



# Home to School Transport Policy Consultation Summary

A consultation on a new home to school transport policy to clarify eligibility criteria and improve the process for applying for transport.



## 1. Introduction

Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to provide home to school transport for pupils who meet specific criteria. The Statutory eligibility criteria are detailed in the Education Act 1996 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and these are reflected in the council's policy.

The home to school transport policy (the policy) applies to all children aged 4-16 who are residents in Central Bedfordshire regardless of where they attend school. The policy applies to children attending all educational establishments, including schools, academies and free schools. Central Bedfordshire Council currently provides transport to over 6,000 pupils on more than 350 different routes per day.

Central Bedfordshire Council is reviewing its home to school transport policy to:

- provide more clarity to parents and others about eligibility and how entitlement is assessed
- make the application process simpler, the decision making process more transparent and improve the appeals process
- reflect the changing education landscape locally
- reflect changes to national guidance, statutory requirements and good practice from other council's around the country

This document provides a summary of the proposed changes to the existing policy and how you can give us your views on it.

## 2. What changes is the council proposing?

The new policy has been completely re-written to provide greater clarity for parents/ carers, schools, partners and council staff. The new policy will be supported by a series of "user guides". These will be developed to provide a shorter and simpler guide to transport eligibility and decision making. There are only a few changes proposed within the policy, beyond providing greater clarity.

Below is a summary of the key areas of the policy which have been made clearer:

### **1. Clearer explanation of "catchment areas" and "qualifying school"**

The current policy was written before the national education landscape had changed and therefore did not represent the variety of choices available to parents.

The proposed new policy includes a clear explanation of all 'qualifying schools' and catchment areas that will be used to define eligibility. This includes reference to community, foundation or voluntary aided schools, academies, free schools and University Technical Colleges and other recognised schools. Please read section 2.1 of the draft policy for more information.

## **2. Clearer definition of eligibility**

The current policy explains which children will be eligible for transport in line with the statutory requirements of the council.

The proposed new policy provides a more robust, clear explanation of eligibility and which children will not be eligible. The new policy is designed to help parents/carers understand eligibility in a more transparent and clear way.

The proposed new policy includes more detail and explanation about how the individual transport needs for children with medical or special education needs or road safety issues will be assessed, and the options available for parents to provide transport to school.

The key changes proposed in the new policy are outlined below:

## **3. Increased support for four year olds**

The current policy does not provide transport for children who have not reached the statutory age of five years old. However, many children start school in the year that they will turn five.

The new policy proposes that the council will apply the same eligibility criteria for pupils in reception year that have not yet reached their fifth birthday. This is beyond the council's statutory duty but aligns transport entitlement with the council's work to support children to start school in the reception year.

## **4. Improved application/ review process**

The current policy includes details of how to apply for transport, but is over reliant on paper forms being completed and in some cases asks for parents to pay for transport by cheque only.

The new policy provides different ways to apply for transport, including forms which can be submitted electronically which will speed up the application process and make it simpler and more transparent for all involved. Draft application forms are available as part of the consultation in Reference document 5 and 7.

## **5. Improved appeals process**

At present, parents/carers can appeal against a decision made about eligibility by following the council's complaints process.

The proposed change is to introduce an appeals panel that will allow parents/carers to present their appeal in writing and in person verbally. This proposal is designed to enable parents/carers to present their individual needs in a more thorough way and to ensure the decision is made with a fuller understanding of the child's individual circumstances. Please see section 6 of the policy for more detail.

## **6. Align the timescale for withdrawal of transport with best practice**

Currently, where pupils receive free home to school transport in error, the transport will be withdrawn at the end of the academic year during which the error is discovered. This

means the council often provides transport for nearly 12 months for children who are not eligible.

The new policy proposes to reduce this to 12 weeks notice to withdraw transport where transport is awarded in error. This will apply to historical transport arrangements as well as new ones. This is in line with national good practice but still gives parents/ carers enough time to arrange for alternative solutions for their children. Please read section 5.6 of the draft policy for more detail.

## **7. Parent/carers agreement**

The new policy proposes to introduce a parent/carers agreement. This is best practice in other councils and is designed to be clear about what is expected of parents/carers of children receiving transport.

The draft parent/carers agreement is the first reference document at the end of the draft policy.

## **8. Code of conduct**

The new policy proposes to introduce an improved code of conduct for pupils provided with transport. This is consistent with best practice in other councils and is designed to be clear about what is acceptable behaviour for the safety of themselves, other pupils and staff.

Where a child's behaviour breaches the code of conduct, the transport operator will notify the council and in turn the parent/carers and school will be notified.

Where a criminal act is suspected the police will be notified.

The draft code of conduct is the second reference document at the end of the draft policy.

## **9. Looked after children**

Children who are looked after and qualify for transport continue to receive transport to their existing school no matter where they are living.

The new policy proposes to only provide transport to the child's previous school for 12 weeks. However applications may be considered on the grounds of "individual or extenuating circumstances" such as the child is about to take exams and moving schools would be too disruptive. Please read section 2.10 of the draft policy for more detail.

## **3. The consultation process**

The council is consulting you to ensure you have the chance to comment on the draft policy, before we make a decision about the final Home to School Transport Policy for Central Bedfordshire.

The consultation is open to all residents in Central Bedfordshire. The Council will provide consultation documents and copies of the proposed policy to all schools in Central Bedfordshire, and those in neighbouring councils where large numbers of Central Bedfordshire residents attend.

The consultation will be open from Friday 4 October to Friday 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2013. You can respond to the consultation using the form at the end of this document, or you can respond through the council's website [www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/consultations). You can also read the full draft policy and associated documents online via the link above.

Printed copies are available at the following council offices, alternatively you can request a paper copy by contacting us on 0300 300 5068.

**Priory House**  
**Monks Walk**  
**Chicksands**  
**Shefford**  
**SG17 5TQ**  
**Open Monday to Thursday 08.30 – 17.00**  
**and Friday 08.30 – 16.00**

**Central Bedfordshire Council**  
**Watling House**  
**High Street North**  
**Dunstable**  
**LU6 1LF**  
**Open Monday - Thursday 08.30 – 17.00**  
**and Friday 08.30 – 16.00**

73 High Street (located within Jobcentre Plus)  
**Biggleswade**  
**SG18 0JH**  
Open Monday, Tuesday and Thursday  
09.00 – 17.00, Wednesday 09.30 – 17.00  
and Friday 09.00 – 16.00

Bossard House  
West Street  
**Leighton Buzzard**  
**LU7 1DA**  
Open Monday, Tuesday and Thursday:  
08.30 - 16:30

Tithe Farm Road  
**Houghton Regis**  
**LU5 5HA**  
Open Monday to Thursday 09:00 - 17:00  
and Friday 09:00 - 16:00

The feedback from the consultation will be presented to the Children Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13 December 2013 and will then be presented for approval at the council's Executive on 4 February 2014.

## 5. Implementation

If the proposed policy is approved, it will be implemented for all applications for the 2014/15 academic year starting in September 2014.

### Contact us...

by telephone: 0300 300 8000

by email: [customers@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:customers@centralbedfordshire.gov.uk)

on the web: [www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/consultations)

Write to: Transport Commissioning and Entitlement, Central Bedfordshire Council,  
Watling House, Dunstable, Bedfordshire LU6 1LF