

## **Have your say on proposed revisions to the home to school transport policy in North Northamptonshire for 2024-2025 onwards**

People are being asked for their views on new policy proposals for the future of home to school transport provided in North Northamptonshire.

The changes will affect the transport for both pupils of a statutory school age and for those aged over 16, continuing with their education.

Changes would not affect children with SEND who are currently eligible for free school transport. Pupils in mainstream education who attend their nearest suitable school and meet the current criteria for free school transport, are also not expected to be affected by the proposals. Policy revisions are focused on the discretionary elements of the service.

Results of the consultation will be used to help shape the new policy which would be introduced from **September 2024** for the **2024-2025 academic year**, to allow parents and carers time to plan ahead.

Following previous feedback the council is also proposing that, going forward, it makes the wording of the policy clearer to understand.

The last time the home to school transport policy was reviewed was in September 2022, although widescale changes have not been introduced for about a decade. With rising costs, the council needs to re-examine its approach and the amount it can afford to subsidise.

Cllr Graham Lawman, North Northamptonshire Council's Executive Member for Highways, Travel and Assets, said: "We live in an ever-changing economic landscape and it's sensible to take stock at regular intervals to make sure that we are providing the best and most cost-effective service that we can.

“The main purpose of school transport is, and will continue to be, to enable pupils to attend school and our policy will reflect that. However, we need to consider how we fund the discretionary element of the service to ensure fairness and efficiency.

“There are also other areas of the policy which we need to tighten up such as around inaccurate applications which cost the taxpayer. This is a common-sense approach.”

The review will look at a number of areas:

**Linked schools** – schools are said to be ‘linked’ if there is a priority given to applicants to a school from a certain school or location. The current policy states that linked schools will be treated in the same way as the nearest suitable school, even if there is an alternative suitable school with spaces available closer to the child’s home. There is no statutory obligation to provide transport to linked schools and the council is reviewing how transport is provided to these. Any changes would only affect **new applications** for September 2024 and beyond.

**Provision of ‘spare’ seats** – any seats left vacant, once children entitled to travel for free have taken up seats on a bus, are available to other pupils for a fee. The council is reviewing the amount it subsidises the provision of these ‘spare seats’ to these non-entitled pupils.

**Children with medical needs** – reviewing the policy on the provision of medically qualified passenger assistants and in line with emerging guidance from the Department for Education.

**Inaccurate applications** – allowing the council to reclaim any costs related to applications that used inaccurate information.

**Travel options** – expanding the travel options available to pupils.

**Collection of children** – reviewing guidance on who can collect a child from a vehicle.

**Appeals and complaints** – clarifying guidance to ensure it is transparent and easy to follow.

Cllr Jason Smithers, Leader of the Council, said: “We recognise we have a role to play in getting children to school and this is essential if we are going to facilitate the education of young people in our area.

“It’s important that people have their say on these proposals to make sure we achieve the right balance of fairness and I would encourage as many people as possible to take part in the consultation.”

The consultation runs until midnight on **Friday, June 2**. A paper on the proposals is then scheduled to appear before the council’s Executive on **July 13**.

People can take part in the consultation in the following ways:

- Completing the [online survey](#).
- Writing to: North Northamptonshire Council, Sheerness House, Meadow Road, Kettering, NN16 8TL

Any policy changes would be introduced from **September 2024** for the start of the **2024 to 2025 academic year**.

**ENDS**