



**West
Northamptonshire
Council**

Home to School Transport Consultation 2023

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1. Executive Summary

- The Home to School Transport Consultation 2023 Consultation received a total of 1509 responses. 1460 were received via West Northamptonshire Council's online consultation platform, 49 were received by email.
- The consultation period for submitting responses was between 31 March 2023 and 30 May 2023.
- Most of the responses received through the online consultation platform were from local residents (1358).
- The consultation detail has been widely promoted using several means including local press, social media, newsletters, email notifications and public consultation drop-in events.
- Proposal to make available spare seats to those in order of the proposed defined priority: 35 per cent agree, 49 per cent disagree, 12 per cent neither agree nor disagree, 5 had no opinion. 306 comments received on proposal.
- Proposal to remove the non-statutory elements of the policy:
 - For transport to linked schools: 13 per cent agree, 78 per cent disagree, 7 per cent neither agree nor disagree, 2 had no opinion.
 - Proposal to remove the non-statutory element of the policy for transport for under 5's for mainstream schools: 17 per cent agree, 52 per cent disagree, 17 per cent neither agree nor disagree, 14 had no opinion.
 - Proposal to remove the non-statutory element of the policy for transport for those in year 11 who move and would not be entitled unless the move took place

due to an emergency: 23 per cent agree, 58 per cent disagree, 11 per cent neither agree nor disagree, 8 had no opinion.

There were 236 comments received on the proposals to remove the non-statutory elements of the policy.

- Reasonableness to review entitlement for Rising 8's as a scheduled task throughout the year: 19 per cent agree, 39 per cent disagree, 23 per cent neither agree nor disagree, 19 had no opinion. 78 comments received.
- The proposed walking route criteria is clear whilst ensuring the safety of school children: 33 per cent agree, 39 per cent disagree, 16 per cent neither agree nor disagree, 12 had no opinion. 160 comments received.
- Proposal to increase the annual fee for the discretionary provision for non-entitled school travel assistance to help meet the cost of providing the service: 19 per cent agree, 73 per cent disagree, 6 per cent neither agree nor disagree, 2 per cent had no opinion. 377 comments received on proposal.
- The invitation to make any further comments on the Home to School Transport or the Draft Home to School Transport Policy received 232 comments.

2. Introduction

2.1 Overview

We asked for views on changes being proposed to our Home to School Transport service. These changes are required to meet increased demand and operating costs, whilst also exploring opportunities to give greater flexibility for parents, support our young people's independence and help to promote sustainable travel.

We recognise circumstances for each child, young person and family are often different, therefore we needed to know how each of our proposals may affect children, parents, and carers. We also sought views from schools and colleges who may also be affected.

This is part of a larger review of transport policies, including Post-16. A consultation of the Post-16 policy will take place later this year, following a full review of bus services.

The changes we are proposing will not come into effect until September 2024.

As well as inviting general comments on the Draft Home to School Education Transport Policy, the consultation focused on the following key areas of Home to School Transport, respondents could choose to comment on some or all. The key areas of this consultation:

- Proposed spare seat scheme
- Removal of entitlement to linked schools
- Provision of transport for rising 8's
- Removal of transport for children under 5 for mainstream pupils only
- Removal of travel assistance for year 11 pupils who move home during the academic year
- Review of suitable walking route criteria
- Increase the cost of non-entitled bus pass

This document sets out the summarised results to the consultation which took place from 31 March 2023 to 30 May 2023.

2.2 Related documents

- Supporting information
- Draft Home to School Education Transport Policy (September 2024 – July 2025)
- Draft Spare Seat Scheme
- Draft Walking Route Assessment Criteria
- Frequently Asked Questions (updated throughout consultation)

2.3 How to have a say

People were invited to have their say by either:

- Attending one of the 5 drop-in consultation events
- Completing an online survey
- Emailing or writing in.

2.4 Method

The consultation consisted of an online questionnaire which was made available through the council's consultation hub, Citizen Space, at:

<https://westnorthants.citizenspace.com/cet/home-to-school-transport-2023>

The questionnaire was offered in an alternative format including large font or easy read. Paper copies were made available where required. Alternatively, people could also respond via email at schooltransportpolicy@westnorthants.gov.uk, or post using The Guildhall address.

People could also provide comments during the following consultation events:

Date	Venue location
27 April	West Northamptonshire Council, One Angel Square, Angel Street, Northampton
28 April	Egerton Hall, Juno Crescent, 20 High Street, Brackley
2 May	Jeffrey Room, West Northamptonshire Council, The Guildhall, St Giles' Square, Northampton
4 May	Council Chamber, West Northamptonshire Council, The Forum, Moat Lane, Towcester
10 May	Daventry Volunteer Centre, New Street, Daventry

Respondents were provided with related documentation and material that related to the proposals within the consultation. Respondents were also provided with further information and explanations around the reasoning for the proposals which were positioned throughout the parts of the online questionnaire for ease of accessing this information.

2.5 Publicity

The consultation was publicised widely throughout the duration of the activity using different means including:

- Local press: A series of media releases that went to circa 370 newsrooms and individuals (including hyperlocal, local, regional, and national, print, digital and

broadcast including the Chronicle and Echo and BBC Radio Northampton) from the council's Communications Team.

- Social media:
 - 6 promotions using Twitter, reaching a cumulative total of 5861 accounts, prompting 130 engagements through clicks, likes and shares.
 - Additionally, the consultation was promoted through Facebook posts 6 times, reaching a cumulative total of 23945 accounts, prompting 128 engagements through clicks, comments, reactions, and shares.
- E-newsletters were sent on 3 different dates during the consultation. Articles were also included in news bulletins to town and parish councils.
- Online council news pages: Internal communications and external public pages.
- Notifications were sent to 186 educational establishments in West Northamptonshire at the start of the consultation and a reminder during including academies, maintained, universities, Nurseries, and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Detail about the consultation was also circulated via email to those registered on the council's Consultation Register and Residents Panel (over 500 contacts), as well as being sent to council members and parish councils. Wider promotion of the consultation was encouraged through these means.

3. Response to the online consultation

There were 1460 online responses to the questionnaire through the council's consultation platform.

The online consultation questionnaire was structured in a way that respondents were able to comment on individual proposals. There was no requirement for respondents to answer every question, therefore the total of responses for each question may differ.

3.1 Response profile

Respondents were asked to select each option that applies to them. This question allowed for more than one answer.

There were 1603 responses to this question. A majority of respondents were local residents (1358).

Table 1, Are you

Respondent type	Count
A local resident of West Northamptonshire	1358
A representative of a town/parish council	12
A representative of the voluntary sector or a community organisation	18
A business or representative of the local business community	16
An educational professional or representative of an education provider	115
A representative of a health partner organisation (for example integrated care, mental health trust)	2
A West Northamptonshire councillor	8
A town or parish councillor	18
A West Northamptonshire Council employee	22

Respondent type	Count
Other	34

Respondents were also asked to choose one option to state what capacity they were responding to the consultation. This was a required question, therefore were 1460 responses.

Table 2, In what capacity are you responding to this consultation?

Response	Count
A parent or carer of a child or young person that attends nursery, school, college, or other further education	1188
A student aged 16 to 19 or up to 25 if you have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND)	15
A transport professional (taxi, minibus, bus operator)	13
An educational professional (head, or another representative)	64
Another organisation, business or group	5
Another interested party	119
None of the above	56

Parents and carers

Those who responded as a parent or carer of a child or young person were asked a series of questions to assist us to build an accurate understanding of the characteristics and communities responding. 72 per cent of those who stated they were parents or carers, completed all or some of this part.

Parent and carer respondents were asked which age group applies to their children or young people; this question allowed for more than one answer as applied to any child within their care. There were 1628 responses to this question.

Table 3, Which age group applies to your children or young people?

Response	Count
Age 0 to 4 (early years)	84
Age 4 to 5 (reception)	84
Age 5 to 11 (school years 1 to 6)	441
Age 11 to 16 (school years 7 to 11)	834
Age 16 to 18, post 16 (school years 12 to 13)	164
Age over 16 (school years later than 13)	21

Parents and carers were asked where their children or young people attended school. 1102 said they go to school in West Northamptonshire, and 55 said they go to school outside of the area. They were also asked about the type of school, if their children or young people currently receive home to school transport, has Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, and has an Education, Health and Care plan, the following questions allowed for more than one answer:

Table 4, Which of the following describes your children or young people's current school or further educational establishment?

Response	Count
Mainstream school	1077
College	34
Special educational needs (SEND) school	51
Other	18

Table 5, Which of the following currently apply to your children or young people?

Response	Count
Eligible for free Home to School Transport	762
Allocated a spare seat	43
Post-16	123
None of the above	296

Table 6, Does your child or young person have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities?

Response	Count
Yes	178
No	906
Unsure	34

Table 7, Does your child or young person have an Education, Health and Care plan?

Response	Count
Yes	88
No	999
Unsure	33

Students in education

Those who responded as a student over the age of 16 were asked a series of questions to assist us to build an accurate understanding of the people responding. All who stated they were students, completed all or some of this part.

Student respondents were asked which age group applies to them. There were 10 responses to this question.

Table 8, Which age group are you in?

Response	Count
Age 16 to 18, post 16 (school years 12 to 13)	9
Age over 16 (school years later than 13)	1

Students over 16 were asked where they attend school. 10 said they go to school in West Northamptonshire, and 1 said they go to school outside of the area. They were also asked about the type of school, if they currently receive home to school transport, have Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, and have an Education, Health and Care plan:

Table 9, If you attend school or a further education establishment, please select the option that applies:

Response	Count
Mainstream school	6
College	1
Special educational needs (SEND) school	4
Other	1

Table 10, Which of the following apply to you?

Response	Count
Eligible for free Home to School Transport	4
Allocated a spare seat	0
Post-16	6
None of the above	0
Unsure	1

Table 11, Do you have any Special Educational Needs or Disabilities?

Response	Count
Yes	7
No	4
Unsure	0

Table 12, Do you have an Education, Health and Care plan?

Response	Count
Yes	6
No	4
Unsure	1

Organisation

Those who identified that they were responding on behalf of an organisation were asked to provide detail namely their organisation name and job role. Of the 50 that responded, they identified as education providers or support services. Job roles of respondents are omitted from this report to protect anonymity. All of those who stated they were responding on behalf of one of these groups, completed all or some of this part.

Respondents to this part were asked if they could tell us if they provided certain services relevant to this consultation.

Table 13, Does your organisation or group provide any of the following?

Response	Count
School transport services	17
Other services for children with SEND	26
None of the above	15

3.2 Proposed Spare Seat Scheme

This proposal affects non-entitled students that currently apply for a seat on one of our existing contracted services and who are then guaranteed transport. This provision will be replaced, and instead there will be a requirement to apply for a seat under the new Spare Seat Scheme.

Currently parents of non-entitled students can apply for transport by the third Friday in May each year and are then guaranteed a seat on one of our existing contracted services. Our proposal is to withdraw this provision and parents will instead be required to apply for a seat under the Council's new Spare Seat Scheme. The new Spare Seat Scheme will prioritise applications in the following order:

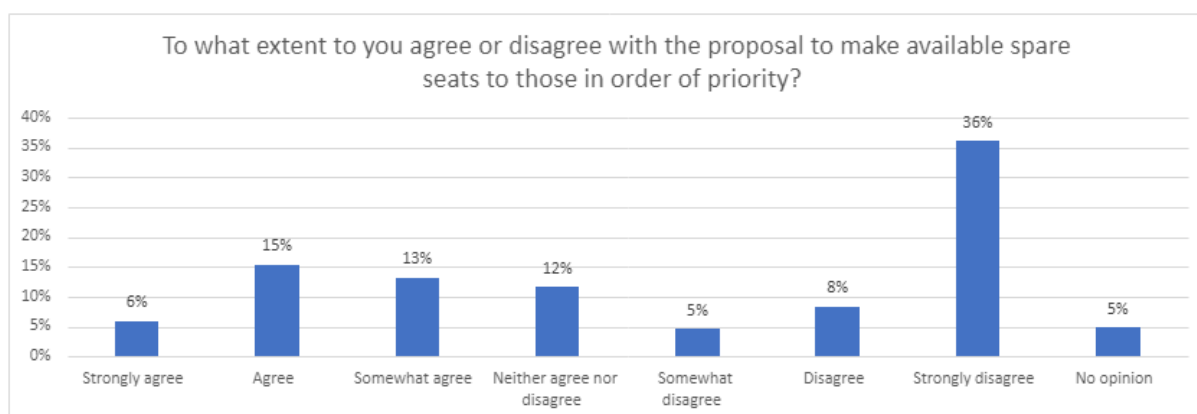
- i. Post 16 Applications that are being renewed
- ii. New Post 16 Applications
- iii. Non entitled children with special educational needs or disability
- iv. Looked After Children or former Looked After Children who have been adopted
- v. Children of Armed Forces personnel - in line with our duty as part of the West Northamptonshire Armed Forces Covenant
- vi. Siblings of eligible students travelling on the same route
- vii. Non entitled mainstream children
- viii. All others - on a first come first served basis from date of application.

Respondents were asked to what extent they would agree or disagree with the proposal to make available spare seats to those in order of priority as detailed above. There were 1192 responses to this question with 412 stating they strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed, and 585 strongly disagreed, disagreed, or somewhat disagreed.

Table 14, To what extent to you agree or disagree with the proposal to make available spare seats to those in order of priority as detailed above?

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	71	6
Agree	183	15
Somewhat agree	157	13
Neither agree nor disagree	138	12
Somewhat disagree	55	5
Disagree	101	8
Strongly disagree	430	36
No opinion	57	5

Chart 1



Respondents were asked to provide any comments on the proposed spare seats scheme. 306 chose to provide comment. 55 comments were received from those respondents who said they agreed strongly, agreed, or somewhat agreed. The following provides a summary of these comments:

- a) Many of those that agree with the proposal had a comment to make about the priority order, the majority being that siblings should sit higher in the list. Some also feel that the order does not appropriately prioritise some children and young people that may be vulnerable due to age or needs.
- b) Some in agreement with the proposal felt that there should be a uniformed approach on seat allocation and be fair to all in full time education. Some also felt that if education is forced until the age of 18, then the provision for Post-16 should be guaranteed.
- c) A small number of those that agree felt that the cost of the service is not affordable, unrealistic especially in a cost-of-living crisis and is unfair for those that have no other choice but to use the service.
- d) A few respondents questioned the narrative of the consultation noting that costs were not clear, it would be helpful to know who this would affect, and questioning how many seats are anticipated and why the council does not have its own service.
- e) A few respondents reinforced the reason they agreed by noting that it would make savings, it is positive that children with disabilities and looked after children will be prioritised.
- f) A few comments called for flexibility of circumstances, stating that parents and carers need to be considered to take account of certain circumstances.
- g) A couple of comments were received noting that Government or the council should organise free school transport, that the proposal is not fair to parents as does not consider their circumstances for example, disabilities, income or working hours.
- h) Comments were also received about unfairness of SEND having to apply for a spare seat, that the service standards are questionable, the proposed would cost the council more, that children and young people should have "grandfather rights," that rural localities are unfairly penalised, and the implications of adopting this approach would be unsafe and not environmentally friendly.

12 Respondents who said that they neither agree nor disagree provided comment:

- a) A few noted that the cost was unaffordable in a current cost-of living-crisis, one noting that payments by instalment should be an option.
- b) A few felt it was unfair for parents/carers that do not have access to a vehicle, that if they cannot get a seat then other schools will need to be considered which is not appropriate when children are settled.
- c) There were also comments received for the following: concern around children standing on buses, that it is not fair on working parents.

The majority of the 231 comments received for respondents who strongly disagree, disagree, or somewhat disagree were about...

- a) Many of the respondents that disagree with the proposal made reference to it being unfair for the reasons that all those attending full time education should be entitled also considering that they need to stay in full time education, that another school will need to be found without considering the detrimental impact on the child or young person or on oversubscription of schools, and that it unfairly impacts working parents or those that do not have access to a vehicle or support.
- b) Many of the respondents felt the proposal unfairly affects those who live in rural areas, offering little or no choice for these due to roads being unsafe to travel any other way. A number of these respondents raised concerns about particular locations in villages and certain schools. Some also stating that the rural located schools would be adversely affected in not getting enough admissions.
- c) A number of respondents commented on the cost of the proposal being too expensive and not considerate of the expense due to current climate or the circumstances of parents/carers and families. Some referring to a cost that is being forced on them due to having no alternative of school due to the distance.
- d) Some respondents felt that the priority order was not appropriate, with comments that siblings should sit higher in the order, that Post-16 should not sit highly, and those who originally were provided a seat would be missing out if the proposals are to be accepted.
- e) Some felt that parent/carers are being penalised due to employment, and some having no other means of transport or support.
- f) A small number of respondents commented on lack of support from the council and Government, noting that the proposal goes against Government agendas against communities. Some calling for the council to act more responsibly.
- g) Other comments included: The reason and narrative being unclear on the proposals and who is affected, that they are not given any choice but instead forced into a situation that may not be appropriate, that the scheme should be based on a first come first served basis, and that there will be issues with timing of application and acceptance.
- h) A small number of comments also noted that the proposal, if adopted, will impact the environment negatively, be dangerous for those forced to walk, that it is uncertain if children/young people can attend education, that those who made a choice originally now have no choice, not considerate of in year changes such as exams. Some also question what happens if not allocated a seat where they otherwise would have been.

7 comments were provided by respondents who selected 'no opinion' or chose not to select an answer. A small number commented that the detail of the proposal is unclear, that they do not understand the reason behind the cost, and that everyone should be entitled. A couple explained that the question did not apply to them.

1 respondent that did not answer but chose to provide comment noted that they were not sure what spare seats meant.

3.3 Home to School Education Transport Policy

The Home to School Education Transport Policy applies to children and young people aged from 4 to 16 in full time education.

The key proposals that relate to this policy are:

- The removal of the discretionary entitlement to linked schools

The current policy makes provision for free travel assistance to a child's nearest or linked school however historically the application of the term 'linked' has different meanings in the Home to School Transport Policy and the Council's School Admissions Booklet. This has led to some confusion for both parents and schools as to whether a child is entitled to free travel assistance.

The Council's proposal is to remove the entitlement to linked schools and provide transport to a child's nearest school only, with available school places. This will help prevent any confusion and make it clearer for parents as to their child's entitlement to free travel assistance.

- An operational change to the provision of transport for Rising 8's to review entitlement

Under the current policy, the entitlement to free travel assistance changes when a child turns 8 years old as the statutory walking distance increases from 2 to 3 miles. Periodically the Council will review entitlement for these children and the proposal is that this will become a scheduled task at regular intervals throughout the academic year.

This is an operational change, not a policy change and those students who qualify for enhanced support under the Governments Extended Rights provision will continue to receive support.

- The removal of the discretionary provision to transport children under 5 for mainstream only

The current policy provides discretionary travel assistance to children in reception class. The Council propose removing this discretionary travel assistance (i.e., free transport) for pupils below the statutory age for education (those in Reception Year who have not yet turned 5 years), for mainstream only.

Legally parents are not required to send their child to school until the term after their 5th birthday and there is no statutory duty for the council to provide transport, therefore reception is a parental choice.

- The removal of the discretionary provision of travel assistance for Year 11 pupils who move home during the academic year

Currently where a family move home during year 11, and their current school is no longer deemed their nearest or linked, the Council will consider providing travel assistance to support the student in completing their GCSE's. The proposal is to remove this discretionary provision unless the house move is necessitated by an emergency such as a house fire or due to domestic abuse.

- A review of suitable walking route criteria

The current walking route criteria is not clear and can be confusing for parents. We want to simplify this at the same time as ensuring that the safety of school children is maintained at all times. The Draft Walking Route Criteria was supplied to respondents as part of the consultation.

Respondents were asked what extent they agreed or disagreed with proposals to remove certain non-statutory elements of the Home to School Education Transport Policy.

Table 15, Removal of the provision of transport to linked schools

1008 chose to answer this question.

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	41	4
Agree	54	5
Somewhat agree	34	3
Neither agree nor disagree	72	7
Somewhat disagree	42	4
Disagree	106	11
Strongly disagree	637	63
No opinion	22	2

Table 16, Removal of the provision of transport for under 5's for mainstream schools

988 chose to answer this question

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	60	6
Agree	66	7
Somewhat agree	42	4
Neither agree nor disagree	166	17
Somewhat disagree	32	3
Disagree	126	13
Strongly disagree	360	36
No opinion	136	14

Table 17, Removal of the provision of transport for those in Year 11 who move and would not be entitled unless the move took place due to an emergency

989 chose to answer this question

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	55	6
Agree	103	10

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Somewhat agree	74	7
Neither agree nor disagree	105	11
Somewhat disagree	43	4
Disagree	132	13
Strongly disagree	400	40
No opinion	77	8

Respondents were asked to provide any comments on the removal of the non-statutory elements. 236 chose to provide comment.

The following provides a summary of the responses to the proposal to remove the statutory elements of the Home to School Education Transport Policy:

Those that specifically referenced the proposal to remove the provision of transport for linked school's summary of comments:

- Change will cause significant disruption, and remove choice, forcing children and young people to a school or area that is not appropriate or not suitable, impacting on their education, independence, health, and wellbeing
- The proposal either forces notable change or significant expense, the latter is not appropriate in this current climate
- Change will affect a vast number of children, especially those in some rural areas and particular villages
- There will be a social impact, that the proposal will divide children and communities and highlight those that have no option to go to another school, that children should not be split by postcode
- Will restrict education opportunities and opportunities for parents/carers working life
- Uncertainty or of siblings attending the same school
- Some rural areas already struggle with reduced or no public transport
- The proposal is not in line with catchment areas, particularly for some villages
- If the proposal is introduced, it could force people to use active travel at a risk to their safety
- Will lead to increased carbon emissions and contradicts environmental policies
- Transport should be provided to SEND without altering the current offer or what they are routinely used to
- Those currently in education should have the same provision until they finish school
- The proposal will further stretch limited school provision, schools will be oversubscribed
- The term Linked School is not clear, as is the reasoning and information
- Will discriminate those families on low-income or will force families into hardship
- Those located rurally should be entitled to a bus service

For the provision of transport for under 5's for mainstream schools the following provides a summary of comments:

- Discriminates low-income families, and children depending on when they have their birthday

- Not in children or parent/carers best interests, disregards the importance of development, getting children settled in a school setting, and bonding
- Not considering the importance of education for under 5's
- Goes against the councils' own objective of children having the best start in life
- Provision is not fair on parents that work or on low-income families
- Disregards SEND

Comments were received specifically sighting the proposal that could affect year 11's, the following provides a summary of these comments:

- Change will cause significant disruption, remove choice, impacting education, independence, health, and wellbeing. The change means that potentially young people will have no choice but to disrupt their education and change schools when they are preparing for GCSE's
- Proposal does not properly identify what an emergency would be, and what if it is not an emergency but serious, justified, and unavoidable. Penalises parents for wanting or needing to move for anything other than an emergency
- Question why year 11 are being singled out
- Proposal does not consider students best interests
- Generally unfair, and should consider low-income families as well as the needs of those affected

Other comments about the removal of the statutory provisions are summarised as follows:

- Removing these provisions negatively impacts the environment and will greatly increase carbon emissions, increase traffic and congestion, cause issues outside of schools that already have limited space and access.
- Larger schools will not cope with increased pressure and demand, and smaller schools will suffer with less demand
- Education is not an option, therefore why would the ability to get there be. Could lead to loss of education. Transport should be provided until the end of education. Generally, these proposals make it harder for children to stay in education.
- Not considering the rural communities, their needs and choice
- A school would have been chosen on the basis that there was a transport provision, to change this midway through children and young people's educational journey is unfair and unjust.
- Children with additional needs or SEND need to be considered along with their routine, a change would adversely affect them, the proposals greatly affect SEND and their families.
- Suddenly removing the provision is unacceptable.
- There is a need to consider the cost implications completely including the sudden increase, the amount parents/carers will need to pay if they want to stay in the same school, the hardship it may cause low-income families.
- Question the drivers for the proposed changes and call for straightforward evidence to be provided that supports these changes and what the positive outcomes would be. Reference is also made to provision for affordable housing and other plans being approved yet removing the non-statutory provisions will have a negative impact on communities, sustainability, and the wider housing market. Also question why children and young people have not been consulted.

- The council and Government need to take more responsibility ensuring provision is professionally managed. The council have not made the information and proposals clear enough, using complicated terminology. The council is unfair in making these cuts and needs to think of the children and its duty to them rather than budgets.

Respondents were asked if they felt that it is sensible to review entitlement for Rising 8's as a scheduled task throughout the year, 969 chose to provide response to this question.

Table 18, To what extent do you agree or disagree that it's sensible to review entitlement for Rising 8's as a scheduled task throughout the year?

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	30	3
Agree	74	8
Somewhat agree	79	8
Neither agree nor disagree	221	23
Somewhat disagree	39	4
Disagree	109	11
Strongly disagree	231	24
No opinion	186	19

Respondents were asked to provide any comments on reviewing the entitlement for Rising 8's being a scheduled task. 78 respondents chose to provide comment. 10 comments were received from those respondents who said they agreed strongly, agreed, or somewhat agreed. The following provides a summary of these comments:

- a) Some respondents said that the proposal was reasonable as long as it was scheduled with enough notice, or is completed on a case-by-case basis.
- b) Other comments referred to the importance of routine for SEND, raised concern about distance if walking. There was also a question on why the focus is on this age group, and a comment noting that it was not easy to understand the question.

9 Respondents who said that they neither agree nor disagree provided comment:

- a) Over half of these respondents felt that the detail was unclear, there was not enough rationale provided, or they did not understand.
- b) A couple of respondents stated concerns over walking distances and safety.
- c) Other comments related to untimely costs, and wanting consistency through the academic year.

41 comments were received for respondents who strongly disagree, disagree, or strongly disagree:

- a) Many of these respondents raised concern around children's welfare or safety noting that distances are unreasonable considering ages and ability. Also having the provision potentially withdrawn would be unsettling/detrimental to those who already have this entitlement, and children should not be sent to other inappropriate schools if they are not entitled.
- b) Some respondents asked for no cuts to services, no changes during the academic year. They also felt that there was not enough information, or they did not understand the question or terminology.

- c) Comments were provided explaining reasons why a review should not be undertaken including that resources could be put to better use, that parents and children need certainty, and that it would cause disruption to a child's education.
- d) Other comments included that it should be fair for all, or a right, questioned fairness

18 comments were received from respondents that either had no opinion on the matter or did not state to what extent they agree or disagree. Most of these respondents were unsure of the terminology used for this proposal. Other respondents felt that the entitlement should be fairer.

Respondents were asked to what extent do they agree or disagree that the proposed walking route criteria is clear whilst ensuring the safety of school children, 976 chose to provide response to this question.

Table 19, To what extent do you agree or disagree that the proposed walking route criteria is clear whilst ensuring the safety of school children?

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	95	10
Agree	133	14
Somewhat agree	95	10
Neither agree nor disagree	158	16
Somewhat disagree	32	3
Disagree	109	11
Strongly disagree	237	24
No opinion	117	12

Respondents were asked to provide any comments on the proposed walking route criteria. 160 chose to provide comment. 27 comments were received from those respondents who said they agreed strongly, agreed, or somewhat agreed. The following provides a summary of these comments:

- a) Many of those that agree are concerned about safety, that all children should feel safe when walking to school which includes consideration around the suitability of routes, such as suitable lighting and footpaths. Consideration also needs to be given to weather conditions and time of year.
- b) Many also raise concern over distance, that for many rural locations a walking route is not suitable due to being isolated with only options to cross fields or walk on busy national speed limit roads.
- c) Some respondents felt that the walking route criteria is incorrect and not feasible in winter months or where there are safety concerns. Calling for the criteria to be thoroughly considered and realistic. The criteria also do not account for school equipment, and assumption is that parents will accompany their child however this is sometimes up to a certain age.
- d) There were some comments that felt that the walking criteria was clear and that walking or cycling should be encouraged providing safety is not compromised.

- e) Other comments received included: That it is not clear who the criteria apply to for instance those who cannot walk to school as they attend a school that suits their needs rather than the nearest, that transport should be provided to those that cannot walk to their catchment school.
- f) Some comments provided suggestions around there needing to be more child safety arrangements directly outside of schools, that active travel should be encouraged and promoted, that walking routes should be limited to a safe zone area around a school (where safe), that weighting should be given to those in rural locations with no public transport.

13 Respondents who said that they neither agree nor disagree provided comment:

- a) Many of these respondents gave comment over safety concerns, or considering safety. These included main roads being unsafe, with no walkways or lighting, high volumes of traffic, routes should be free from too many crossings and verges should not be considered as safe for children to walk along.
- b) A few comments related to unsuitability due to being rurally isolated, or in a village without suitable measures for walking, or being too far to walk.
- c) There were a couple of comments relating to the narrative being unclear, noting they were not sure what the criteria is, or that they did not have enough information to provide an informed response.
- d) Other comments on the walking route clarity and criteria included a suggestion to have a bus stop in a safe walking distance from a school to encourage walking, to consider those SEND or other issues that prevent comfortable walking, that the criteria are not realistic to distance related circumstances.

113 comments were received for respondents who strongly disagree, disagree, or somewhat disagree:

- a) The majority of these comments raised concerns over safety including main roads, crime areas or increased risk from criminals or attacks and dangerous adults, dark underpasses, lack of footpaths and lighting, cars avoiding potholes, blind corners, large vehicles mounting pavements, walking in dark months or extreme weather, crossing roads, crossing/passing waterways. Many also stating that a road without a footpath, and suitable lighting, is entirely unsuitable questioning how this could be disregarded. Some noted that the criteria are not reasonable, and if there is not proper consideration into safety concerns it could lead to accidents or harm. Other comments relating to safety include: respondents asking what is involved in the assessment, when assessments are carried out, safety of drivers is also a risk to avoid walkers not on suitable paths.
- b) Some felt that distance and rural isolation has been disregarded, and it is unrealistic to expect a child or young person to walk or cycle a great distance without being tied and compromising their education. Some also commented on children and young people having to carry school equipment great distances, and storage of clothing needed to travel this way. There were also comments around how the distance is calculated.
- c) There were some comments relating to the criteria being unfair, not carefully considered or planned. Comments included that other factors should be considered such as school circumstances, all safety aspects, and practicality. Some felt that further explanation and information is needed in the criteria, that the criteria are not

clear and brings routes into doubt with the criteria stating routes are safe and the reality being that it/they are not.

- d) Other comments included that the criteria disadvantages children with disabilities or medical issues particularly those SEND, unrealistic and penalises parents, and forces parents and carers to take children to school increasing traffic and emissions. Some comments also relate to the council inappropriately cutting costs at the detriment to children, young people, parents/carers, not taking care of roads, question what the council thinks is acceptable, and note that this proposal goes against other council agendas.

7 comments were received from respondents that either had no opinion on the matter or did not state to what extent they agree or disagree. These included comments that those in full time education should be entitled to free transport, that the detail is not relevant as unrealistic based on their location, routes being unsafe, and questioning what is deemed as safe.

3.4 Increase the Cost of Non-entitled Bus Pass

The proposal is to increase the contribution towards the financial costs incurred by West Northamptonshire Council in providing transport, by increasing the cost of a bus pass that parents currently pay for statutory school age non-entitled children.

Local authorities can charge a contribution where a passenger does not have a statutory entitlement.

The current policy provides discretionary travel assistance to non-entitled children at a cost of £600 per annum. These costs have been reviewed and one of the proposed changes is to revise the contribution required by parents who apply for a spare seat under the new scheme.

The cost of a bus pass is proposed to increase to £1000 per academic year which better reflects the actual cost to the Council for providing a seat to a mainstream learner and will therefore help meet the costs of providing the service. The current £600 cost was introduced 10 years ago and has not been increased until now.

The increased cost will apply to both Special Educational Needs and Disabled students and Mainstream students.

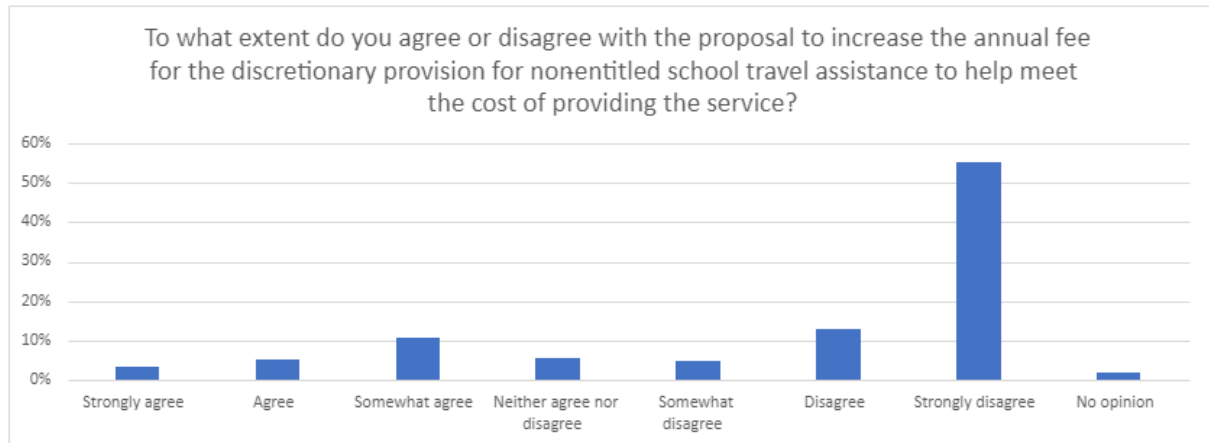
Respondents were asked to what extent they agree or disagree with the proposal to increase the annual fee for the discretionary provision for non-entitled school travel assistance to help meet the cost of providing the service. There were 987 responses to this question with 191 stating they strongly agreed, agreed, or somewhat agreed, and 721 strongly disagreed, disagreed, or somewhat disagreed.

Table 20, To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to increase the annual fee for the discretionary provision for non-entitled school travel assistance to help meet the cost of providing the service?

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Strongly agree	33	3

Response	Count	Per cent (%)
Agree	52	5
Somewhat agree	106	11
Neither agree nor disagree	57	6
Somewhat disagree	49	5
Disagree	128	13
Strongly disagree	544	55
No opinion	18	2

Chart 2



Respondents were asked to provide any comments on the proposal to increase the annual fee. 377 chose to provide comment. 53 comments were received from those respondents who said they agreed strongly, agreed, or somewhat agreed. The following provides a summary of these comments:

- Many commented that the increase was set too highly especially in a cost-of-living crisis
- Some agreed that the increase should reflect the actual cost
- Some suggested phased or means tested options. Other suggestions included having a cost proportionate to distance travelled.
- There was also comment that the increase penalises low-income and rural families.

7 Respondents who said that they neither agree nor disagree provided comments that the cost should reflect how the child was allocated the school making it fairer, the cost should not go up too much but a rise is understandable, that increase should be phased in, and payments taken in instalments, and that an increase is better received than a complete cut in service provisions.

316 comments were received for respondents who strongly disagree, disagree, or somewhat disagree:

- The majority of these comments indicated that the increase is too much, unaffordable to increase in one go in the current climate, is disproportionate, and too sudden. Also commenting that parents have no option, and the proposal is unfair, as changes should not be forced in this way as it is compulsory to stay in education.
- Some felt significantly disadvantaged as they have more than one child, are a single parent, are on low-income, in a rural location, working and unable to transport their

- child, or otherwise have no choice but to pay an amount that they disagree with when they made an original choice based on cost of transport.
- c) Some felt that the proposal decreases the life chances of children and young people by removing choice and parents/carers having no option but to reconsider school choices. Some also felt that children will simply not be able to attend school and would suffer academically. There were also concerns around welfare of those attending school and parents/carers having to make cuts around bills and food, also concerns for children and young people that are considered as vulnerable.
 - d) Some respondents feel that the lack of foresight from the council should not justify the increase. That there is no straightforward evidence that supports an increase of the amount proposed. Some felt that the council could make cuts to other services, that money is wasted on other schemes, are insensitive to the current situation around costs. A small number of comments were not clear around the information that has been provided.
 - e) A few comments were critical of the transport service provided, noting that payments are not made easy, that they have problems with the conduct of the transport provider, or buses are often changed or late.
 - f) A small number of comments stated that the service should be free to align with the requirement to stay in education.
 - g) A small number of comments felt that having to make alternative choices due to a rise in cost for travel will lead to oversubscribed schools.
 - h) Suggestions were provided including that the cost should: be phased in incrementally, be based on a means test, not be increased for current students, be a lower amount, discounted for siblings, subsidised, remain at current cost, introduce greener travel to reduce operating costs, make ways to pay fairer.

1 comment has been received from a respondent that had no opinion on the matter noting that a card payment system would be better than the current.

3.5 Further comments

Respondents were invited to provide further views or comments on Home to School Transport or the Draft Home to School Transport Policy, that they had not already told us about. There were 232 comments that make up the following summary.

- Many respondents felt that the proposals would significantly disadvantage and also discriminate children, young people, and families. That they are unfair and feel that choice of school will be limited, or they have little choice, and that changes should not be made as will affect or deny education and place a burden on families.
- Some felt that the proposals will significantly impact those living in rural communities, and split some areas based on postcode. Others felt that the proposals would affect SEND and there needs to be more to support. Some felt that the proposals would affect working households and single parents, with working households having to question and consider their ability to work or make forced changes. Also, the potential impacts to parents and carers emotional and physical wellbeing.
- There are comments relating to stress and anxiety the proposals would cause, particularly with how children and young people deal with changes to routines, and the potential of exposure to busy roads, long journeys, and harsh weather.

- Several respondents felt that the financial burden is unfair, cost is too high, is pricing people out, is a cost saving exercise and having to pay more for an already poor service. That the proposals will contribute to general financial poverty and referred to the cost-of-living crisis.
- That the current service is not fit for purpose, not value for money, and the provision should be reviewed. Also, that the system is unfair and complex.
- There are concerns around road and route safety, and concerns about child safety, and not to do anything until all routes and safety issues have been considered.
- Some state that proposals should be fairer
- A few comments noted that provision should be free and should be free for 16 to 18-year-olds as they are made to be in education.
- Other comments included that proposals should only apply to new intakes, that costs should be subsidised, that more investment should be in greener ways to travel, that people need more help, that education should be easier to access, that a full review should be undertaken, proposals will negatively impact the environment, were critical of the thought around the proposals.

The last question sought detail about how the respondent heard about the consultation. There were 1105 responses to this question, and respondents could choose more than one answer. The most prevalent method of hearing about the consultation was from schools (56 per cent of all selections), followed via social media (25 per cent).

4 Written responses

There were 49 written responses received by email. They included responses from individuals, education providers, Councillors, and parish councils. The following provides an overview of the written comments provided in this way.

- The proposals will detrimentally impact working parents/carers, single parents/carers, vulnerable children and families, children with additional needs or SEND, those on low incomes, those who have no access to a vehicle, and the environment.
- Some concerned comments relate to the proposals that affect linked schools, due to the impact on rural localities.
- The choice is being taken away from children, young people, parents, and carers which will impact on education, general health, mental health, and wellbeing. Families are being forced to decide based on cost rather than what is best for children, young people, and their families.
- The cost of proposals is too much, not proportionate to inflation, not comparable with other geographical areas, puts pressures on families, is unreasonable, and unfairly punishes parents and carers that are responsible for more than one child.
- The changes will lead to oversubscription of schools, or undersubscription.
- The changes put children and young people at risk of harm and have safeguarding implications. Children should not be expected to walk great distances to attend school where it is completely unsuitable to do so.
- The timing of the events for more information was not thought out or effectively communicated.

- Comments were received regarding the council pushing a burden on to families, that it is unfair when it is an administrative error that increase has not been annual, that an equalities assessment should be provided as part of the consultation, that the proposals contradict admissions policies for schools, that the detail and the consultation has not been properly promoted, that some of the narrative and technical wording is not properly explained.
- Other comments suggest that the schools or the council subsidises transport, that access to education is a right, that evidence is needed, that "grandfather rights" should exist or the provision remain as it is, that costs should be reconsidered, that current provision works well, that there are concerns with the transport service, that changes will impact all.

Respondents that specifically referenced the proposed Spare Seat Scheme felt:

- It disadvantages and confuses those that are currently eligible, as they won't be in the future,
- That SEND should be prioritised,
- Causes confusion as implicates schools on administering the proposal,
- There is not enough notice.

Those that specifically referenced the proposal to remove the provision of transport for linked school's said:

- That the provision should remain as it is as the original choice was based on this,
- Changes will cause huge disruption,
- The detail around 'Linked schools' is not clear, and it is uncertain of who it applies to,
- It penalises children, parents, rural communities,
- It is not feasible to send all children to their nearest school,
- Changes will affect children's education and wellbeing,
- Will affect many as often the linked school is not the nearest.

Respondents that referenced the removal of provision for under 5's for mainstream schools noted:

- That it is unfair and discriminates parents and disadvantages children's development

Those that specifically references transport for those in year 11 who would not be entitled unless the move was due to an emergency gave the following comments:

- Should allow current provision to continue,
- It is unfair due to upheaval and during an important time of education

Rising 8's

- Unfair particularly on vulnerable and SEND children

Walking route

- Does not consider the rural areas
- There are few safe walking routes or are too far away as walking distances

Increase cost

- Too much in the current climate,

- Penalises parents and those that have no other option,
- Unfair to parents with more than one child,
- Affects those on low incomes,
- Not acceptable as the service is poor.

5 Feedback from consultation events

There were 5 people who chose to provide written feedback at the consultation events, the majority were parents, a support group representative and a community transport provider also attended. Others that attended these events advised that they were going to complete the online consultation. A summary of those who provided written feedback:

- Concern raised over the walking route criteria and if free transport would be ceased
- Concern for the removal of linked schools and an increase in charges for those non-entitled students, but would be supportive of "grandfather rights"
- Concern of the potential impact for SEND, and the removal of transport for children under 5
- There was interest in community transport being able to assist schools directly

A summary of other comments received at the consultation event, that did provide written feedback included:

- Questions around what linked means and how it impacts students, and younger siblings
- Questioned the impact on Post-16 students
- The cost from £600 to £1000 is excessive particularly in the current cost of living crisis
- Questioned if the cost could be phased
- Raised concern over the walking route assessment and the loss of free transport.

End of report