

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



**TO EACH MEMBER OF THE
EXECUTIVE**

08 March 2010

Dear Councillor

EXECUTIVE - Tuesday 9 March 2010

Please find attached the revised Appendix C – Part 2 as at 8 March 2010 for the following item:-

8. Home to School Transport Policy

Should you have any queries regarding the above please contact Democratic Services on
Tel: 0300 300 4036.

Yours sincerely

Devina Lester,
Senior Democratic Services Officer
email: devina.lester@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk

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Appendix C (02. 03.10) (Revised 8 March 2010)

Consultation Process and Outcomes

Central Bedfordshire Council has consulted widely on the proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy.

The Consultation period began on 6th January 2010 and concluded on the 19th February 2010. The original consultation period was extended by one week beyond the statutory minimum to allow further time for the diocesan authorities to respond, and to provide additional time for members of the public to give their views. The minimum period for the consultation was therefore met in line with the DfES Statutory Guidance.¹

A Communication Plan was agreed with the Council's Corporate Communications Team, to include dissemination of the consultation and questionnaire, and press and radio coverage.

The Consultation guidance and Questionnaire were available through the following options:

- Council website and online submission;
- Paper copies available from Council Contact Team and School Transport Team;
- All Central Bedfordshire schools received information and were asked to inform parents of the Consultation. Schools could have copies of the consultation to send to parents, and these were sent to all schools that requested them.

The Council was aware that the proposals would potentially affect some parents and children very directly. To ensure that these families were aware of the consultation, individual letters were sent to all families with children in denominational schools and to all families with children with Statements of Special Educational Need.

Representatives from the Diocese of St Albans and a representative from the Catholic Diocese of Northampton were consulted at a meeting with the Local Authority on 26 January 2010. A written submission was received from both representatives and their views were also put to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 2 February 2010.

Directors of Children's Services in neighbouring authorities were informed of the proposals and of the number of Central Bedfordshire children currently receiving education in denominational schools in their authority.

Central Bedfordshire members of Parliament were informed of the proposals.

¹ Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance 2007. DfES. "Consultation should last at least 28 working days."

Following problems with the Council's IT systems, a final check for lost emails was carried out to ensure that all responses submitted had been logged and analysed.

The headlines from the consultation were checked at intervals through the consultation process. The final analysis was completed following the close date of the 19th February 2010. These were then ratified alongside the policy and alongside the Equalities Impact Assessment.

Summary of the Outcomes of the Consultation

The joint letter from the Diocesan authorities made strong representations against the proposal to abolish free home to school transport for children attending Church of England and Catholic schools. Whilst recognising that the provision of transport lies within the discretion of the Local Authority, the letter made a number of points about the long standing arrangements with the former Bedfordshire County Council; the financial contribution made by parents and faith groups; environmental considerations; and the anxiety caused to parents of the proposal. The letter questioned the validity of the consultation process. The letter stated that those already in a denominational school or who have already made an application to a school should continue to receive free travel to their nearest church school of their denomination until they leave that school.

A letter was received from Hertfordshire County Council broadly supporting the proposals. Under Proposal 5 a request was made for Central Bedfordshire to consider reviewing this proposal so as not to penalise those families who are attending their nearest school but for whom this school is located outside Central Bedfordshire.

There were 313 responses to the questionnaire. The profile of the respondents for the Home to School transport consultation has been compared with the most reliable and up to date population statistics available for Central Bedfordshire. The comparisons show that:

- responses to this consultation were in-line with the population statistics for Central Bedfordshire by ethnicity and religion.
- Female respondents, those aged 30-59 and children with disability were over represented in this consultation. However this is to be expected given the nature of the proposals, as those of parent age are more likely to respond, and similarly those with children who have a disability.
- Under 30 year olds and males were under represented in this consultation.

Spreadsheet 1 shows the results by question. All of the proposals were supported by those responding with the exception of Proposal 2: The Council proposes to end the provision of transport to denominational schools with effect from 1 September 2010. 39% of respondents agreed with the proposal and 61% disagreed.

Of these respondents:

- 49% of parents with a child at a mainstream school agreed with Proposal 2;
- 46% of parents with a child at a special school agreed with Proposal 2;
- 74% of employees or governors of a mainstream school agreed with Proposal 2; and
- 67% (2 responses) of employees or governors of a special school agreed with Proposal 2.

90% of Parents with a child at a denominational school disagreed with Proposal 2, as did 100% (8 responses) of employees or governors of a denominational school.

An analysis of written comments received in response to the questionnaire have been analysed and are summarised in Spreadsheet 2.

In addition to the written comments received in response to the questionnaire, letters were received as follows:

Responses to Proposal 1 - Road Safety Transport

2 letters from schools
2 letters from parents

These were from schools and parents of under 13 year olds living in rural locations expressing concern that the routes to school were unsafe. We need to comply with current guidance, and schools that do not have safe walking routes will not be affected by this requirement to update information.

Responses to Proposal 2 - Denominational Transport

10 circular letters from parents to all Members of the Council
12 individual letters from parents to Members or Officers
5 letters from faith schools and school governing bodies

All of these letters objected to Proposal 2. Several of the letters that were circulated to all Members were substantively similar, using the same wording and seeking clarity on the same issues. Many of these challenged the consultation timing and process as well as disagreeing with the proposal.

Individual letters were to ward Members and Officers of Central Bedfordshire Council and reflected concern about their personal family circumstances, although some also challenged the consultation process.

Responses to Proposal 7 - Transport for Children with SEN

2 parent letters

These sought clarity on the criteria to be used to assess the need for free transport and concerns that this should be robust.

The majority of parents who wrote letters also filled in consultation questionnaires and have also been counted in the consultation responses. It is not possible to verify if all these parents responded to the consultation.

Petitions

A written petition was received opposing Proposal 2 – Denominational Transport. The petition is listed formally on the Executive Agenda under Item 6. The petition is from 124 residents of Central Bedfordshire who are asking for the continuation of school buses for all children going to a Faith School in Central Bedfordshire.