bus, pupils aged 9 or over may be offered a public transport pass instead.

The proposed policies would then be applied in full to new applications for the academic year 2018/19 and future new applications.

Please see Appendix A for more details.

6. How to have your say

The consultation is open from 29 June 2017 until 18 September 2017. You can have your say by answering a questionnaire on our website at www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/consultations or you can pick up a paper copy from your local library or leisure centre.

The consultation feedback will be considered at the Executive Committee meeting on 10 October 2017 before finalising the new policies.

Appendix A
Home to School /College Travel Policies – Comparison of Current and Proposed Approaches

Current Approach	Proposed Changes
<p>All children who are in reception year to the end of year 11 qualify for free school transport if they go to their nearest suitable or catchment school and live at least:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2 miles from the school if they are under 8 • 3 miles from the school if they are 8 or older. 	<p>Travel will only be provided from home to nearest available school with a place for that child, rather than to the nearest or catchment school. Where there are 'pyramids' of schools that will be to the next school in the pyramid, rather than to the nearest school. For children with a SEN, it will usually be the school named in their Education Health Care Plan (EHCP).</p> <p>There will be no changes to other aspects of these policies.</p>
The statutory walking distances are measured by the shortest available walking route	No change.
If there is no available walking route, children may be offered free transport.	No change.
<p>If the family is in receipt of the maximum Working Tax Credit or your children are entitled to free school meals, they will get free school transport if they are:</p> <p>I. aged 8 to 11 and the nearest suitable school is at least 2 miles away</p> <p>II. aged 11 to 16 and attend 1 of the 3 nearest schools between 2 to 6 miles from the home address</p> <p>III. aged 11 to 16 and attend the nearest school of their chosen religion or belief and it is between 2 to 15 miles from the home address</p>	<p>As Universal Credit replaces Working Tax Credit we will use Free School Meal entitlement as the basis for entitlement to travel assistance on low income grounds.</p> <p>There will be no changes to other aspects of these policies.</p>
The majority of entitled pupils are transported on council contracted vehicles.	Provision of a pass to travel on public transport will be the first point of assistance offered to Middle and Upper school pupils ages 9 – 16, rather than the commissioning of routes through private operators. The council already provides bus passes for pupils to use public transport, but we will seek to increase the use of public transport.
Transport is provided to entitled under 5's starting in reception class	Transport will not be provided for children who are less than statutory school age (under 5).

Current Approach	Proposed Changes
<p>Concessionary passes are sold where there are spare seats on council contracted routes. The cost for concessions in 16/17 was £157 per term</p>	<p>Concessionary passes will be charged at a cost that better reflects the actual cost to the council of providing the transport. Under the revised scheme charges could vary from £100 - £300 based on journey cost.</p>
<p>Where students are on split time tables or only attend school for short periods in the day a contracted route is used to provide transport</p>	<p>Where it is more cost-effective, schools will be given the option to have a contribution made to allow them to run their own minibus to transport their pupils.</p>
<p>There is no automatic entitlement for pupils with an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) or Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN). However, transport can be provided if they live further than the statutory walking distances mentioned above and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • attend their nearest or catchment mainstream school. • attend the nearest suitable special school, which has been agreed by us as being able to meet their needs 	<p>Where a vehicle is provided to a family through the national Motability Scheme, we will provide parents/carers with a payment to cover the mileage, in order that they can use their specialised vehicle to transport their child to school or college.</p>
<p>If a child lives under the statutory walking distance but their needs would mean it was unsafe for them to walk (even when accompanied by an appropriate adult), then transport may also be provided.</p> <p>This also applies if the child's parent /carers needs mean it makes it unsafe for them to accompany their child, and there is no other responsible adult to accompany the child to school.</p>	<p>Provision of a pass to travel on public transport will be the first point of assistance offered, rather than the commissioning of routes through private operators.</p>
<p>If a child attends the nearest or catchment school and they have a medical condition which means they are unable to walk to school or access mainstream or public transport, then transport may be provided.</p> <p>This also applies if the child's parent/carer has a medical condition and there is no other responsible adult to accompany the child to school</p>	<p>Transport will be to the nearest available school only.</p>

Current Approach	Proposed Changes
<p>Where a boarding school has been identified as the nearest available school to meet the child's needs, travel assistance is provided in accordance with the boarding arrangements where the usual distance criteria are also met. Boarding arrangements for residential schools can be one of the following:</p> <p>Termly boarding – travel assistance is only provided at the beginning and end of each term and at the beginning and end of the mid-term holiday.</p> <p>12 day boarding – travel assistance is provided on alternate weekends and at the beginning and end of each term.</p> <p>Weekly boarding - travel assistance is provided to school on Monday and from school on Friday each week.</p> <p>52 week placement – travel assistance is provided up to a maximum of three return journeys each academic year.</p> <p>For all boarding arrangements, any additional journey to those laid out above remains the responsibility of the parent/carer.</p> <p>In the interests of the efficient use of resources the council, in all cases, encourages the parent/carer to make their own travel arrangements for which appropriate reimbursement is made</p> <p>The cost of attending one statement review per year at an out of council area school is met by the council by reimbursement of the most economical means of travel assistance available.</p> <p>No other additional costs (e.g. other members of the family, friends etc.) are met by the council.</p> <p>One parent/carer can be transported with the child to act as a passenger assistant to schools which are out of the council area if that results in the most efficient use of the council's resources.</p> <p>All additional transport requirements remain the responsibility of the parent/carer.</p>	<p>Where a boarding school has been identified as the nearest available school to meet the child's needs, travel assistance will change for new applicants.</p> <p>Where a Motability vehicle has been provided for the child, travel assistance will be by way of a mileage payment to the parent/carer.</p> <p>If there are spaces on a bus to the boarding school provided through the council's travel assistance scheme, these spare spaces will continue to be offered to pupils who are not eligible for travel assistance. However, they will be charged at a fee that reflects the cost to the council.</p> <p>In future, parents/carers will be required to make their own travel arrangements, for which appropriate reimbursement will be made and the council will cover the costs when this is less than the cost of providing transport.</p> <p>This non-statutory provision will no longer be made available.</p> <p>No change</p> <p>No change</p> <p>No change</p>

Current Approach	Proposed Changes
<p>Post 16</p> <p>If a child is aged between 16 and 18 and in further education or sixth form, we may help with transport provided that they meet certain criteria:</p> <p>The distance from home to school or college needs to be between 3 and 20 miles (measured by walking distance up to 3 miles and motorised route after 3 miles) and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• they must be from a low income family or;• they must have a medical need or;• be in the care of the authority. <p>If the above criteria are met, transport is provided to pupils who attend the catchment or nearest school or the nearest establishment which offers the chosen course.</p> <p>Additionally, travel can be provided for pupils who have a Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education Health Care Plan up until the age of 25.</p>	<p>No changes.</p> <p>The only change will be that post 16 Special Educational Needs (SEN) students will be required to make a contribution towards the cost of their travel, unless they are from a low income family.</p>

**Central
Bedfordshire**

Central Bedfordshire in contact

Contact us...

by email: school.transport@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

on the web: www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

Write to Central Bedfordshire Council, Priory House,
Monks Walk, Chicksands, Shefford, Bedfordshire SG17 5TQ