



## EXECUTIVE 12<sup>th</sup> July 2023

<b>Report Title</b>	<b>Home to School Transport - Policy Revisions for Statutory School Age Pupils 2024/25</b>
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<b>Lead Member</b>	Cllr Matt Binley, Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets

<b>Key Decision</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Are there public sector equality duty implications?</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972</b>	

### List of Appendices

- Appendix A** – Summary of responses to consultation
- Appendix B** – Home to School Transport Mainstream Demand as at 2023
- Appendix C** – Current Home to School Policy
- Appendix D** – Copy 'Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance 2014'
- Appendix E** – Equalities Impact Assessment (June 2023)

### **1. Purpose of Report**

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- 1.1 North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) are required to arrange free, suitable, home to school transport for children of compulsory school age who are eligible, to their nearest suitable qualifying school in line with section 508B of the Education Act 1996 and the Government's statutory guidance 'Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance 2014'.
- 1.2 The arrangements that the Council feels necessary must be published in an annual policy by September, to allow parents applying for places at secondary school for the following September to consider any transport related matters prior to making their choices.

- 1.3 This report is to request Executive to approve the proposed changes to the Policy.

## 2. Executive Summary

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- 2.1 NNC provides transport for 4133 mainstream students to and from 54 schools daily throughout the school term (these numbers change throughout the year depending on demand):
- 3989 students are of statutory school age;
  - 3694 students are entitled to free home to school transport;
  - 295 students purchase a discretionary seat.
- 2.2 Ten schools alone account for 3614 of those pupils.
- 2.3 In addition, there are a further 173 students using the Home to School service under the Post 16 policy which is planned for a review over Summer 2023
- 2.4 The home to school travel arrangements offered must be free of charge to the parent of an eligible child.
- 2.5 The provision under the current policy meets the statutory minimum requirements with some local enhancements.
- 2.6 A public consultation was held to seek opinions on potential changes to the Home to School Transport Policy for students and pupils of statutory school age (5 to 16). The consultation, which is a legal requirement, was open from 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023 and closed at midnight on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2023. A summary of responses and outcomes is attached at **Appendix A**.
- 2.7 The consultation primarily considered the discretionary element of home to school transport which is currently costing the Council approximately £538,000 per year (this figure changes depending on demand and the outcome of tendering processes and does not include administrative costs). Some of this cost is recouped by charging up to £600 for each available seat, but this recovers less than £265,000 per year.
- 2.8 There is an important financial consideration for the Council regarding the provision of seats on a discretionary basis for a fee. The distinction between selling a 'spare seat' and an 'additional seat' is important in considering the Council's approach to providing discretionary seats on their transport.
- 2.9 The possible changes put forward in the consultation fell into two categories:
1. Format and language used in the policy document.
  2. Substantive changes to entitlement to free and discretionary transport
    - a. ceasing to provide free transport to linked schools unless it is the nearest suitable school with places. This proposal would comply with the legislation.

b. Making changes to the provision of discretionary transport:

Options relating to discretionary transport:

- Withdraw all discretionary transport (all age groups).
- Withdraw discretionary transport for Post 16 only.
- Cease to guarantee a discretionary seat for those applying by mid-May.
- Increase fares to recoup more of the expenditure and cease to undercut the commercial market.

- 2.10 The options in 2b are not exclusive or stand-alone; it is possible to implement some of them together.
- 2.11 All changes consulted on were focussed on Mainstream provision where entitlement is primarily based upon walking distance to the nearest suitable school and the road safety issues affecting any walking routes.
- 2.12 It is proposed that any implementation would only apply to new school placements. Existing students would continue to receive transport under the same provisions as at present to allow them to complete their schooling. If they change school (or they move house), their eligibility would be assessed against the new policy.
- 2.13 It was identified that the three proposals to limit availability of discretionary transport would have a significant impact upon families in the former East Northants District, and in particular, families with students attending, or wishing to attend, Prince William School in Oundle. It is, therefore, proposed that, should the Executive decide to adopt one or more of these proposals, the Home to School team work with colleagues from the Council's Transport team, service operators and the affected schools to consider appropriate alternative transport options.
- 2.14 No changes are proposed to the current entitlement arrangements for pupils with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND).

### **3. Recommendations**

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- 3.1 The Executive is recommended to:
- i) Update the format and wording of the policy to make it easier to understand.
  - ii) Retain the discretionary service provision for all age groups subject to the following changes:
    - a) The guaranteed discretionary seat for early applicants to be withdrawn from all *new* applications for transport for September 2024 onwards. In doing so, discretionary seats will only be available on a first-come-first-served basis if there is spare capacity on transport arranged for pupils eligible for free transport.

- b) From September 2024, increase the fare contribution to £760/seat/year to reduce the subsidy provided by the Council, funded from general taxation. This will apply to existing passengers as well as new applicants.
- iii) Review the fare annually in line with the Council's fees and charge's structure.
- iv) Cease to provide free transport to linked schools unless it is the nearest suitable school with places. This would only affect *new* applications from September 2024 onwards.
- v) Delegate authority for the approval of the final draft of the policy to the Executive Member of Highways, Travel and Assets in consultation with the Executive Director for Place and Economy.

### 3.2 Reason for Recommendations:

- The Home to School Transport Budget was overspent by £4m in 2022/23. Although the budget has been increased for 2023/24, there are still pressures on the budget due to a combination of factors including inflation, changes in employment legislation (minimum wage and living wage regulations) and the increase in demand. There is a need to take action to control spend.
- The current service is more than the statutory minimum required. The proposals and recommendations in this report focus on the few areas of the Council's discretionary powers where any financial savings may be obtained from change.
- The revisions to the Policy are part of a larger package of measures to control costs, including improved management data, and exploration of alternative ways to meet our statutory obligations.
- The demand for transport (both entitled and discretionary and including Post 16) is in some geographical areas bordering on commercial service levels and there is therefore potential to work with operators and other stakeholders to move responsibility for provision of this service to the commercial market rather than relying on the Council. This would also benefit other residents in the same areas by providing an increased public service for other users. This is in line with the aims of the Corporate Plan to develop sustainable transport and improve accessibility across the North Northamptonshire.
- The current service is subsidised by the Council, which is using funds provided from general taxation to benefit those families who are not eligible for free transport and who choose to use the Council's home to school transport service. These families are not legally entitled to this service and yet the Council is providing a significant subsidy for their use of it.

- Our current fare and provision of discretionary transport is undercutting the commercial market, which in turn may be inhibiting potential commercial growth.
- The current fare for discretionary transport has not been reviewed or increased for 10 years. In that period costs for travel provision have increased substantially. If the discretionary fare had been increased by 3% year for the last ten years, it would be approximately £800.
- Providing discretionary transport to pupils enables them to travel from home to school on shared transport rather than encouraging the use of cars and therefore where spare capacity exists, it is helpful to offer it for use.
- The Government currently has a capped fare scheme in place with fares capped at £2 per journey. This would equate to £760 for a home and return journey for the 190 days of school each year. An increase in fares to this level would therefore be bringing the fares back in line with current commercial fares, and would be a reasonable compromise between the need to off-set costs and the consultation response.

### 3.3 Alternative Options Considered –

All options considered fall within the discretionary powers of the Council:

- Make no changes to the policy. This would ensure no disruption to pupils and their families but would not address the Council's financial position and continues with the significant subsidy towards the service, which is funded by general taxation.
- Reduce entitlement to free transport to those between 5 and 16 (statutory school age) only i.e., withdraw entitlement for those under 5 who are attending school in reception class. This change would result in minimal savings for a disproportionately negative impact on those not yet of statutory school age and may discourage parents from starting their child at school until they are 5 years old.
- Enforce the need to change schools for those changing address in year 11 (exam year) where a place is available at a nearer school rather than provide transport. This change is – expected to produce minimal savings and creates disruption to those in their exam year.
- Impose increased statutory walking distance in the term following a pupil's 8<sup>th</sup> birthday; this is expected to produce minimal savings for the Council.
- Retain linked schools only where link is created by the Local Authority Admissions Board. Remove link where it is created by other Admissions Board e.g., Academy, Foundation, etc. This would result in complex administration for the Council costing more in back-office resources or reducing the level of customer service provided to residents using the home to school service.

## 4. Report Background

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- 4.1 Under the Education Act 1996, the Council must provide assistance with travel between home and school for those young people meeting the eligibility criteria set out in the legislation. Such travel arrangements provided by the Council must be free of charge to the parent of an eligible child.
- 4.2 A local authority may also use its discretionary powers to provide transport for young people who do not meet the eligibility criteria and a charge may be levied to cover all or part of the cost of that discretionary transport.
- 4.3 Eligibility for free transport is based upon:
- the child or young person attending their nearest suitable school with places available;
  - the statutory walking distances for their age between home and school;
  - special educational needs, disability or mobility problems preventing the child from walking the statutory walking distance;
  - where a walking route shorter than the statutory walking distance is unsafe to walk;
  - extended rights for those in receipt of certain benefits or on low incomes.
- 4.4 Children and young people with Special Education Needs (SEN) are also potentially entitled to free transport where it is deemed unreasonable to expect them to be able to walk to school, even if accompanied by an adult, due to their SEN or disabilities. In the case of young people with SEN, their nearest suitable school will be the one named in their Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- 4.5 For those young people who do not meet these criteria, the Council currently uses its discretionary powers to provide the following:
- linked schools are treated the same as the nearest suitable school in respect of eligibility for free transport.
  - parents can purchase a seat on Council contracted services for a fare of £600 per year,
  - a guarantee that the Council will commission sufficient additional seats to accommodate those who apply before a set day in May each year (the spare seat guarantee).
- 4.6 There is an important financial consideration for the Council regarding the provision of seats on a discretionary basis for a fee. Where a seat is genuinely 'spare' e.g. a bus carrying pupils eligible for free transport has spare capacity, it is in the interest of the Council to sell that spare seat in order to recoup the costs, which is better than having an empty seat and no financial contribution towards it. Where a seat is purchased by the Council specifically to accommodate a pupil who chooses to take up a discretionary seat in exchange for paying a fee, it is in the interest of the Council to recover the full cost of providing that seat otherwise it is subsidising that pupil at a cost to the Council.

This distinction between selling a 'spare seat' and an 'additional seat' is important in considering the Council's approach to providing discretionary seats on their transport.

- 4.7 The provision under the current policy is close to the statutory minimum required under the legislation. There are few elements of the policy that are discretionary and can be amended by the Council.
- 4.8 All changes consulted on were focussed on Mainstream provision where entitlement is primarily based upon distance to the nearest suitable school and the safety of any walking routes.
- 4.9 No changes are proposed to the current entitlement arrangements for pupils with SEND.

## **5. Issues and Choices**

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- 5.1 Local authorities must consider the impact that proposed changes to their home to school travel policy will have on parents' school choices, and on the financial impact they will have on affected families.
- 5.2 Every day NNC provides transport for 4133 mainstream students to and from 54 schools (these numbers change throughout the year in line with demand).
  - Ten schools alone account for 3614 of those pupils.
  - 3989 students are of statutory school age.
  - 3694 students are entitled to free home to school transport.
  - 295 students purchase a discretionary seat.
- 5.3 In addition, there are a further 173 students using the Home to School service under the Post 16 policy which will need to be reviewed later in the year.
- 5.4 In line with legislation, a public consultation was held to seek opinions on potential changes to the Home to School Transport Policy for students and pupils of statutory school age (5 to 16). The consultation was open from 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023 and closed at midnight on Monday 12<sup>th</sup> June 2023.
- 5.5 The consultation was particularly focused on the discretionary element of home to school transport which is currently costing the Council in excess of £538,000 per year. Some of this cost is recouped by charging up to £600 for each available seat, but this recovers less than £265,000 per year.
- 5.6 The Consultation was in two parts.
- 5.7 Part One**
- 5.8 The first part asked for opinions and thoughts about a proposed rewording and reformatting of the current policy document. Over recent years we have

received a considerable number of negative comments from parents and professionals that the current policy is difficult to understand and does not follow a logical order. The wording of the current policy also leaves some areas open to interpretation.

- 5.9 We have worked with colleagues from the Children's Services and with members of the Parents' Forum to revise the content and layout of the document to try to make it as understandable as possible and to ensure that it contains all the information that parents and carers need to be aware of when applying for transport or other Travel Assistance.

## **5.10 Part Two**

- 5.11 The second part of the consultation focused on potential substantive changes to the current eligibility criteria.

### **Linked Schools**

- 5.12 The consultation asked for opinions in relation to the possible withdrawal of the right to free transport to linked schools.
- 5.13 Some primary schools are given priority over others for places at secondary schools. These are often referred to as feeder schools or linked schools.
- 5.14 Links are created by the Admissions Body relevant to the schools. With the advent of Free Schools and Academies the local authority is no longer the Admissions Body for these schools, which can declare a "link" to any school or area that they feel appropriate.
- 5.15 The legislation requires a Council to provide free transport to those meeting the entitlement criteria when attending their nearest suitable school with places available.
- 5.16 The current NNC policy allows for feeder schools or linked schools to be treated in the same way as the nearest suitable school, even where there is another suitable school geographically closer to the child's home than the linked one.
- 5.17 Removal of this clause would potentially increase the number of young people requiring discretionary transport. In some areas it may also overload the nearer schools to the extent that they can no longer meet the demand, pushing local children into schools further from home.
- 5.18 Areas particularly affected by withdrawal of this linking between schools would be within the former East Northants district. For example, primary schools in Thrapston have a link to Prince William school, despite there being a school at Raunds which is geographically closer. The school at Raunds would not have the capacity to absorb the annual intake from Thrapston. Those who chose to attend Prince William school would require discretionary transport, whilst those who were allocated Prince William school because Raunds was unable to accommodate them would be entitled to free transport. This could lead to



inequality of provision and would certainly result in avoidable challenge and dissatisfaction from parents.

- 5.19 It is currently not possible to calculate exactly how many young people obtain free transport because they attend linked schools, although the largest proportion would appear to attend Prince William School in Oundle. This proposal is expected to reduce the cost of transport for the Council, but it is not practical to calculate the cost as it depends on how individual journeys will be affected by removal of any links, and how families choose to alter their choice of school and mode of transport.

### **Changes to the current provision of discretionary transport**

- 5.20 Four options were consulted upon in relation to reducing the cost of discretionary transport.

#### **5.21 Option 1: Withdrawal of all Discretionary Transport**

- 5.22 If the Council were to withdraw all discretionary transport (from all age groups), based on current numbers, there are 295 young people of statutory school age who would need to find an alternative way to access their school placements, along with a further 173 post-16 students.

- 5.23 Many areas do not have suitable public transport to absorb this demand, either because of operating schedules or because of the numbers of children that require travel at the same time. Parents would need to find alternative ways to get their children to school, which could include the use of private cars.

- 5.24 Prince William School would be particularly badly impacted as 300 of these young people attend that school; 200 of statutory school age and 100 post-16 students. If parents decided to drive their children to and from the school, the congestion and environmental impact upon Oundle would be significant. Also the roads and villages between Oundle and Corby and Weldon, where the majority of these young people reside, would be negatively impacted with increased traffic flow, and the resulting pollution and congestion.

#### **5.25 Option 2: Withdrawal of Post 16 transport**

- 5.26 Although the post-16 service is not covered by this policy and thus the current consultation, there are over 700 young people in Year 11 currently using home to school transport. These young people will be looking for their post-16 education options shortly. Many of these will opt to transfer to post-16 colleges. For the others, the largest numbers opt for Prince William, Corby Business Academy and Wollaston School.

- 5.27 There are currently 173 students using the post-16 service, and Prince William accounts for over 57% of that demand.

- 5.28 The same arguments about congestion and environmental damage apply here as for the withdrawal of the whole service, although on a slightly lower scale.

### 5.29 **Option 3: Removal of the Spare Seat Guarantee.**

5.30 The Council currently guarantees to commission additional capacity to meet all demand in respect of applications for discretionary transport received before a set date in May. Applications received after that date can only be filled where there is surplus capacity on the route, once the entitled students and those who applied sufficiently early to get the guaranteed seat have been accommodated. From the data currently available it is not possible to isolate the numbers accommodated under this provision, but it is indicative that popular schools such as Prince William have a waiting list for spaces for those applying for a discretionary seat after the deadline. This suggests that a considerable number of families that did not apply early enough to qualify for a guaranteed space and that there is an ongoing demand for transport services.

5.31 Removal of the guarantee would reduce the availability of spare seats to only those seats genuinely surplus to the requirement for students entitled to free transport, i.e. the difference between demand and the capacity of the most practical vehicle for the purpose. This would not have a detrimental impact for most schools, where the number of young people paying for their transport is 5 or less. However, there would be a disproportionate number of young people attending the more popular schools adversely affected by this proposal.

5.32 To use Prince William as an example again, there are currently 26 vehicles required to meet the demand for access to this school. There are 683 pupils of statutory school age who are entitled to free transport to the school. In theory this demand could be met by using 13 coaches of 56 seats each. This would provide 728 seats, meaning that there were 45 “spare” seats available for discretionary transport. This could leave 171 students whose transport needs were not met. (In this specific instance it is likely that more coaches would be required to compensate for the wide geographical area covered, so that there would potentially be a larger number of “spare” seats available, but still not sufficient to meet the entire demand.)

### 5.33 **Option 4: Increase in fare payable for discretionary transport.**

5.34 Currently the Council is in effect subsidising discretionary transport by approximately 50% of the true cost of service provision (the actual cost of seat depends on the nature of the journey and the tender prices received from the market). One way to mitigate the cost is to recover a larger proportion of the cost from those using the service. The current charge is £600.

5.35 The consultation document included a table of potential options and ranges of possible charges.

5.36 Unsurprisingly the verdict from respondents was that they would prefer there to be no increase in fares and thus the fares should be left alone.

5.37 Against this argument, the Council need to consider in the levels of overspend from previous years and the overall effect of increasing demographics and the availability of school placements at key points across the Council area.

- 5.38 It must be borne in mind that there have been no increases in Home to School fares for the past 10 years and the Council is currently providing a significant subsidy to families who choose to travel on the Council's home to school transport. This subsidy is funded from general taxation rather than individual contributions from those using the service. As an indicative calculation, if the fare had been increased by 3% each year for the last ten years, the fare would now be £783.
- 5.39 On the basis that schools are open for 190 days per calendar year, and daily fares on a direct commercial service operating under the Government's current £2/fare scheme, would currently be £4 per day (£2 each way) it is therefore suggested that the fares be increased to £760 per annum for discretionary seats. This represents a 27% increase in the fare, which, whilst unpalatable for the end user, is proposed as a reasonable balance.

## **6. Next Steps**

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- 6.1. The policy will be revised to reflect the decisions of the Executive and will be published in its final version by September 2023.
- 6.2. The Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets will be asked to approve the final draft on behalf of the Executive prior to publication.
- 6.3. The revised policy will come into effect from September 2024 onwards.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

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### **7.1. Resources, Financial and Transformation**

- 7.1.1. Any savings from these proposals will contribute towards the overall budget for Home to School Transport from 2024/25. The provision under the current policy is close to the statutory minimum required under the legislation. The proposals and recommendations in this report focus on the few areas of the Council's discretionary powers where any financial savings may be obtained from change.

### **7.2. Legal and Governance**

- 7.2.1 The report has been prepared in consideration of the Education Act 1996 which contains the law on school transport and furthermore in carrying out its duties as a local authority has regard to **Appendix D** which is the statutory guidance on Home to school travel and transport.

### **7.3. Relevant Policies and Plans**

- 7.3.1 The demand for transport (both entitled and discretionary and including post-16) is, in some geographical areas, bordering on commercial service levels and

there is therefore potential to work with operators and other stakeholders to move responsibility for provision of this service to the commercial market rather than relying on the Council. This would also benefit other residents in the same areas by providing an increased public service for other users. This is in line with the aims of the Corporate Plan to improve the sustainable transport network.

#### **7.4. Risk**

- 7.4.1 It has been identified that there would be a significantly increased impact for residents of some of the former East Northants district from the implementation of these changes. Consideration will be made to identify mitigations to reduce these impacts. In the short term the Council could continue to provide excess spaces based on current levels of demand, but, without the formal guarantee of a seat, whilst alternative solutions are sought and implemented for the schools and residents most affected.
- 7.4.2 There is a risk that the restriction of access to discretionary transport will lead to parents using their own vehicles to take the young people to and from school. This would increase congestion and pollution in the worst affected areas and, in particular, the areas around Oundle.

#### **7.5 Consultation**

- 7.5.1 The Council conducted a consultation exercise between 24<sup>th</sup> April 2023 and 12<sup>th</sup> June 2023. The public consultation was supported by the Council's Consultation and Engagement Team.
- 7.5.2 The consultation sought views on the Council's proposed policy changes and options affecting the discretionary transport to inform the consideration and subsequent changes to the policy. It also sought feedback on how the Council could make the wording and layout of the policies clearer to understand.
- 7.5.3 The structure and design of the consultation set out the proposals and enabled both online and non-digital means of participation, in accordance with nationally recognised good practice. To ensure the widest possible reach, a variety of consultation feedback channels were used to maximise the range of accessible channels for consultees, these included:
- Visiting the Home to School Transport Policy Review Consultation webpage and completing the questionnaire or requesting a paper questionnaire
  - Accessing the online questionnaire free of charge at any NNC library for those without internet access
  - Emailing [HomeToSchoolConsultation@northnorthants.gov.uk](mailto:HomeToSchoolConsultation@northnorthants.gov.uk)
  - Writing to Home to School Transport Policy Consultation Response, North Northamptonshire Council, Sheerness House, Meadow Road, Kettering, NN16 8TL
  - Contacting the Council by telephone to give verbal feedback

- Using social media – including Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn

7.5.4 Opportunities to take part in the consultation were promoted in the local media via press releases. The press release went to 26 newsrooms (local, print and broadcast), plus individual reporters and other local news sites. It was promoted through the Council's Leaders' Update, the Council's website, e-newsletters and social media channels, enabling both internal (e.g. staff) as well as external consultees to get involved in the process.

7.5.5 Councillors, local MPs, town and parish Councils, partner organisations, voluntary and community sector organisations, North Northants Business Network, and members of both the North Northamptonshire Residents' Panel and the Council's Consultation Register were invited to give their views and asked to promote the consultation to their members, or within their local area where appropriate.

7.5.6 All North Northamptonshire Head Teachers were advised of the consultation via the Leadership in Schools Email (LSE) and asked to promote the consultation to families. Promotion of the consultation was also circulated by North Northants Information, Advice and Support Service (IAS); Northants Parent Forum Group (NPFGB); Northamptonshire Local Offer; and the Northamptonshire Children's Trust newsletter. Consultation details were also sent out to Northamptonshire Health participation groups.

7.5.7 During the consultation period, using the various means available to consultees, local people, interested parties and organisations contributed to the consultation 518 times. Nearly all of the feedback received was via the questionnaire, with 514 respondents participating via the questionnaire and four respondents submitting a written response. Within the questionnaire, respondents could choose which questions they responded to, and so there are lower response numbers to each question when compared with the overall number of participants.

7.5.8 The consultation feedback is analysed and presented in detail in **Appendix A**.

7.5.9 Consultation responses have been considered in making the recommendations within the report and balanced against the other factors as set out within the report. Members should ensure they read and consider the analysis and redacted comments that have been made available to them before making their decision on the revised policy.

## 7.6 **Consideration by Scrutiny**

7.6.1 The consultation results and the range of possible substantive changes to the policy were considered by the Place and Environment Scrutiny Committee on 27<sup>th</sup> June 2023. A minute extract of the recommendations of that meeting is included below:

**“Resolved to recommend to the Executive that:**

- i) The format and wording of the policy be updated to make it easier to understand;
- ii) Free transport to linked schools be ceased, for new applications, unless it is the nearest suitable school with places, with effect from September 2024.
- iii) New applicants pay the full cost of the fare for those not eligible for free transport, but those pupils currently within the system pay a suggested fare of £760, rising potentially over a three-year period from September 2024, with a caveat that consideration be given to the cost implications on older pupils undertaking examinations and to multiple children travelling from the same household;
- iv) The 'guaranteed seat' option be removed, and applications received before the May deadline be offered on a first come first served basis."

## 7.7 Equality Implications

7.7.1 The Council is committed to treating people fairly. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) was carried out on 19<sup>th</sup> June 2023, taking into account the responses to the consultation and the concerns raised Members of the Prosperous Communities and Future Communities Executive Advisory Panels. The EqIA is presented in **Appendix D**.

7.7.2 The EqIA and responses to the consultation have identified that there is a particular potential adverse impact on some residents in the former East Northants District. This group does not form one of the nine protected characteristics but will require mitigations to be developed and implemented if the Council was to avoid or lessen the impacts of the change.

## 7.8 Climate and Environment Impact

7.8.1 If all discretionary transport were to be withdrawn the impact on the climate and the local environment would be negative, with particular impact on areas served by the most popular schools, such as the former East Northamptonshire District.

7.8.2 Mitigations will be considered to manage the transport demand to the areas most negatively affected, including exploring commercial and co-produced options.

## 7.9 Community Impact

7.9.1 The consultation and EqIA has identified that some residents of the former East Northamptonshire District will be significantly impacted by these proposals. In particular students attending or wishing to attend Prince William School in Oundle will be significantly affected by the withdrawal of free transport to linked schools and the withdrawal of the guaranteed spare seat.

7.9.2 The transport demand to this school is bordering on commercially viable demand from several communities in the area. Officers will work with stakeholders, including officers elsewhere within the Council, to mitigate the impacts by identifying and developing alternatives, including alternative service provision.

## 7.10 **Crime and Disorder Impact**

7.10.1 There are no crime and disorder implications.

## **8 Background Papers**

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8.1 None.