

Home to School Transport Policy Review

Consultation Analysis Report 2023

June 2023

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this report is to set out the Home to School Transport Policy Review consultation process, and key consultation findings (including an understanding of who participated in the consultation), the results of which will be used to help inform the review of the North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) Home to School Travel Assistance Policy and Post 16 Education Transport Policy.

The following lists the changes NNC are considering making to the above policies. The consultation also sought feedback on the wording and layout of the policies, so they are clearer to understand:

- Change to the status of Linked Schools
- Insertion of a provision to allow the Council to reclaim costs of transport awarded based upon inaccurate application
- Changes to the provision of discretionary transport (Spare Seats) 4 Options
- Clarification on the services provided for children and young people with medical needs
- Clarification of the ways in which transport support might be provided
- Clarification on who is authorised to meet a child from the bus

2. Executive decisions and formal consultation

Consultation was carried out in accordance with the Department for Education's guidance. Consultation commenced 24 April 2023 and concluded on 12 June 2023.

The public consultation was supported by the Council's Consultation and Engagement Team. 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.

A paper on the final proposals is scheduled to appear before the Council's Executive on 13 July 2023.

3. How was the consultation promoted?

The consultation was hosted on the Council's Consultation and Engagement Hub website. 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 (circa 625 members) 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.

Opportunities to take part in the consultation were also promoted in the local media via press releases. The press release went to 26 newsrooms (local, print and broadcast including the Northants Telegraph and BBC Radio Northampton), 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. The Facebook reach (i.e. the number of people who saw any content from or about the consultation web page) was 4,543; the Twitter Impressions (i.e. the number of times any content from or about the consultation web page entered a person's screen) was 3,850; and LinkedIn impressions were 991.

In addition to the above 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 which goes out to all schools including primary, secondary, special educational needs and disabilities provision (SEND), and under-fives settings. Consultation details were also sent out to Northamptonshire Health participation groups.

Where appropriate reminders of the consultation were distributed during the consultation period, including direct emails to the Head Teachers of schools with the largest users of the service.

4. How did consultees have their say?

Local people, organisations and other interested parties were able to have their say about the proposals in a range of ways, by:

- 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
- Emailing 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

5. Number and type of responses received

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 4 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.

During the consultation period, an interim summary of the consultation responses received were circulated to senior Transport officers and all responses received were circulated to decision makers upon conclusion of the consultation to enable them to see each response in full.

6. What did people say?

This report is a summary of the feedback received. It is recommended that it is read in conjunction with the full consultation results. The full consultation results have been made available to Members and are available on the [Consultation & Engagement Hub](#).

The following documents were published alongside the consultation questionnaire:

- [Current Home to School Education Transport Policy \(September 2022 – July 2023\)](#)
- [Draft Home to School Travel Assistance Policy \(Academic year 2024-25\) as reformatted](#)
- [Current Post 16 education transport policy](#)
- [Equality Impact Assessment](#)

6.1 Home to School Transport Policy Review Consultation Questionnaire

In total, 514 respondents filled out a questionnaire on the Home to School Transport Policy Review, either partially or fully. Respondents did not have to answer every question and so the total number of responses for each question differs and is shown in relation to each question.

6.1.1 About the respondent

Respondents were asked in what capacity they were responding to the consultation. There were 506 responses to this question, with respondents being able to select more than one option if applicable. The vast majority of respondents said they were a parent/ guardian/ carer of a young person aged under 16 and in education in North Northamptonshire (431). The second highest respondents are a parent/ guardian/ carer of a young person aged over 16 and in education in North Northamptonshire (60). This was followed by interested members of the public (35) and educational professionals (18). The following table details the various respondent types to the consultation questionnaire.

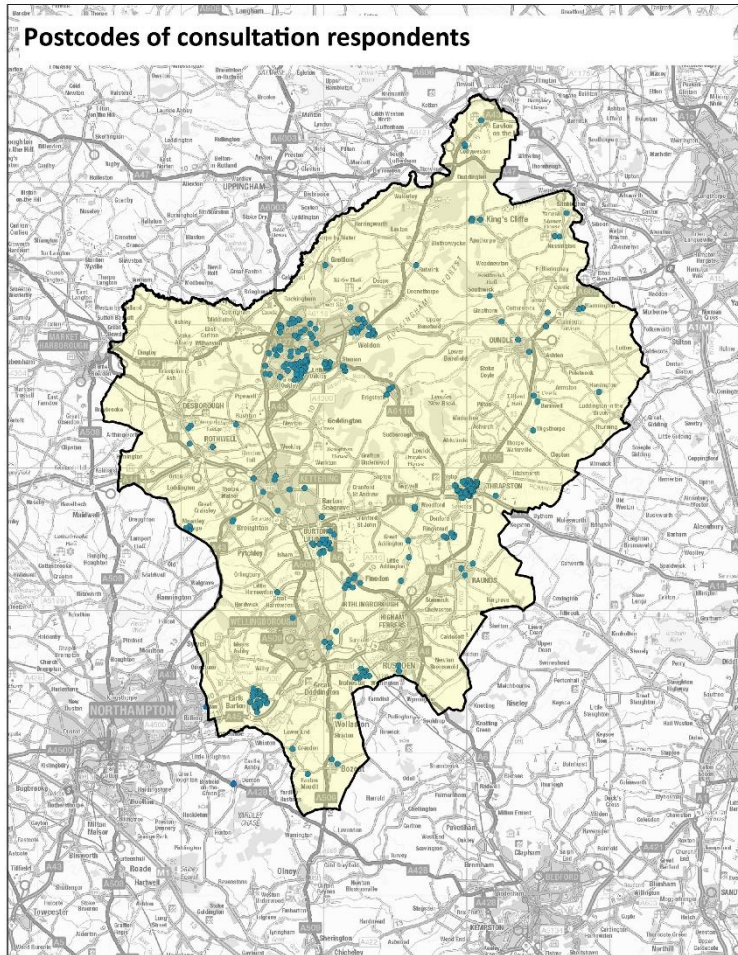
	Response number
A parent/guardian/carer of a young person aged under 16 in education in North Northamptonshire	431
A parent/guardian/carer of a young person aged 16 or over in education in North Northamptonshire	60
A student aged under 16 in education in North Northamptonshire	2
A student aged 16 or over in education in North Northamptonshire	5
An educational professional in North Northamptonshire	18
A representative of an education provider in North Northamptonshire	5
A representative of a transport operator in North Northamptonshire	1
A childminder and/or a before/after school setting	2
An interested member of the public	35
A North Northamptonshire Council Councillor	3
A Town or Parish Councillor	10
A representative of a Town/Parish Council	3
A representative of the voluntary sector or a community organisation	1
A representative of the local business community	0
Other (please give details below)	9

The 9 respondents who made comment within the 'Other' text box gave short descriptions as to their personal status.

6.1.2 Parent, guardians and carers

Respondents who said they were either a parent, guardian or carer of a child or young person were asked an additional set of eight questions to give us a better understanding of their circumstances.

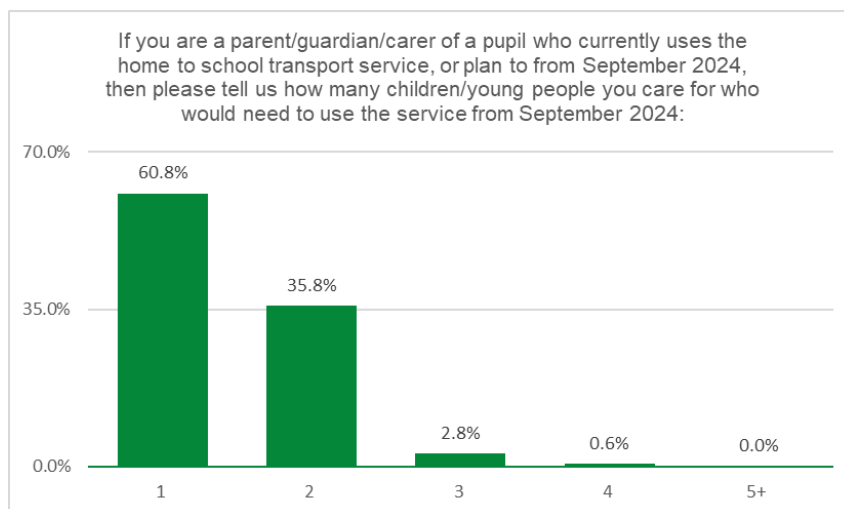
These respondents were asked to provide their postcode to give us an understanding of where they live. There were 344 valid postcodes provided for North Northamptonshire. The following map broadly shows where these respondents reside. As can be seen from the below, most respondents identified themselves as either living in or around Burton Latimer, Corby/Weldon, Earls Barton and Thrapston.



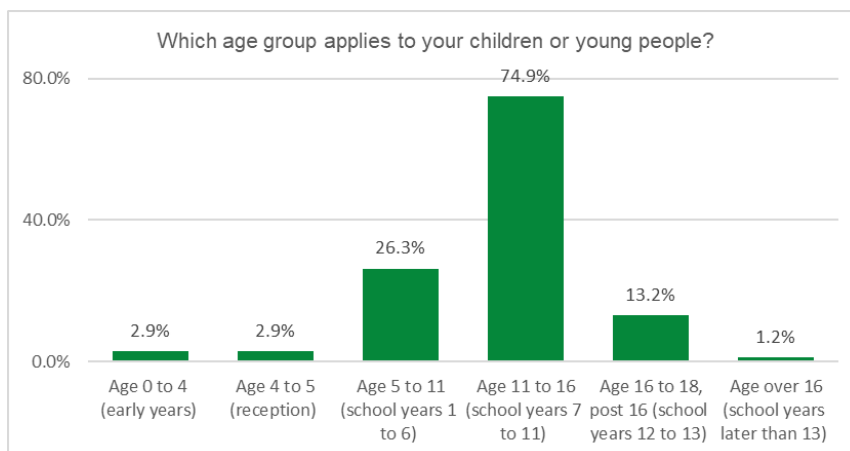
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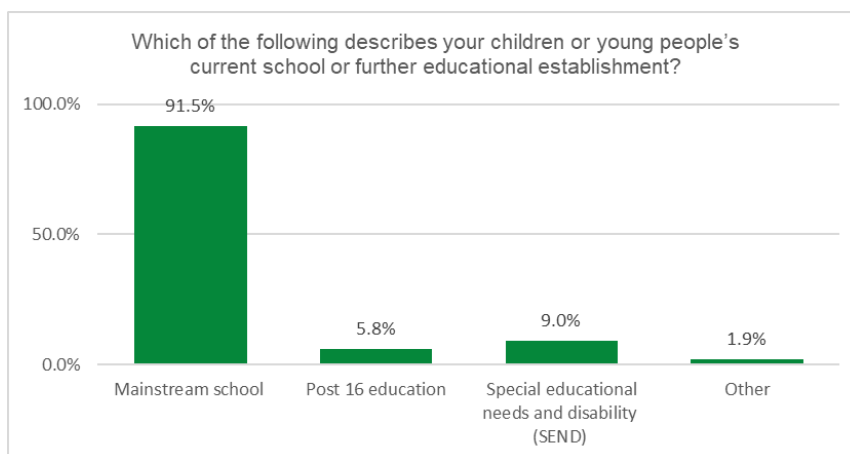
Parent/guardian/carer respondents of pupils who currently use the home to school transport service, or plan to from September 2024, were asked how many children/young people they care for would need to use the service from September 2024. A total of 352 respondents answered this question, with the majority (60.8%) saying they have one child who would need to use the service. A total of 35.8% said they would have two, 2.8% said three, 0.6% said four. No one said five or more.



Respondents were then asked which age groups applied to their children. A total of 410 respondents answered this question, with most respondents (74.9%) saying age 11 to 16 (school years 7 to 11). The second highest (26.3%) was age 5 to 11 (school years 1 to 6). A total of 5.9% identified their children as aged 5 or under and either in reception or early years. The remaining 14.4% were aged over 16 and in school years 12 or above.

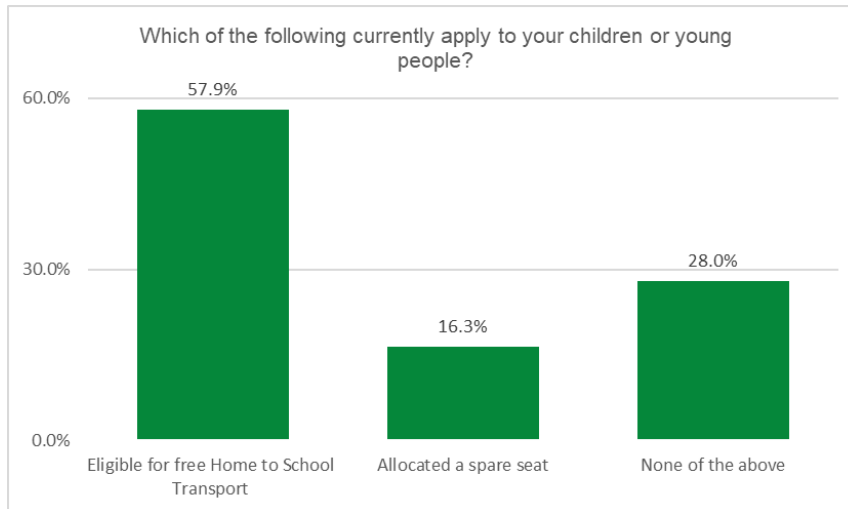


Respondents were then asked which type of educational establishment their children attend. A total of 411 respondents answered this question. By far the most frequent response was mainstream school (91.5%). This was followed by 9.0% saying special educational needs and disability (SEND); 5.8% saying post 16 education; and 1.9% saying 'Other'.



The 8 respondents who made comment within the 'Other' text box, mostly provided details of their child's school setting.

These parent/guardian/carer respondents were then asked if their child/young person were eligible for free Home to School Transport or allocated a spare seat. A total of 404 respondents answered this question, with the majority all respondents (57.9%) saying they are eligible for free Home to School Transport. A total of 16.3% said they were allocated a spare seat; and 28.0% said 'None of the above'.



Parent/guardian/carer respondents were then asked how they would define their sex, marital status, and if they have a disability. The following tables outline the feedback received.

How would you define your sex?

	Response number	Percentage (%)
Female	321	78.1%
Male	70	17.0%
Non-binary	0	0.0%
Self define (please state below)	1	0.2%
Prefer not to say	19	4.6%
TOTAL	411	100.0%

How would you describe your marital status?

	Response number	Percentage (%)
Single (never married)	36	8.8%
Married	272	66.2%
Civil partnership	7	1.7%
Divorced	20	4.9%
Widowed	5	1.2%
Cohabiting	38	9.2%
Separated	9	2.2%
Other (please state below)	1	0.2%
Prefer not to say	23	5.6%
TOTAL	411	100.0%

Do you have a disability?

	Response number	Percentage (%)
Yes	25	6.1%
No	364	88.6%
Prefer not to say	22	5.4%
TOTAL	411	100.0%

6.1.3 Style of the Draft Home to School Travel Assistance Policy (Academic year 2024-25) document

All respondents were then advised that the Council has received feedback saying the layout of the current policy is difficult to follow, and that some people have struggled to find the relevant information. NNC has re-written the draft Home to School Assistance Policy into a new format, to make it more user friendly for people to read and clearer to understand.

It was explained that based upon the outcome of this consultation and the feedback on the new format for the Draft Home to School Travel Assistance Policy (Academic year 2024-25) the Post 16 policy for 2024 may be reformatted before publication later in the year.

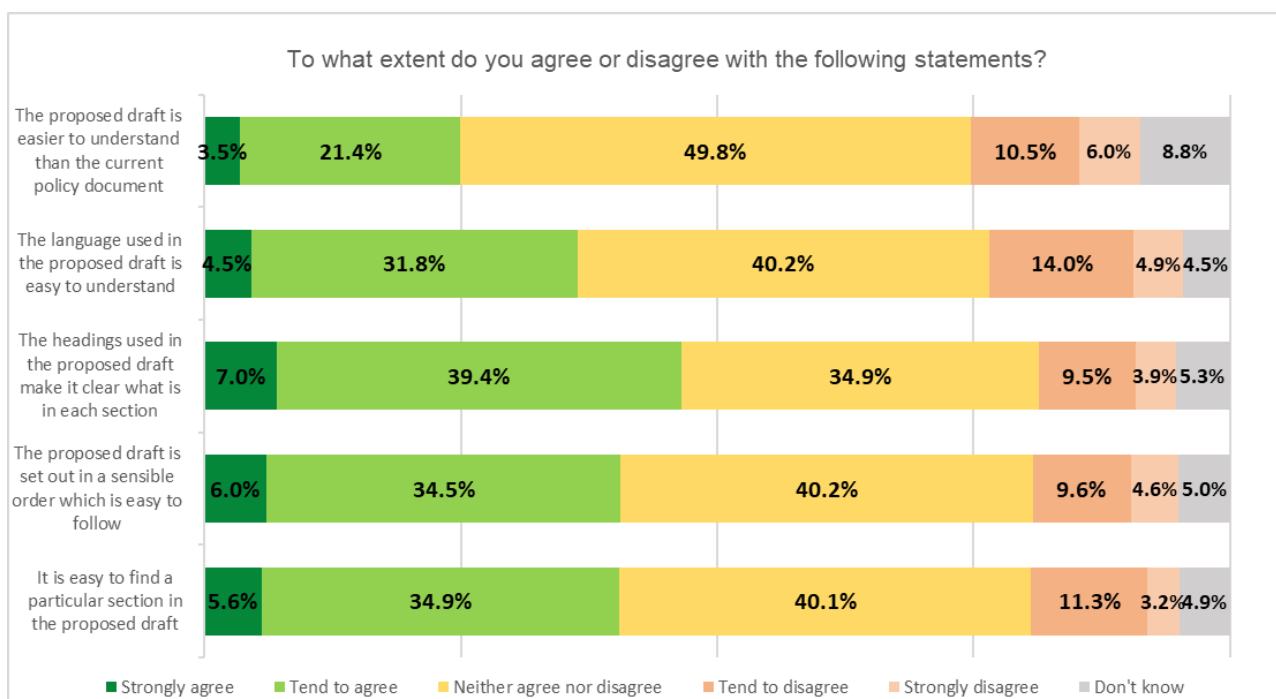
Respondents were then asked a series of questions to seek their views on the revised format. It was made clear that the questions in this section were about the form and style of the policy and not the detail of the content/proposed changes, and that respondents would be asked to provide their feedback on the content/proposed policy changes later in the questionnaire.

Links to the following documents were shared again here as a reminder of their contents:

- [Current Home to School Education Transport Policy \(September 2022 – July 2023\)](#)
- [Draft Home to School Travel Assistance Policy \(Academic year 2024-25\)](#)
- [Current Post 16 education transport policy](#)

Respondents were presented with a series of statements and were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each of them.

There were 286 responses to this question. As can be seen in the below graph, whilst there were a lot of respondents who neither agree nor disagreed with the statements, on the whole there was more agreement for every statement than disagreement.

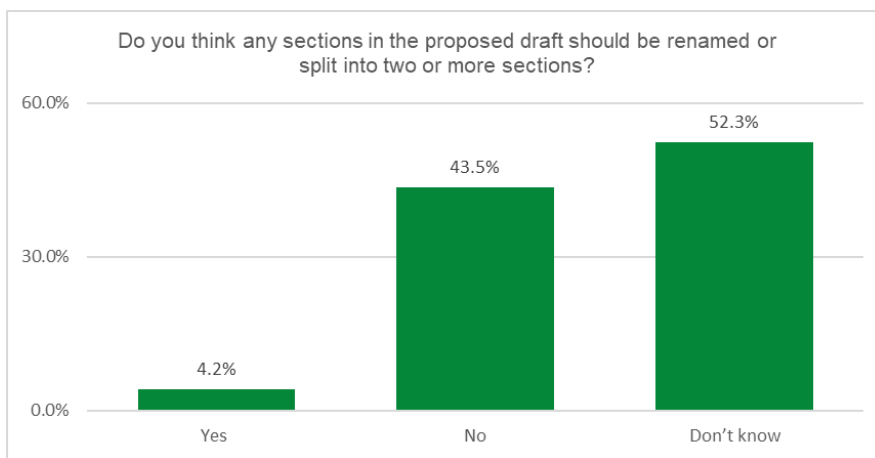


Statements listed in order of strength of agreement:

	Total agree (%)	Total disagree (%)
The headings used in the proposed draft make it clear what is in each section	46.5%	13.4%
The proposed draft is set out in a sensible order which is easy to follow	40.6%	14.2%
It is easy to find a particular section in the proposed draft	40.5%	14.4%
The language used in the proposed draft is easy to understand	36.4%	18.9%
The proposed draft is easier to understand than the current policy document	24.9%	16.5%

Respondents were then asked if they thought any sections in the proposed draft should be renamed or split into two or more sections. There were 285 responses to this question. Most respondents (52.3%) said they 'Don't know', whilst 43.5% said 'No', and 4.2% said 'Yes'.

The below graph shows the frequency of response answers to this question.



Those respondents who felt some sections should be split were asked to tell us which ones. Of the 12 respondents who said 'Yes' to the above question four added additional comments as to how the sections should be split. It was suggested the document should be rewritten and all topics put into sections e.g. SEND/fare paying passengers/low income households. There were also comments that eligibility should be explained as clearly as possible and that a one page summary of the policy is needed.

Respondents who felt some sections should be renamed were invited to tell us what we should rename them. A total of five respondents made comment. It was suggested the word 'free' be added into the section 'Who Is Entitled To Travel Assistance' so that it is clear this section is for eligible customers.

Although not specifically referencing a title section there were several additional comments, these included that the difference between low income and exceptional circumstances should be clearer; the notification process should be personalized; that the text is still unclear to a layman, with confusing and complicated language; and it should be made clear what an eligible school is and what choice will be available.

Respondents were then invited to tell us of any other suggestions as to how we can make the policy easier to understand. A total of 18 respondents made comments.

Of the points regarding the policy several indicated that the new policy content was not clear. Some of these comments made suggestions for changes which included better indenting and listing; to move 'How to Apply' and 'When' near the start of the document; that the language used was deemed prohibitive to those for who

English is a second language or have limited literacy skills. It was also suggested that only the relevant information should be shared with families and that the school and/or Council should provide any additional information as needed; and that it should be mandatory for every school website to hold the transport information and/or include details in their schools admission pack.

Other comments include the opinion consultation supporting materials were unclear as to what the proposed changes were and the supporting papers were too long; that the policy needs more clarity about which schools were link schools, particularly with villages; and concern over the financial pressures that families would face if charges were increased.

6.1.4 Proposed policy changes

Respondents were then reminded that the changes being proposed and consulted upon may affect children and young people from all age groups; that the findings from this consultation will therefore be used to amend both the policy for statutory school age pupils and the policy for post 16 pupils as appropriate; and the sections of the policy under review.

Respondents were also informed of the Councils legal requirements of the service, as outlined below:

- We are legally required to provide home to school transport for pupils of compulsory school age (5 years to 16 years of age) if:
 - The child lives beyond two miles to the nearest suitable school (below the age of eight)
 - The child or young person lives beyond three miles to the nearest suitable school (age 8 to 16)
 - The child lives beyond two miles to the nearest suitable school for pupils aged eight to 11 and is from a low-income family (for example in receipt of free school meals)
 - The child or young person lives between two to six miles to one of the three nearest qualifying schools for pupils aged 11 to 16 and is from a low-income family
 - The child or young person lives between 2 and 15 miles from school where this is the nearest school preferred on the grounds of religion or belief for pupils aged 11 to 16 and is from a low-income family
 - The child or young person lives below the statutory walking distance to the nearest suitable school and cannot reasonably be expected to walk due to their special educational needs or disability.
 - The route has been assessed by the Council as unsafe to walk even when accompanied by an adult.

6.1.5 Linked schools

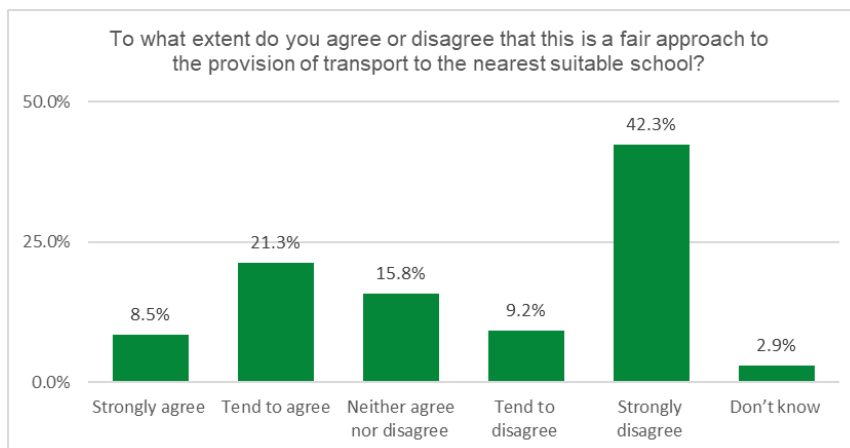
Respondents were given an explanation of “linked” schools, what is required by statute and what is currently provided under the existing policy. The consultation outlined the Council’s proposal:

- With effect from September 2024, transport will only be provided to the nearest suitable school which has places available, subject to the young person also meeting the other eligibility criteria for transport. The nearest suitable school means the school which is geographically closest to the child’s home and is deemed suitable to meet the needs of the child and has places available to accommodate the child.

It was explained that this proposal would ensure the Council meets its statutory duty and will deliver efficiency savings to help reduce the service’s current overspend and ensure the available funding is directed at delivering our statutory requirements.

It was also explained that to avoid problems for young people already attending a linked school under the current policy, any changes to this provision would apply to new applications only. Those already receiving transport under the criterion in the current policy would continue to receive transport until their next trigger point; for example, change of school, change of address, etc.

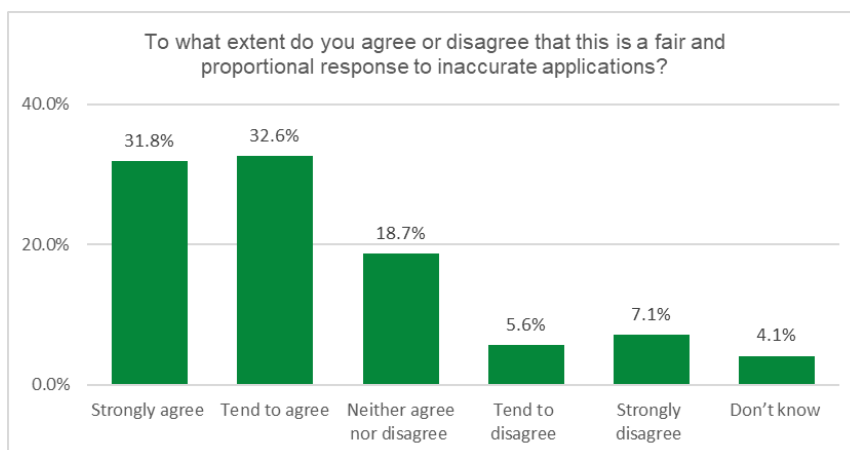
Respondents were then asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that this is a fair approach to the provision of transport to the nearest suitable school. There were 272 responses to this question. Just over half of the respondents (51.5%) said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree, while a little under a third (29.8%) said they strongly agree or tend to agree.



6.1.6 Inaccurate Applications

Respondents were told this is a new stipulation, which would allow the Council to reclaim any costs of providing transport where the placement at that school was based upon inaccurate or fraudulent information.

Respondents were then asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that this is a fair and proportional response to inaccurate applications. There were 267 responses to this question. The majority of respondents (64.4%) said they strongly agree or tend to agree, while 12.7% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree.



6.1.7 Provision of Spare Seats/Discretionary transport

The provision of “spare seats” and the discretionary transport that the Council currently provides, along with the budgetary pressures this brings, were explained to respondents. Respondents were also informed that the current charge to the family/student for discretionary transport (spare seat) is £600 per year and that this was introduced 10 years ago and has not increased. It was explained that this fare does not cover the cost

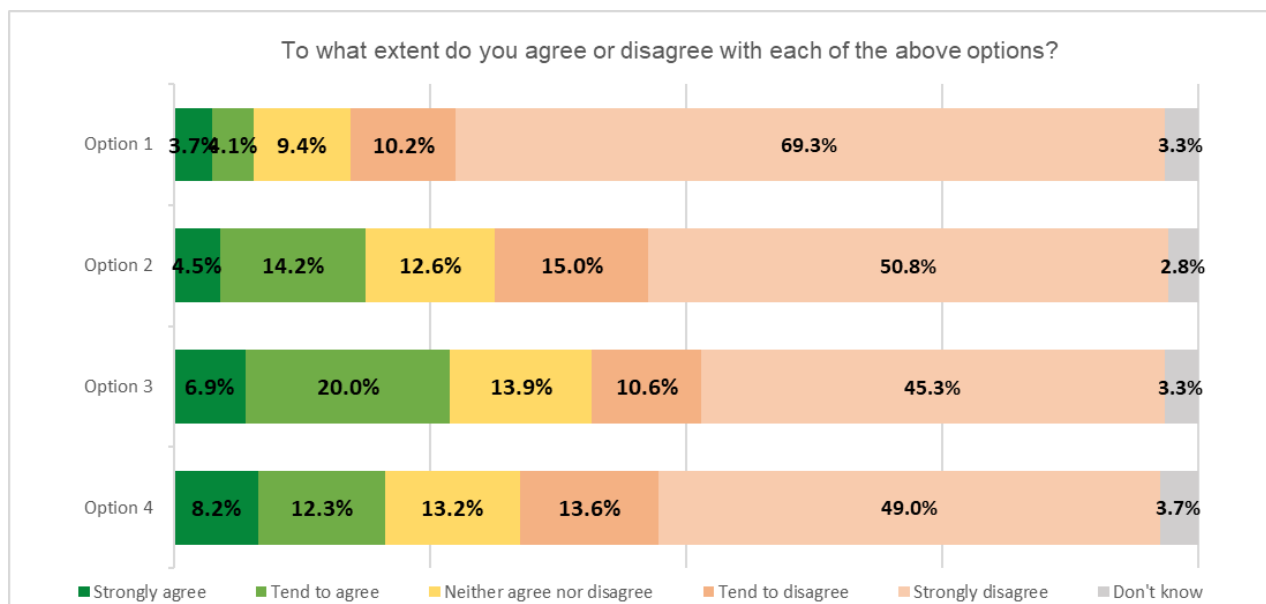
of the transport provided, resulting in the Council subsidising the cost of this transport for these families/ children and young people.

The consultation stated that the Council is considering the following options:

- Option 1. Withdraw all discretionary (spare seat) transport for all age groups. This would mean that parents of all children and young people who were not eligible for transport under the statutory criteria would need to provide transport for themselves.
- Option 2. Withdraw discretionary transport (spare seat) provision for all Post 16 students, i.e. retain spare seats for those of Statutory School age only. This would mean that all Sixth form students would need to make their own way to their chosen place of education. Sixth formers with SEND who cannot access education or training in any other way would still be eligible for free transport.
- Option 3. Cease to guarantee a “spare seat” for those applying before a set date (usually the 3rd Friday in May); fare paying “Spare seats” would only be available where there were genuinely spare seats on a vehicle rather than purchasing additional capacity on the vehicle to ensure additional seat availability. Priority would continue to be given to those of statutory school age, and then on a first come first served basis for Sixth form students.
- Option 4. Increase the charges payable by all students in receipt of discretionary transport to cover the true cost or a higher proportion of the true cost of the provision of the seat. This option may also be applied alongside Options 2 or 3.

Respondents were then asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed with each of the above options.

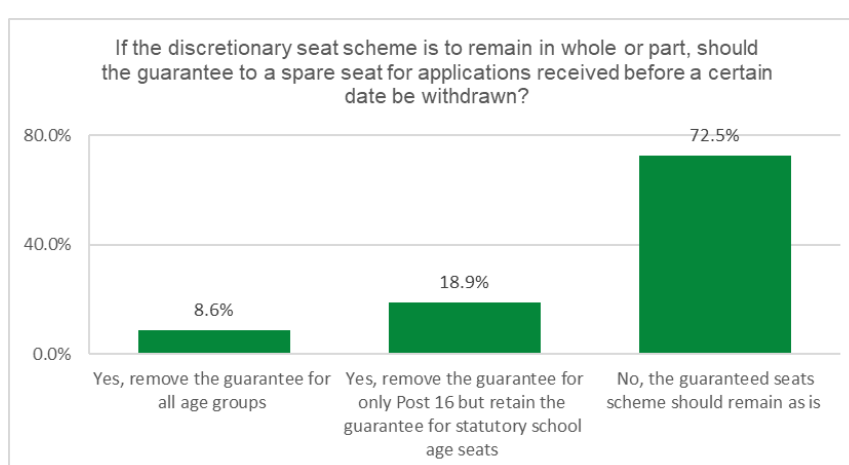
There were 248 responses to this question. As can be seen in the below graph, there was a lot of strong disagreement with these options. Option 3 received the most support with a total of 26.9% of respondents to this question agreeing and 55.9% disagreeing. Option 1 received the least support with a total of 7.8% agreeing and 79.5% disagreeing.



Options listed in order of strength of agreement:

	Total agree (%)	Total disagree (%)
Option 3	26.9%	55.9%
Option 4	20.6%	62.6%
Option 2	18.7%	65.9%
Option 1	7.8%	79.5%

Respondents were then asked if the discretionary seat scheme is to remain in whole or part, should the guarantee to a spare seat for applications received before a certain date (usually the 3rd Friday in May) be withdrawn. There were 244 responses to this question. The vast majority of respondents (72.5%) disagreed and said they felt the guaranteed seats scheme should remain as is. A total of 18.9% felt the scheme should be removed for only Post 16s but retain a guarantee for statutory school age seats. Whilst 8.6% felt there should be removal of a guaranteed seat for all age groups.



6.1.8 Discretionary transport (spare seat) fare review

Respondents were reminded that the current charge to the family/student for discretionary transport (spare seat) is £600 per year. It was explained that the average cost to the Council of providing transport for the Home to School service is approximately £1,050 per person per year. This increases to approximately £1,200 per person per year when administration costs are added. Respondents were reminded that the Council does not have to provide this discretionary spare seat service and were shown the following table, which gives several examples as to how the cost of the discretionary (spare seat) transport could be shared between families/students who are not entitled to free transport and the Council. The table was set out in the form of percentages variants to give an understanding of respondents views on the principle of sharing the cost between the Council and families/students:

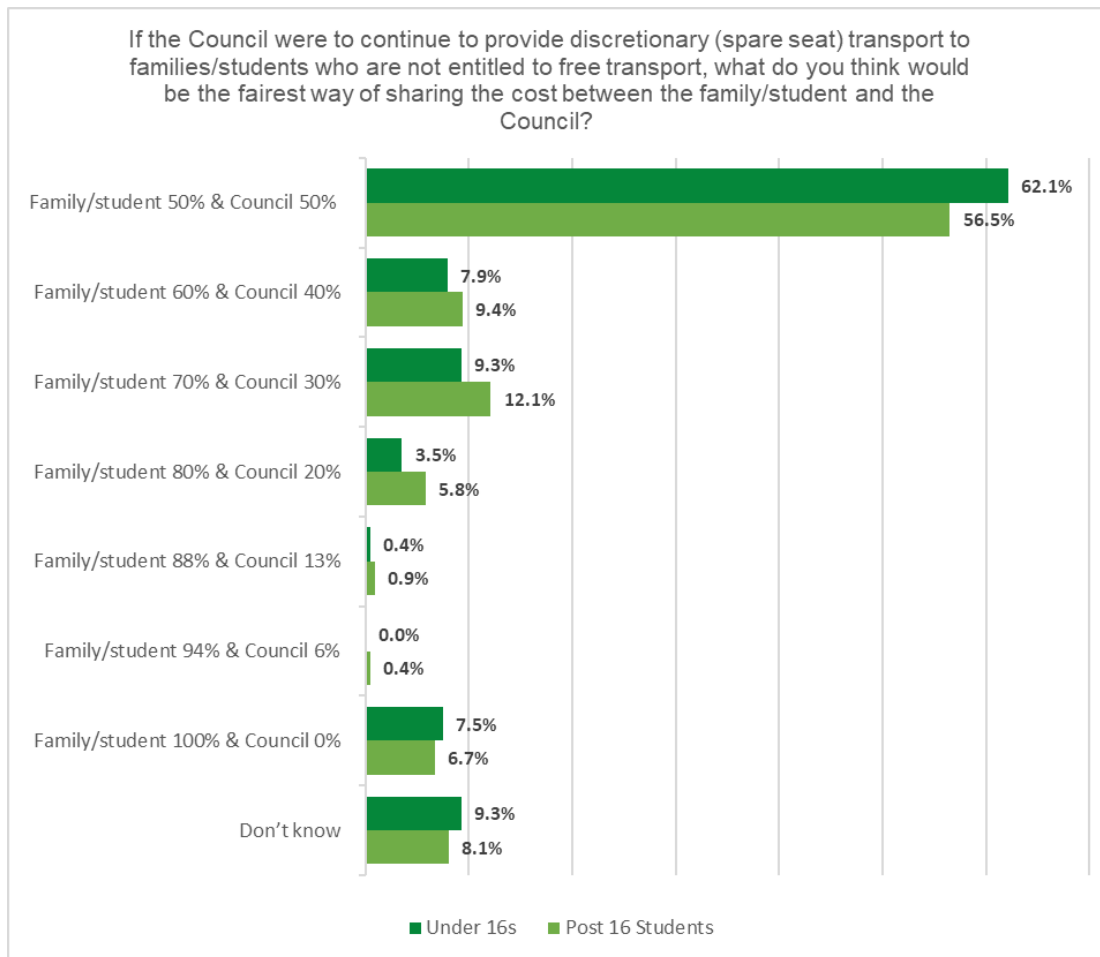
Cost to family/student	Cost to the Council	Percentage of subsidy provided by the Council		To note
		Family/student	Council	
£600	£600 (including approximate £150 administration cost)	50%	50%	This is the current rate and shares the cost 50/50
£720	£480 (including approximate £150 administration cost)	60%	40%	This shares the cost 60/40

£840	£360 (including approximate £150 administration cost)	70%	30%	This shares the cost 70/30
£960	£240 (including approximate £150 administration cost)	80%	20%	This shares the cost 80/20
£1050	£150 approximate administration cost	88%	13%	This means the family/student pay the cost of transport and the Council pays the administration cost
£1125 (including £75 contribution towards the approximate administration cost)	£75 contribution towards the approximate administration cost	94%	6%	This means the family/student pay the cost of transport plus a half of the administration cost. The Council pays the other half of the administration cost
£1200 (including approximate £150 administration cost)	£0	100%	0%	This means the family/student pay the full cost of transport and the administration cost

Respondents were asked what they felt would be the fairest way of sharing the cost between the family/student and the Council, if the Council were to continue to provide discretionary (spare seat) transport to families/students who are not entitled to free transport. Respondents were asked to consider if this should be different for those students who are in post 16 education and those that are younger.

There were 229 responses to this question. As can be seen by the below graph, when considering the principle of how the cost could be shared the majority of respondents feel the fairest way of funding the discretionary transport is by sharing it 50/50 between the family/student and the Council. There was also little variation between whether the percentage of share should be different if the pupil were under 16 or post 16.

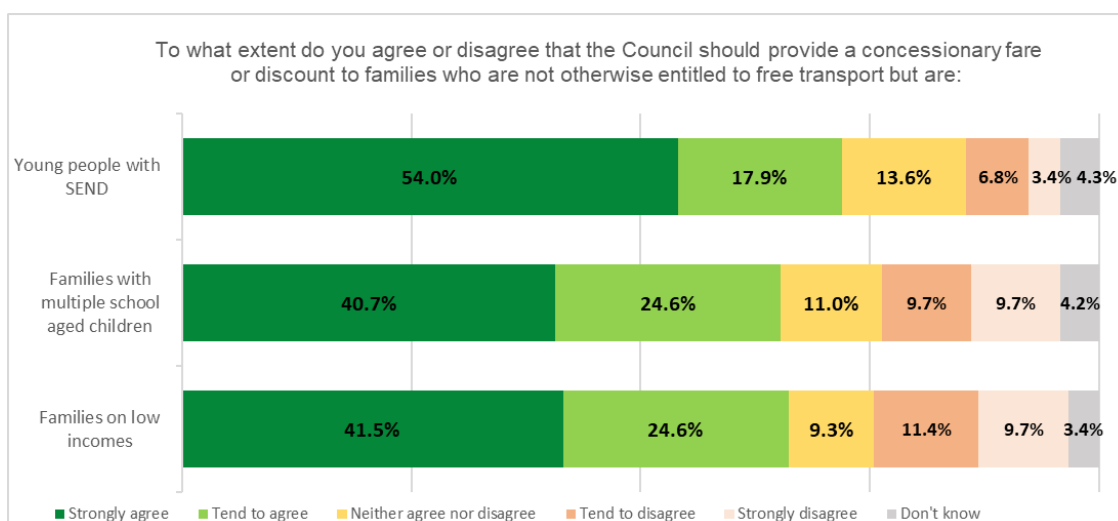
	Under 16s		Post 16 Students	
	Response number	Percentage (%)	Response number	Percentage (%)
Family/student 50% & Council 50%	141	62.1%	126	56.5%
Family/student 60% & Council 40%	18	7.9%	21	9.4%
Family/student 70% & Council 30%	21	9.3%	27	12.1%
Family/student 80% & Council 20%	8	3.5%	13	5.8%
Family/student 88% & Council 13%	1	0.4%	2	0.9%
Family/student 94% & Council 6%	0	0.0%	1	0.4%
Family/student 100% & Council 0%	17	7.5%	15	6.7%
Don't know	21	9.3%	18	8.1%
TOTAL	227	100.0%	223	100.0%



The Council has the option to provide a concessionary fare or discount to certain groups of people. Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that the Council should provide a concessionary fare or discount to families who are not otherwise entitled to free transport but are:

- on low incomes and/or in receipt of benefits
- have multiple school aged children
- young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND).

There were 237 responses to this question. Respondents were in support of this proposal with the majority of respondents feeling the Council should provide a concessionary fare or discount to all of the family circumstances mentioned above. Families with young people with SEND received the most support with a total of 71.9% of respondents to this question agreeing and 10.2% disagreeing. This was followed by families on low incomes (with a total of 66.1% agreeing and 21.2% disagreeing); closely followed by families with multiple school aged children (total of 65.3% agreeing and 19.5% disagreeing).



Statements listed in order of strength of agreement:

	Total agree (%)	Total disagree (%)
Young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND)	71.9%	10.2%
Families on low incomes and/or in receipt of benefits	66.1%	21.2%
Families with multiple school aged children	65.3%	19.5%

6.1.9 Transport of Children and Young People with Medical Needs

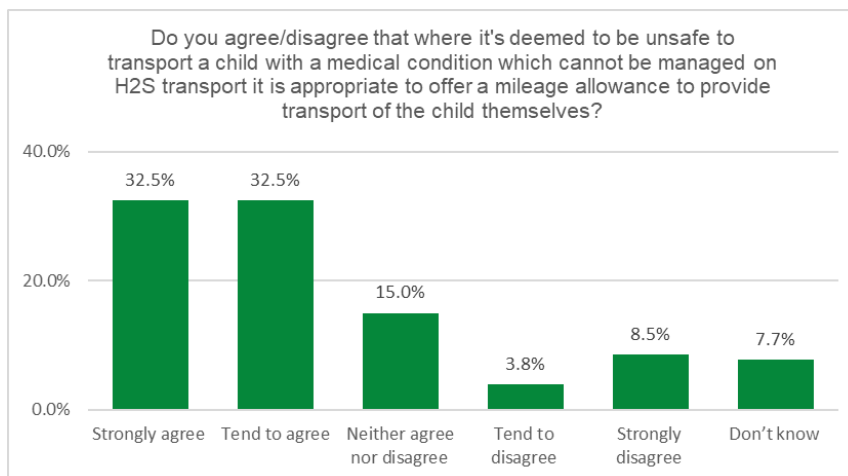
It was explained to respondents that local authorities need to ensure that drivers of vehicles providing dedicated home to school transport, and any passenger assistants involved in providing home to school transport, have undertaken appropriate training and that this is kept up-to-date.

Some young people have medical needs which may impact upon their transport. For most young people their needs can be met by a Passenger Assistant (i.e. someone who is employed to supervise and support one or more young people on the vehicle) but for those with more serious conditions additional support may be required. It is anticipated that the current guidance will be revised to require a Risk Assessment to be carried out for those with medical needs and where it is considered appropriate to ensure safe transport, a Passenger Assistant be trained in managing those needs. As such the Council proposed:

- A medically qualified Passenger Assistant (i.e. Nurse or Nursing Assistant) will only be appointed in the most exceptional cases (for example a condition which requires frequent and immediate medical attention). In most circumstances one or more Passenger Assistants would be trained in how to deal with the child's needs and condition. This may require arranging for specialist training and support from the School Nurse or other professional involved with the child.
- Based upon a Risk Assessment, where it is felt that it would be unsafe to transport the child, because their medical condition cannot be managed on Home to School Transport parents/guardians/carers may be requested to transport the child themselves in exchange for a mileage payment.

It was explained that this proposal is in line with the draft guidance issued for consultation by the Department for Education at the end of 2022, and is included in this policy in anticipation of the publication of the confirmed guidance later this year.

Respondents were asked to what extent they agreed or disagreed that where it is deemed to be unsafe to transport a child with a medical condition which cannot be managed on home to school transport it is appropriate to offer parents/guardians/carers a mileage allowance to provide transport of the child themselves. There were 234 responses to this question. Approximately two thirds of the respondents to this question (65.0%) said they strongly agree or tend to agree, while 12.4% said they strongly disagree or tend to disagree.



6.1.10 Travel options

It was explained to respondents that the Council has a duty under Section 508A of the Education Act 1996 to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport. This duty applies to all children and young people of compulsory school age (5 to 16) who travel to receive education or training in a local authority's area.

The proposed policy includes a list of travel options. Travel options which may be considered are:

- Walking (alone or accompanied by parent)
- Walking bus (walking with other children and adult supervisors)
- Cycling or Scooting
- Bus/Train Pass for public transport
- Discounted travel schemes
- Parental mileage payments
- Personal budget
- Independent Travel Training
- Dedicated school bus routes (with passenger assistant if required)
- Minibus or shared Multi-Purpose vehicle (people carrier) from pick up points (with passenger assistant if required)
- Minibus or shared Multi-Purpose vehicle (people carrier) from door to door (with passenger assistant if required)
- Shared Taxis (with passenger assistant if required)
- Solo taxi (with passenger assistant if required)

It was explained that for some pupils, especially those with special educational needs and disability (SEND), some of these forms of transport will not be practical options. Some of the options will require further work before they become practical, for example a walking bus would need local and/or school support to put it in place, not least in providing adults to supervise the young people.

Respondents were asked if there were any other potential travel solutions which they would like to see included in this list. Schools and parent groups in particular were asked to consider whether there are any local options open to them to improve access to the school premises. There were 42 responses to this question.

Approximately half of these respondents suggested other potential travel solutions. The most frequent were park and ride, and car share schemes, and offering a discount for bicycles and cycling proficiency courses. There was also an indication that better cycle/walking routes were required too, with meeting points for children to ride to school together.

Further solutions were a free pass or reduced cost for public transport and a percentage contribution towards driving lessons for post 16 to be able to transport themselves.

Some options centered around changes to admissions with children only being offered a place at their nearest school and withdrawing an option of attending a school more than three miles away. It was also suggested that current processes and plans should be reviewed, that could combine current routes and/or review the size of buses used, to be more cost effective. It was felt more bus stops were needed and logistical support for children, for example at zebra crossings.

For those using home to school transport and not at their nearest school, it was suggested there could be a charge per mile for the difference between the nearest and chosen school so that costs could be recouped.

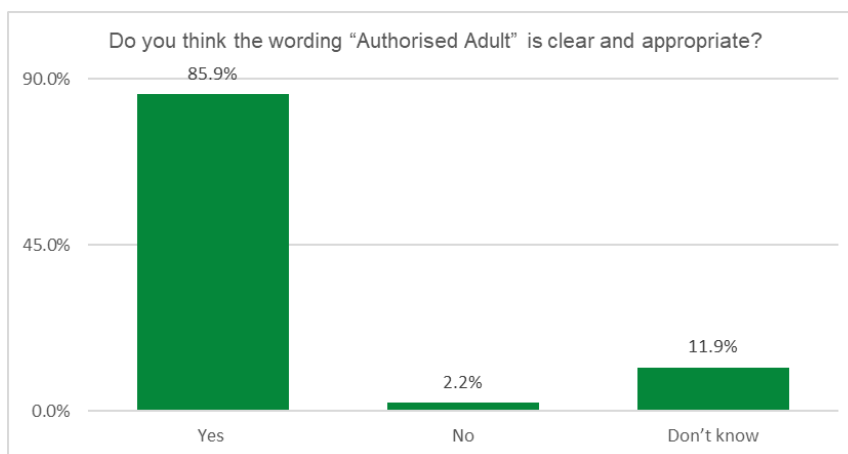
Approximately half of the respondents did not specifically reference alternative travel solutions. These comments were regarding a concern about the perceived lack of safe footpaths and routes for children walking to school, particularly from villages. Some indicated that these should be reviewed and rectified before any changes are made to the current arrangements.

Several comments expressed concern over the additional financial costs of the service, with some indicating it should be free. There was also concern regarding the lack of suitable alternative bus routes, options, the number of buses available and their frequency/lateness.

There were a small number of comments regarding the frustration of some of the Council's internal processes including invoices being sent at infrequent intervals leaving parents with larger sums to pay in one go and receiving late notification as to whether a seat had been allocated.

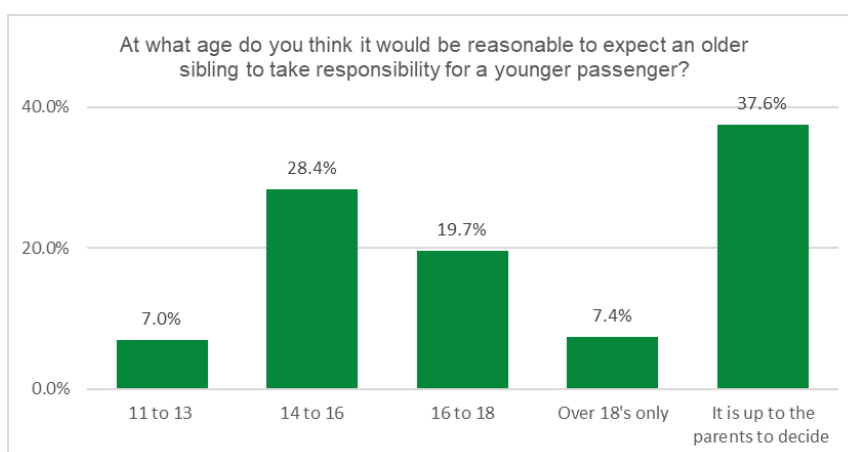
Finally, some comments were shared saying an amount of choice has been taken away from parents, particularly as some choice of schools had been made with an understanding that there would be home to school transport available, and that should be continued. There was also concern raised over logistical difficulties in getting children to school, affected by parents having to work and the perceived additional traffic on the road.

The following is a Wordcloud of the most frequent words respondents used when asked what other potential travel solutions they would like to see:

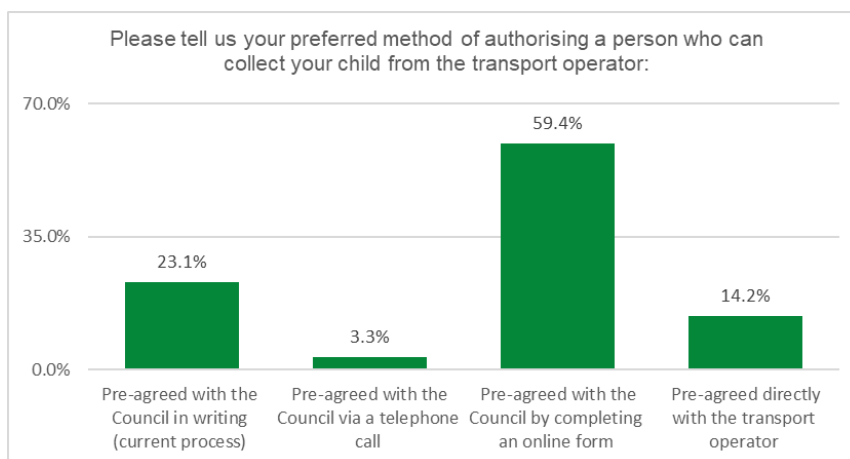


Those that said 'No' were invited to tell us why and asked what alternative they would suggest. Only one respondent made comment. They said there is a need to have an age appropriate adult collecting.

Respondents were asked what age they thought it would be reasonable to expect an older sibling to take responsibility for a younger passenger. There were 229 responses to this question. Many respondents (37.6%) felt it is up to the parents to decide. When analysing the age bands presented 14 to 16 was the most frequent answer, with 28.4% of respondents choosing this answer option. This was followed by 16 to 18 (19.7%). Other answers were 11 to 13 (7.0%) and Over 18's only (7.4%).



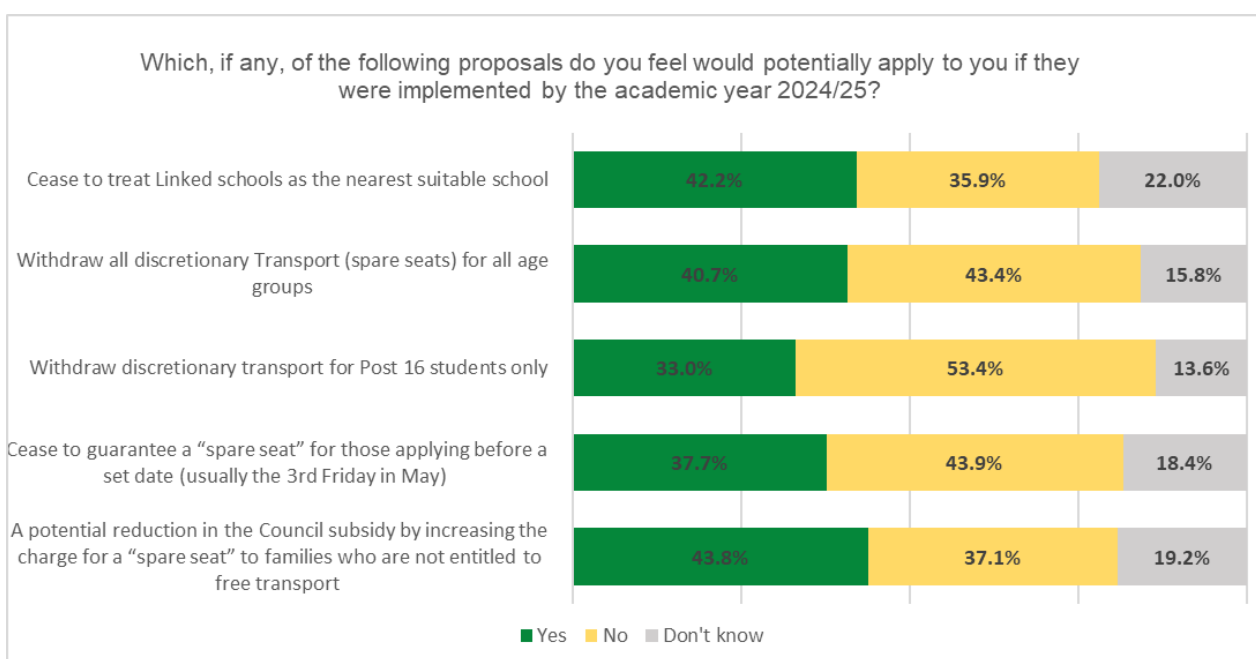
Currently the arrangement for authorising someone to collect a child from the bus is done via email or letter to the Transport Team and is arranged by the team with the transport operator. Respondents were asked to tell us their preferred method of authorising a person who can collect the child from the transport operator. There were 212 responses to this question. The preferred option (59.4%) was 'Pre-agreed with the Council by completing an online form'. This was followed by the current process of 'Pre-agreed with the Council in writing' (23.1%); then 'Pre-agreed directly with the transport operator' (14.2%); and lastly 'Pre-agreed with the Council via a telephone call' (3.3%).



6.1.12 Other comments

Respondents were asked which, if any, of the following proposals they felt would potentially apply to them if they were implemented by the academic year 2024/25. There were 227 responses to this question. There was a mixture of respondents who felt the proposals would potentially apply to them or not, as well as some who did not know. The following lists the number of responses to this question in order of which potential proposal may apply, ranging from the highest to the lowest:

	Percentage (%)	
	Yes	No
A potential reduction in the Council subsidy by increasing the charge for a “spare seat” to families who are not entitled to free transport	43.8%	37.1%
Cease to treat Linked schools as the nearest suitable school	42.2%	35.9%
Withdraw all discretionary Transport (spare seats) for all age groups	40.7%	43.4%
Cease to guarantee a “spare seat” for those applying before a set date (usually the 3rd Friday in May)	37.7%	43.9%
Withdraw discretionary transport for Post 16 students only	33.0%	53.4%



Respondents were invited to tell us of any negative impacts they feel the proposals may make, along with any suggestions on how any potential negative impacts could be reduced or avoided. A total of 96 respondents shared their comments. A large amount of respondents gave details about their own personal circumstances and mentioned many perceived potential impacts changes to the policy may create.

About a third of the comments received were in relation to the lack of alternative travel options for families to be able to ensure their children reached school including concerns about logistics and managing the time around their own working hours and potentially having to change jobs. There was particular concern around the lack of public transport or none at all from rural areas.

Approximately a quarter of comments were in relation to the financial pressures the potential increase would have on families, with those on low incomes and single parents particularly impacted in having to find additional funds and current service users feeling penalised. Several added that the proposed increase was too much and that cumulatively, if there was more than one child, there would be an even larger financial burden on families.

Whilst several schools were mentioned almost a quarter of respondents to this question made specific reference to Prince William School in Oundle and its links with rural villages and the towns that feed into it, particularly Thrapston Primary School and Corby schools. There is strong concern that if the linked school for Thrapston Primary is changed to the nearest school, which is Manor School in Raunds, lots of families will be impacted. Respondents stated that historically most of the Thrapston Primary School children go on to Prince William School, with many having older siblings at the school and families and Thrapston Primary School having existing long-term relationships with the school, and changes to this would be disruptive. Respondents said the proposed changes to linked school travel would mean many parents would be charged for transport to Prince William School, with a small number indicating that it could potentially create a two-tier system of those who can afford it and those who cannot. It was strongly felt this could have a negative impact both financially and mentally due to potentially splitting friendship groups and family groups, as many older siblings already attend Prince William School. It was also felt that the removal of free travel to linked schools would have a negative impact on Prince William School itself as it appears to have a large rural intake which would decrease if more of the children went to Manor School in Raunds and that the relationship has not yet been developed with Manor School.

About a fifth of respondents commented on the legal position regarding post 16 education and said those in that category had no option but to attend sixth form/college and therefore should receive assistance or free travel.

A similar number felt there would be a removal of choice if families are unable to afford to pay for home to school travel for a school that is their preferred choice. It was commented that the proposed plans appear to impact families on a lower income in a proportionately higher way, and that this was not sufficiently referenced in the Equality Impact Assessment.

A few families were unclear if any changes to the policy would impact existing service users or only new applicants. These respondents felt that if a choice has already been made based on currently available information it would be unfair for existing users to be affected. Some felt that what the Council may deem as a suitable school, the parent/child may not agree.

Several comments were received regarding the proposed changes leading to an increase of road traffic, especially around busy schools with drop off/collection of children, leading to concerns around environmental impact, safety, and the impact on local residents. It was also felt the proposals contradict the Council's green travel plan.

Several comments were received expressing dissatisfaction with the Council's current processes including infrequency of receiving invoices for home to school transport, leading to a larger bill later in the school year, causing additional concern and financial burden. There were other suggestions that a direct debit system should be set up for monthly or term invoices and that communication and processes should be reviewed and improved. It was mentioned that confirmation, or otherwise, of a seat on home to school transport can come late and there was reference to the admissions policy and children not necessarily securing a place at their nearest school. It was also referenced that the recent annual increase in Council Tax should cover the cost of this service. There was also frustration regarding the small window to make a potential school option at a brand new school when there is no history to understand how the school is fairing.

A similar number of comments were received regarding concern of perceived potential disruption to children and their education if they have to change school due to changes in home to school transport, or there are siblings in different schools and potential non-attendance if children cannot physically travel to school. There were also concerns that pupils could also potentially miss out on extra curricula activities.

Some comments were made raising concerns over the mental wellbeing of both children and parents, and the negative impact, due to the uncertainty and potential disruption and changes resulting from some of the proposals.

A few respondents also referenced concern that current relationships and links with feeder schools could be broken and that current smooth transition from one school to another could be disrupted. It was felt it would also impact local communities where relationships with schools has been built.

A similar number indicated a perceived negative impact on rural communities with limited or no public transport and possible increased car traffic of parents taking their children to and from school.

A small number of comments indicated that there needs to be a guarantee of spare seats or better planning so that any spare seats allocated are not withdrawn and parents should receive sufficient notice as not knowing whether a seat has been secured makes it a challenge for the family to plan.

Other comments shared were that any future plans need to consider how a child can access the school without transport during the placement, and the opinion that the plans are retrogressive. It was stated that transport should be available to everyone, with improvement needed around Kettering/Corby/Wellingborough areas. While there was recognition that costs had changed to the service it was felt that the options presented were leaning towards forcing parents to choose a more expensive option over losing the service and placed pressure on students and parents to consider a potentially lower grade school which could limit the education and experience for some students. It was felt this showed a lack of care and compassion from the Council and raises questions about its priorities and agenda.

A few respondents suggested various potential ways any impact could be mitigated. These included that there should be a full transport options review; the Council should investigate digital solutions and negotiate a contract with one provider; there should be free transport or any increases should be staggered, means tested and reviewed with schools and parents; free transport should be scrapped and all seats should be required to pay the subsidised amount, giving them a guaranteed place on the bus; to review eligibility for example children in the catchment area do not need the free transport; to charge a fee per mile for the difference between linked and allocated/chosen school; and that linked schools should provide transport to their catchment area.

The consultation raised some questions including why other areas, i.e. a nearby College, charge a smaller amount for a bus whereas NNC buses are going to the school anyway and there is room for post 16 children.

Other suggestions included ensure that siblings are offered places at the same school; to review the perceived practice of allocating Corby children to Kettering schools and Kettering children to Corby schools; that there should be better relationships between linked/catchment schools as children would attend from further away; allocating children from a cross-section of schools could lead to better Ofsted results; to allow schools some time to build relationships with all primary schools in their locality and review transport provisions at that time (3 years minimum was suggested); would be willing to pay a contribution for transport to get their child to school safely; discretionary places should offset the SEN places; and to lobby government for increased funding.

Respondents were then given an opportunity to tell us of any other comments they would like to make that they have not already told us. There were 53 additional comments made. The largest number, nearly a third, were relating to frustrations of the Council's internal processes and/or admissions policy. Comments were made regarding a lack of, and/or poor, communication with parents having to chase the Council for information regarding allocated seats and not receiving confirmation until after the child had already started school and late issuing of the bus pass. It was commented that invoices were often issued late, resulting in larger sums having to be paid at any one time. Sharing a personal story, frustrations were expressed regarding siblings attending different schools due to allocations. It was felt the system for SEND children should be simplified; and there was also a reference that a child who is allocated a seat should be guaranteed the seat through their whole school life.

There were several comments, in equal numbers, asking the Council to work more closely with operators and adjust plans to ensure they are more efficient and cost effective; that the costs for the service to families should be spread more evenly across everyone who uses it and/or reviewed; and that the proposed changes would have a negative impact on children if they have to change schools or change their plans, with the potential of non-attendance.

A small number of comments expressed a perception that choice has been removed or that the proposed plans are unfair to service users.

Finally there were a small number of comments in relation to a few different themes including concerns over the lack of alternative, reliable public transport if children don't receive an allocated seat; additional traffic on the roads if parents drive children to school; the impact of the proposed changes on the mental wellbeing of children; and also the additional financial pressures that an increase in costs could have on families. A couple of comments indicated that the consultation supporting papers were difficult to understand and that there should be support from the schools in understanding what proposed changes may mean from a practical perspective.

A small number of ideas and suggestions were shared including the provision of low-cost transport to the nearest school for all children; that all barriers to get children to school should be removed; the creation of a formal car share scheme; that all villages should have an allocated school for both primary and secondary; and if the Council do not have enough funding to provide the service then it should lobby government for appropriate funding.

6.1.13 Demographic information

The questionnaire then invited organisational respondents to provide more detail about their organisation by providing their organisations name and their job title/ role. The two respondents who provided this information identified themselves as a Town and Parish Council. We have not listed the job titles/ roles of respondents within this report to ensure respondents' anonymity is retained.

Respondents who were not responding on behalf of an organisation were asked a range of equality monitoring questions to help us understand the characteristics of people who have taken part in the consultation.

Many respondents did not complete the equality monitoring form, although key demographic data was captured within the main questionnaire, as presented earlier within this report. The following is a brief summary of the data received from the equality monitoring form.

More females (87.5%) completed the equality monitoring form than males (12.5%). All of the equality form respondents said they were the same gender as they were assigned at birth and are aged between 35 to 49.

Most of the respondents identified themselves as being married (62.5%), followed by being single (25.0%) and divorced (12.5%). The majority of respondents said they were heterosexual (87.5%); with 12.5% saying 'Prefer not to say'.

Other identified demographic information provided by respondents demonstrated that 25.0% were disabled. Predominantly respondents identified themselves as White British (85.7%), with the remainder identifying themselves as Polish. The most frequent religion identified was Christian (71.4%), with 28.6% of respondents choosing 'None'.

6.2 Written responses

There were four written responses received.

One submission made several comments including requests for further information regarding the development of the proposals and the Council's supporting data. They also challenged the language used in the equality impact assessment as they felt there is no doubt that the proposal would have negative impacts.

This respondent challenged the viability of reliance on public transport as an alternative to discretionary seats, and cited an example of no buses running at a suitable time to match the school day on a local bus route. They felt the proposed changes would result in more cars on roads generating higher emissions than the transport currently provided, which would cause environmental damage.

They felt the draft proposals would revoke equality of opportunity between school children based on where they reside, and believe they have the potential to discriminate against children on the basis of their home address.

Another respondent explained their personal circumstances and said there should be no charge to families whose children have to attend a school which was not their first choice.

The other two respondents, including one from a local school Chair of Governors, mentioned their disagreement with removal of the linked school proposal, both citing Thrapston Primary School and Prince William School. It was commented that this proposal goes against years of historic transfers to the linked schools and is causing angst among families. A parent respondent felt if this proposal were to be approved it would be unfair as those families who could not afford the cost of transport would have their choice of preferred secondary school taken away from them. They raised concern over the breaking up of lifelong friendships, especially during what has been a challenging number of years to the children due to the pandemic.