

Appendix C

Home-to-School/College Travel Assistance Consultation Report

1. Purpose of consultation

The Council currently transports over 5,000 children/students from home to school each year. In 2016/17 this cost the council over £8.4 million, a rise of over £1.1m from the previous year. Having reviewed the legal requirements, the council has identified that it is currently offering services over and above the recognised statutory minimum.

The Home to School/College Travel Assistance Policies for Central Bedfordshire are therefore being reviewed. The consultation sought to understand the public's views on proposed changes to its Home to School/College Travel Assistance Policies. Responses to the consultation are helping to inform the review. Any revisions to the policies would then be applied (subject to approval) to new applications for the academic year 2018/19 and future new applications.

2. The proposals

The consultation sought feedback on a variety of proposals, looking at changes to; qualifying schools and where travel will be provided to, age range criteria, transport to boarding schools for Special Education Needs (SEN) provision and the type of travel assistance offered to those aged between 9-16 years old.

Elements of the proposals relate to provision for under-5s through to those attending post-16 education as well as having implications for SEN and mainstream students.

3. The Consultation Process

The consultation document was made available both as an online survey and a paper questionnaire and was launched on 29th June 2017 and concluded on 18th September 2017 following an extension after feedback from parents requesting additional time.

The consultation was supported by a comprehensive communications campaign which directly targeted parents/carers and those in the wider community.

Activities included:

- A news release was issued to all local newspaper groups at the start of the consultation. Biggleswade Comet and Dunstable Gazette both published

articles (9th July). Bedfordshire on Sunday and Biggleswade Comet again published articles during the consultation period.

- Regular updates were posted on CBC social media channels;
 - Twitter:
 - Number of tweets: 22
 - Total engagements (comments, likes, retweets): 133
 - Total impressions (people that saw the tweets): 21,444
 - Facebook
 - 2 posts
 - 391 engagements
 - 21,282 impressions
- Email bulletins were issued encouraging people signed up for Central Bedfordshire news to take part in the consultation.
- Updates were published in various council newsletters (Staff Central, Members' Information Bulletin) to promote the consultation and to encourage those in a position of influence such as councillors to promote it further.
- Targeted promotion with emails sent to database of 3000 parents/carers on the school transport database
- Emails and alerts were sent to all schools and colleges asking to help make parents aware.
- Notices were put up on the school admissions web pages, linking to the consultation page as these users could be directly affected by proposals.

Paper copies of the questionnaires were made available through all Central Bedfordshire libraries and on the *Just Ask* 'Rave bus' that travelled Central Bedfordshire talking to residents.

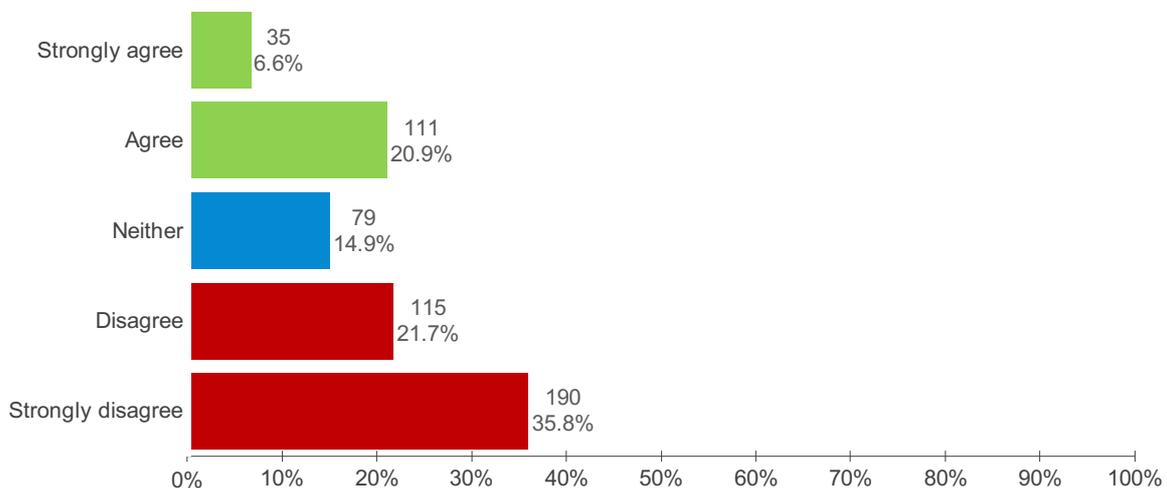
The Home-to-School consultation webpages had a total of 16,357 page views between 29th June 2017 and 18th September 2017, demonstrating a high level of interest and reach of the campaign. The top method used to find information was via Facebook with just under 3,625 hits. Others included; 3,602 hits from google searches, 1,754 from Gov Delivery bulletins, 429 from Bing search engine and 160 hits from Twitter. 5,247 hits came directly meaning from untraceable sources but mostly likely from links in emails that were sent to parent/carers.

4. Feedback on the proposals

In total 538 residents participated in the consultation by completing the survey. 83% (449) said they were parents/carers of which 60% (271) said they were intending to apply for a 2018 school place. These groups were key stakeholders and it was important to engage with all of them throughout the consultation. The second biggest group were those who said they were residents of Central Bedfordshire 12% (67).

a. Changes to qualifying schools

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to provide transport from home to nearest available school, rather than to the nearest catchment?



58% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal to provide transport to the nearest available school, rather than to the nearest catchment school. With less than 28% supporting the proposal.

Comments on the proposal:

229 respondents provided additional comments regarding the first question. An analysis of the comments reaffirms the views of the first question, with the most frequent themes being:

- Council should provide transport to catchment schools (50 respondents)
- Policy restricts parental choice (40 respondents)
- School places and transport should be connected (40 responses)
- Policy would have adverse effect on children (31 respondents)
- Policy disregards catchment system (25 respondents)

“Q1 has big implications on Admissions as this will affect where parents choose to send their child to school. It is not the fault of the parent that the catchment school is not necessarily

their nearest school. It seems unfair to penalise parents and children by denying them transport to what the council has determined is the catchment school.”

“this takes away parent choice for a school best to your child's needs”

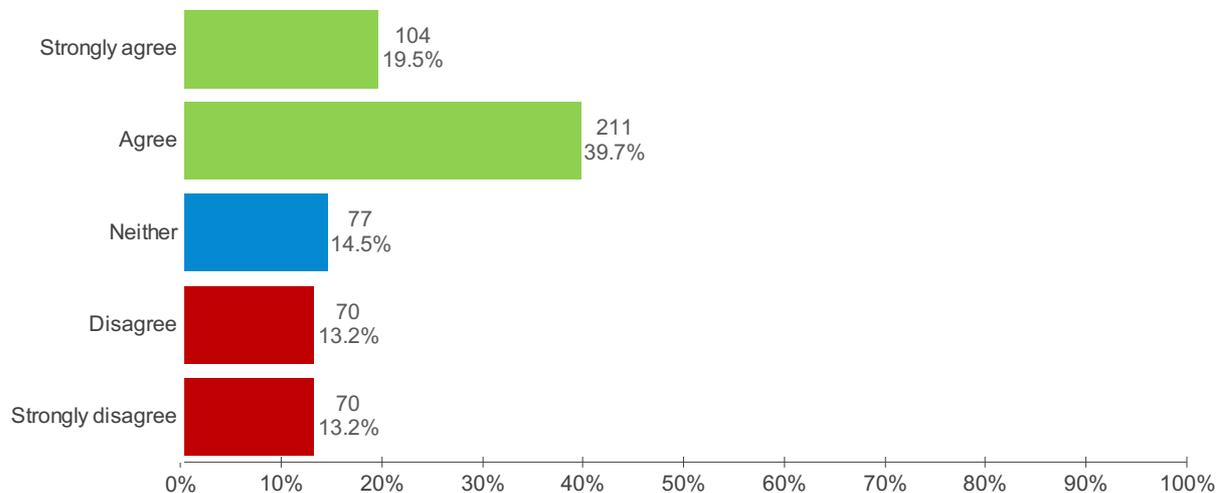
“While this policy may make more financial sense, if the admissions policy of the schools are not in line with the transport policy, then there may be hardship on the child and family concerned.”

Summary

There was a lack of support for this policy from respondents. Many of the main themes to come from the comments revolved around the disparity between the CBC school transport policies and BC school admissions criteria. It was pointed out that many schools still used catchment areas as criteria, with families choosing where to live based upon these catchments areas. To remove catchments from the school transport policies would mean some children would not be able to attend their preferred school of choice. This created a large amount of concern and confusion around why these two policies were not aligned together.

b. Changes to age range criteria

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to only provide transport for children who are aged five and above?



The majority (59%) of respondents agreed with the proposal to only provide transport for children who are aged five and above, with only 26.4% disagreeing.

Comments on the proposal:

- Proposals risk hindering development of children and young people (23 respondents)
- Under 5's should be escorted (5 respondents)

“Although children do not have to attend school full time until the term after which they turn five, the vast majority of children start school in the September (and attend full time) following their fourth birthday. This is strongly encouraged by schools and academies to ensure the best start for both the children and staff at the school. Parents can defer their child’s place until the term after their fifth birthday, however for summer born children we will only hold the place for the child until the start of the summer term. If parents of summer born children have not started by this time, the place is withdrawn and parents are then required to reapply for a Year 1 place, at which there is no guarantee of a place at their preferred schools. Although the Council is not obliged to offer transport to children below statutory school age it seems at odds that they would not offer transport to four year old children in Reception Year when they are legally entitled to full time education at school.”

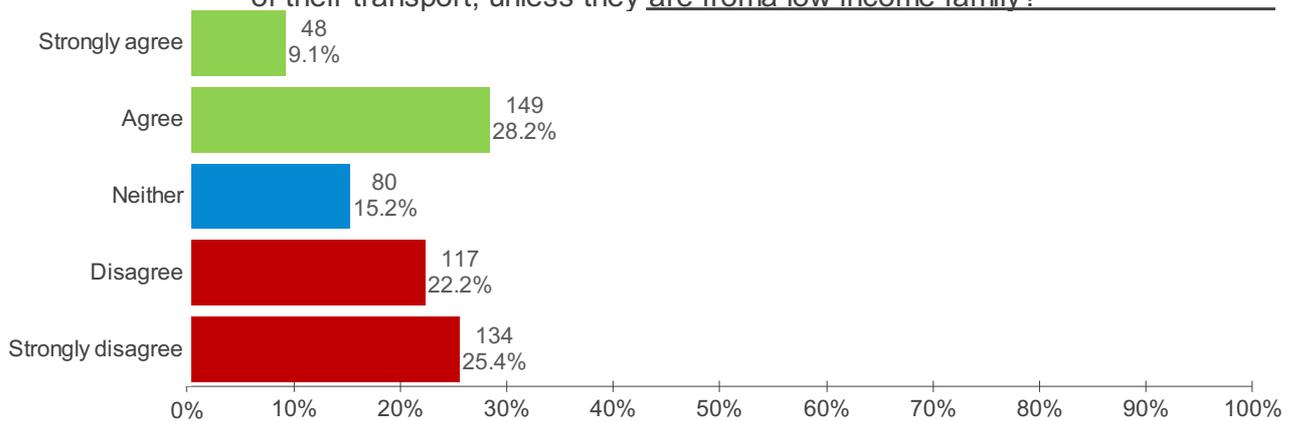
“If transport is withdrawn for 4 year olds this would have a hugely detrimental impact on the early years education of Traveller children which could result in children missing the entire Reception year as parents would choose to keep their children at home until they could access the transport.”

Summary

Whilst the majority supported this proposal there was some concern from those opposed with regards to four-year olds who have been granted a school place. There was again some concern and confusion around why school transport should not be provided to a pupil when a school place has been allocated. There was also some concern that this would impact most upon more vulnerable groups who could not facilitate the transport to school themselves and would have to defer starting school until the age of five, potentially putting them at a disadvantage to their peers who would be able to attend from the age of four.

c. Post-16 (SEN) contributions

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that students over 16 years old with a special education need (SEN) will be required to make a contribution towards the cost of their transport, unless they are from a low income family?



47% disagreed with the proposal to require post 16-year olds with SEN to contribute towards the cost of their transport, unless from a low-income family. Another 37% agreed with the proposal with a further 15% responding neither, indicating a wider split in opinions.

Comments on the proposal:

- Transport for SEN should be provided (42 respondents)
- Paying for transport will cost families (36 respondents)
- Post 16 must stay in school (27 responses)
- SEN students have to travel for appropriate schooling (26 respondents)

“This is unreasonable and in my opinion shows discrimination. It is not the fault of the family that a child has SEND and therefore has to travel further afield to attend school, e.g., Leighton Buzzard to Houghton Regis. Some over 16 have a very low academic age so it is important they remain at school where they feel safe and comfortable. Families with SEN children have enough pressure and their lives have to fit around the child as it is. There is no special school in Leighton Buzzard which again is not the fault of the families so this cost of transport should be fully covered.”

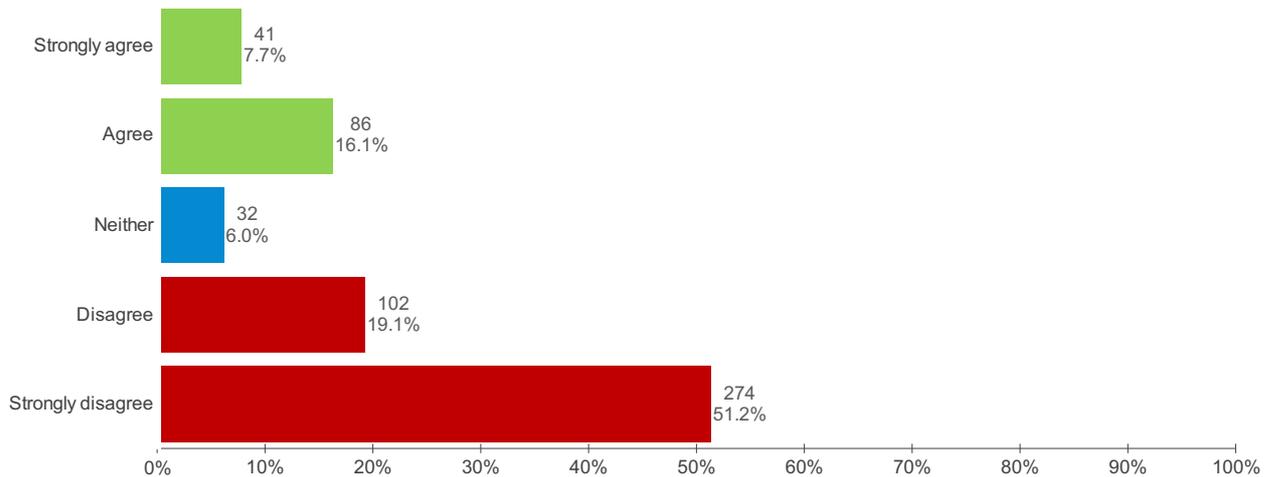
“As schooling is now compulsory up to age 18, it would be discriminatory to request that those over 16 with a SEN should have to pay for their transport. If there are only certain schools that can fully support a child with a SEN, then it would be disgraceful to deny them access to that school on the grounds of transport cost. Forcing a child with a SEN to be placed somewhere where they cannot reach their full potential not only impacts negatively on that child themselves, but can also cause disruption to the rest of their class and prevent those students from achieving what they should.”

Summary

There was less of a consensus on this proposal but a larger proportion disagreed with it. Responses have indicated that it is unreasonable for SEN students to be asked to contribute towards transport as the locations of appropriate schools are often not local to where they live, meaning they may travel further than mainstream students would have to. Another frequent theme suggested that having to contribute to travel would cost families money, and would adversely impact those families just be above the ‘low-income’ threshold. Once again, there were comments regarding the inconsistent approach to policies, with many highlighting that it was now mandatory for students to remain in some form of further education after the age of 16. There were concerns that removing paid transport could affect attendance figures negatively, hence hampering the education of some students.

d. Changes to what travel assistance is offered

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to offer a travel pass for a public bus or train for Middle and Upper school pupils (aged 9-16), rather than supplying private buses or taxis in the first instance?



A significant majority (70%) disagreed with the proposal to offer a travel pass for a public bus or train to students (aged 9-16) rather than supply private buses or taxis in the first instance. Only 24% of respondents agreed with the proposal showing an overwhelming objection to the policy.

Comments on the proposal:

- Concerns over current public transport provision (119 respondents)
- Concerns with younger children travelling alone on public transport (116 respondents)
- Public transport not suitable for many SEN children (6 respondents)

“I have concerns regarding child protection using public transport, children would potentially be exposed to situations they should be protected from. The current public bus service would be inadequate to manage the number of children at the same time causing children to arrive late at school which would effect their education. This is a very bad idea.”

“Public buses may be unreliable - what happens if they are late? or full? I have concerns about pupil safety. I would be very concerned about by young daughter travelling on a public bus unaccompanied - I cannot accompany her as I work full time. A school bus gives me peace of mind.”

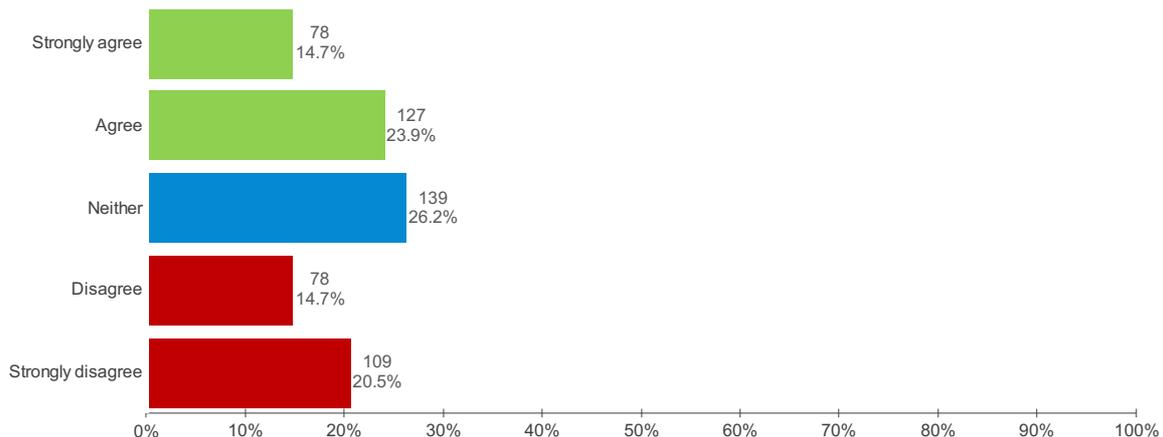
“No SEN child would be able to get on a bus on there own , and if that child was to have a meltdown, they would be putting themselves and the public in danger”

Summary

Comments have highlighted two extremely common themes regarding this proposal. Firstly, there is concern regarding the current provision of public transport in Central Bedfordshire, many claiming it is too scarce and unreliable to be used as school transport. Respondents have suggested that transport links to villages are a particular issue and no routes would be suitable for their child to get directly to school. Secondly there were concerns over the safety of children on public transport, particularly those as young as nine with many parents worried about placing that amount of responsibility on young children. Safeguarding was also a frequent theme with respondents extremely concerned about young children being in close proximity to the general public unsupervised. There was some recognition that this proposal could work, but only if the age range was changed.

e. Motability Vehicle Proposal

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that when a vehicle has been provided to the family by the national Motability Scheme, the council will provide parent/carers with a payment to cover the cost of mileage rather than provide additional transport?



39% of respondents agreed with the proposal to provide parents/carers with a payment to cover the cost of mileage of transporting their child to school with their Motability vehicle. 35% disagreed with the proposal whilst 26% responded neither, indicating no opinion which suggests the proposal may not affect them enough to comment either way.

Comments on the proposal:

- Motability proposal would penalise working parents (27 respondents)
- Agree with Motability vehicle proposal (4 respondents)

“Disabled children are likely to be travelling very much longer distances to school, and those schools are less likely to provide any sort of wraparound care. Without school transport it would become difficult if not impossible for many parents to work. For single parents this could be catastrophic.”

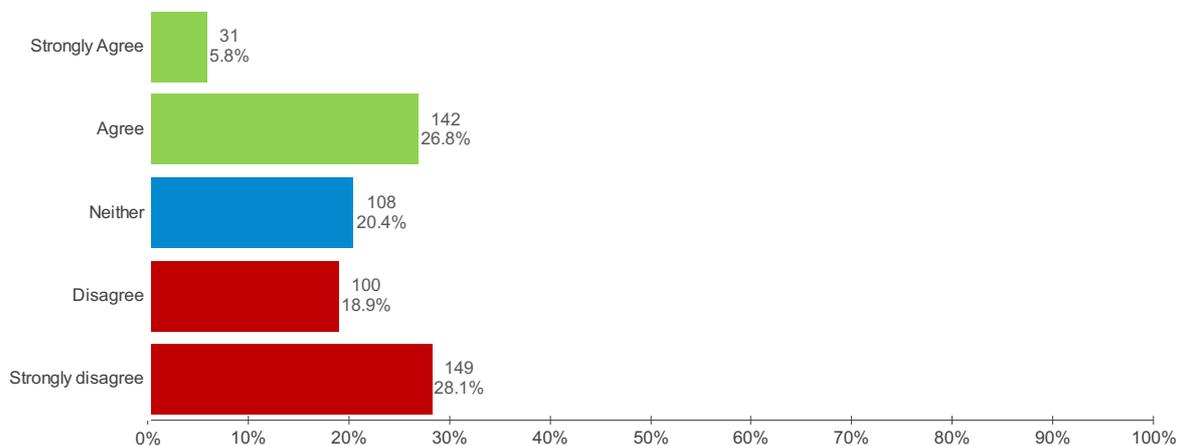
“it is ridiculous for children who have mobility cars to be transported to their schools by their parents/ carers when their parents/carers have to go to work, or have other commitments ie other children. This would not work in our situation as I would have to give up work and claim benefits from the council if I were to drive my child to and from school every day in their motability car. I strongly object to this proposal. In addition, is the council trying to promote more cars and traffic onto our already congested roads? I thought we were meant to be looking at our carbon footprint and thinking of ways to reduce car journeys?”

Summary

Responses have shown more of a split regarding this proposal with no clear majority either way. With the single biggest response coming from ‘neither’ suggesting no opinion from a large proportion of respondents. The additional comments should be noted for the details they provide regarding the potential impact on some families. Comments have clearly indicated concern with many respondents explaining how this proposal would negatively impact upon working parents of SEN students. They explain that the amount of travel that would be required to undertake would mean many would have to give up their job to do this. As with a previous proposal, the distance that SEN students are required to travel to school, was highlighted, and the responses have once again noted that is unfair to penalise these students and families because of it.

f. Concessionary buss passes

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to charge concessionary bus passes at a variable rate that better reflects the cost of the journey rather than a universal fixed rate?



Just under half of respondents (47%) disagreed with the proposal to charge concessionary bus passes at a variable rate rather than a universal fixed rate, with only 33% agreeing with the proposal.

Comments on the proposal:

- Concessionary pass should not be charged on distance (23 respondents)
- Parents should be means tested (6 respondents)
- Agree with concessionary bus passes (4 respondents)

“I think if you start to have a variable charge for a pass it will have a huge impact on the demographic attending particular schools where the journey may incur a greater/lesser cost for whatever reason...”

“It seems unfair that some pupils will be charged more for their journey than others because they live further away. It may mean that they cannot afford to travel to a chosen place of education if too expensive.”

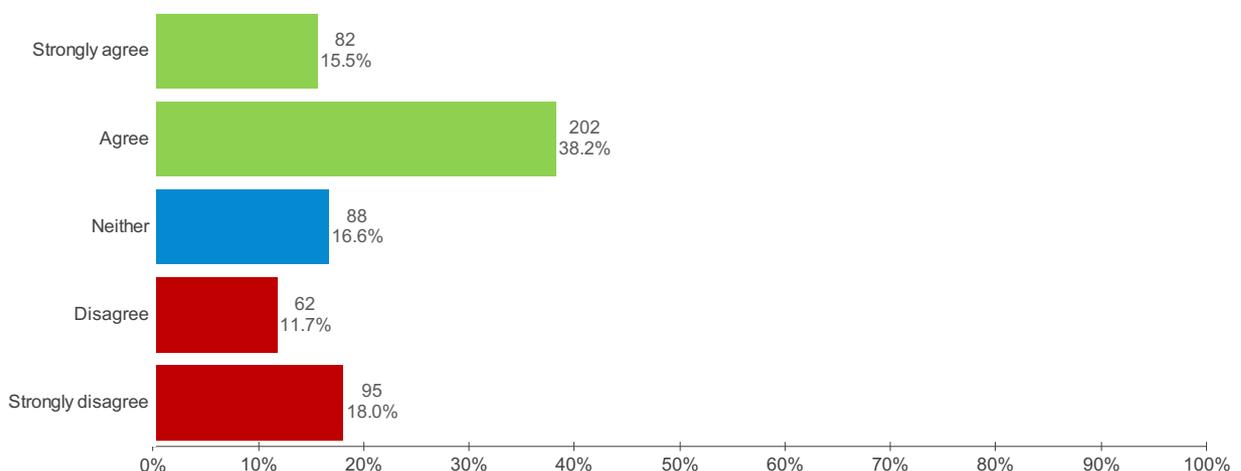
“If the cost of transport was increased this would possibly make it unviable for us. We would then have to drive to the school which would increase transport at school which the council says it wants to avoid.”

Summary

Once again there was no outright majority in agreement or disagreement with the proposal. The largest majority was 47% in disagreement. Comments suggest this is because respondents disagree with the proposal to charge on distance rather than a fixed rate. Cost also became a factor with some suggesting the price could lead to some students not being able to access certain schools or curriculum because of cost.

g. School mini buses

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to provide a contribution to schools to run their own mini buses instead of commissioning private bus operators, in instances where this is more cost effective?



The majority (54%) supported the proposal to provide a contribution to schools to run their own mini buses instead of commissioning private bus operators, with only 30% in disagreement.

Comments on the proposal:

- Transport is the responsibility of the council (42 respondents)
- Schools cannot run own mini bus (31 respondents)
- Agree with concessionary bus passes (4 respondents)

“Contribution to schools is a cop out of the councils responsibility...The council has responsibility to ensure students can get to their place of education just the same as parents have responsibility for them to attend but this change WILL mean students not being able to get to their education facility”

Not a very practical idea as school minibuses are for all pupils to use and having to use them at the beginning an end of school day for possibly one or two pupils would completely upset the use of having a minibus to take pupils to Visits and sports fixtures during the morning and after-school. The school would have to supply and pay for a driver to run the mini buses as it is usually only a few members of teaching staff that are trained to drive the minibuses. Schools cannot afford any more expenses...”

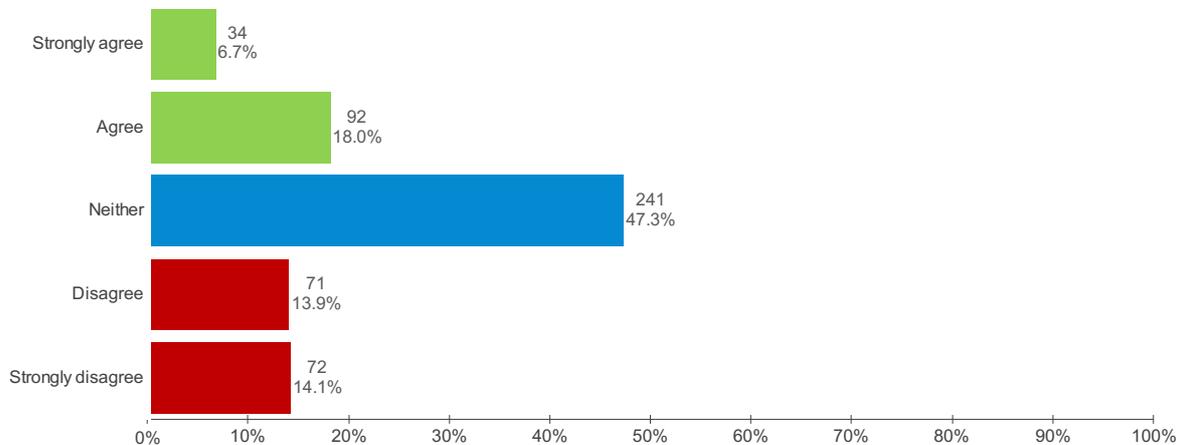
“...if this is generally cost effective then yes but not at the cost of schools having to find more money from their already diminishing budgets to fund it.”

Summary

Whilst the majority of respondents were supportive of this proposal, there were some concerns about how well this would work in practice. Some felt it was not the role of the school to transport children and this should lie with the council. In particular they did not want to see further strain put upon school budgets by having to use money to facilitate the use of the mini bus. There were also concerns regarding the knock-on effect this proposal would have for extracurricular activities for the school i.e. field trips, sports events. Careful consideration would need to be given to these issues before any implementation.

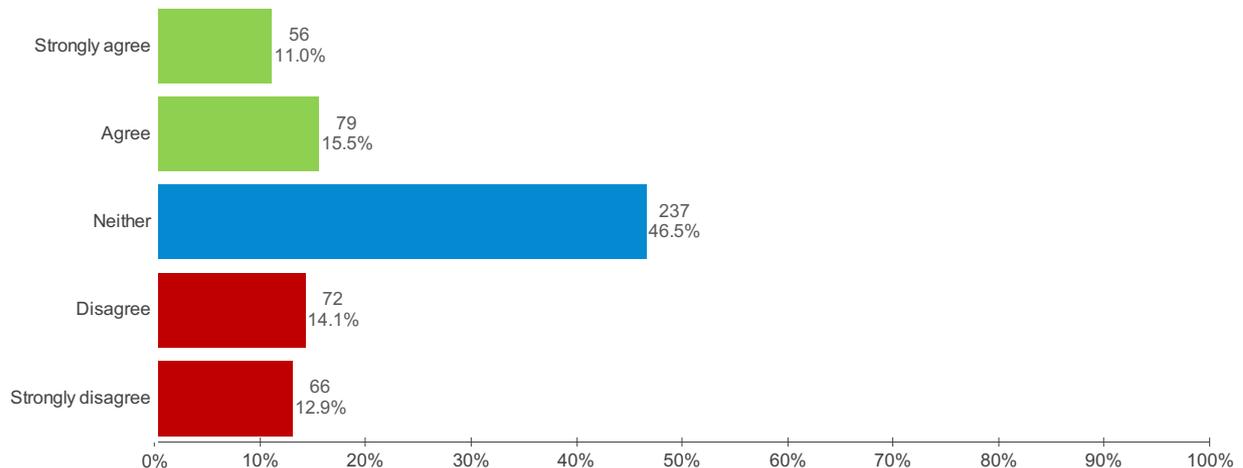
h. Boarding Schools – where a boarding school has been identified as the nearest available school to meet the child’s needs.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal that rather than providing transport, the council will reimburse travel expenses to parent/carers whose children attend a boarding school?



47.3% responded 'Neither' indicating no opinion, likely because of the very specific nature of the proposal. 28% disagreed with the proposal to reimburse travel expenses to parent/carers rather than provide transport in the first instance with 15% agreeing.

To what extent do you agree or disagree with the proposal to no longer provide travel assistance to parents/carers attending a Statement/EHC review whose children attend an out of council area boarding school?



Again, a similar proportion of respondents (46.5%) responded 'Neither'. 27% disagreed with the proposal to no longer provide travel assistance to parents/carers attending a Statement/EHC review at an out of area boarding school. With a slightly smaller percentage (26.5%) disagreeing with the proposal.

Comments on the boarding school proposals:

- Families with SEN children should be supported (14 respondents)
- Misunderstanding of proposals (14 respondents)
- It is not the families fault they have to travel out of area (13 respondents)
- If school is deemed necessary, transport should be funded (9 respondents)

"If the school that is best for that child is out of area...why should the family have to pay? Any family with a child that has needs should be fully supported and to make life no more difficult than it already is. No one chooses to have a child with extra needs and to live the life, 24/7 is tough...it should not be made any more difficult."

"Being able/not able to pay for travel should NOT affect whether a parent can attend a Statement/ EHC meeting - or do you really believe these are of no importance?"

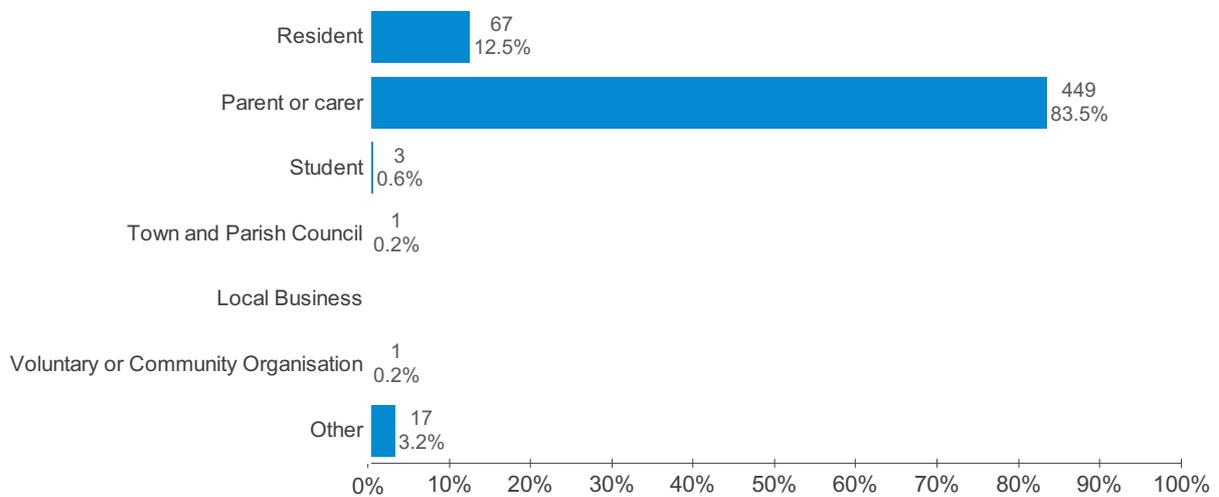
Summary

A section of comments suggested a misunderstanding of the boarding school proposals with some assuming the proposals related to private boarding schools rather than residential schools for pupils with special educational needs. It is important to highlight this misunderstanding as this could have affected how people responded to the proposals, particularly the first proposal which offered to reimburse travel expenses to parents instead of providing transport. Some parents questioned

why the council was supposedly funding transport to private boarding schools. Overall more respondents disagreed with both proposals than those who agreed. An analysis of the comments shows that respondents are not keen to see SEN families impacted upon, with concerns that SEN families should be supported given the difficult circumstances they face and that they should not be punished for having to travel out of area for their child’s education. The later point is a reoccurring theme throughout the consultation regarding services for SEN children/parents.

i. Profile of respondents

Are you responding as:



- 84% of respondents indicated that they were parents or carers. 13% of respondents were residents of Central Bedfordshire, and 3% responding as other. This is a good indication that the consultation reached key stakeholder groups.

Please specify which Town and Parish Council:

Biggleswade Town Council

Please specify the name of your organisation:

Bedford Area Bus Users' Society

If other, please state:

Head Teacher	Teacher
Work in a secondary school with SEN children	Governor
Teacher	Local authority employee
User of local buses and a member of the bus user group BABUS	Senior teacher at Stanbridge School
Professional	Lower school
School Admissions Team (CBC)	



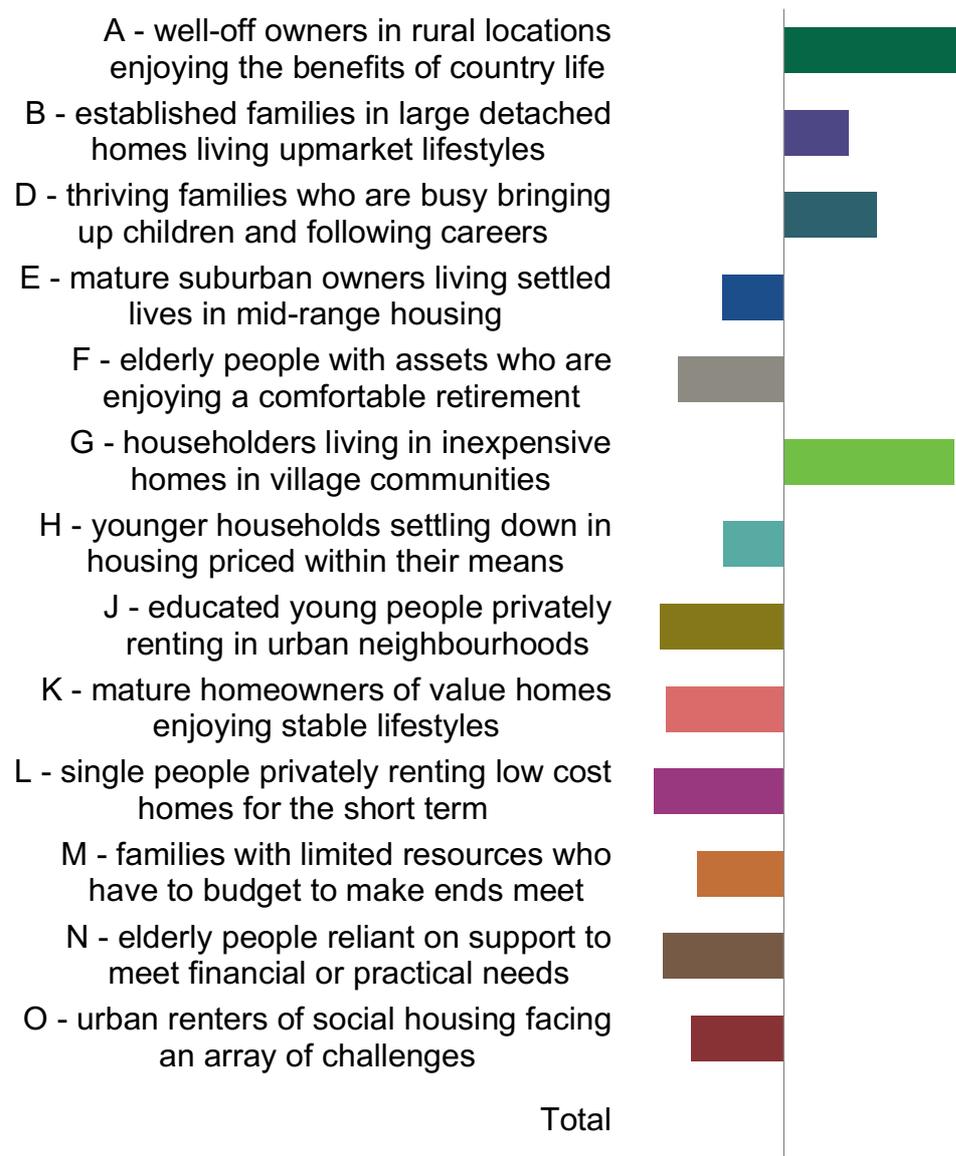
- 54% of respondents said they would be applying for a 2018 school place within Central Bedfordshire.
- 80% of respondents were female and 20% male.
- Although the majority of respondents (95%) did not have a disability, 5% of respondents considered themselves to be disabled.
- The respondent profile was similar to the average for Central Bedfordshire as a whole, with 94% of respondents identifying as White British, 1% Black/Black British, 1% Asian/Asian British, 2% identifying as mixed ethnicity and 2% as 'Other ethnic group'.
- The majority of respondents were aged between 30-44 years (50%) and 45-59 (40%). 60+ represented 6% of total respondents, with Under 30s representing 4%.
- Postcodes show there has been a varied response from across the Central Bedfordshire, and particularly from rural areas where there is a greater reliance on school transport, with less responses coming from the towns.

Postcode location (by Parish)	No. of Respondents	Postcode location (out of area)	No. of Respondents
Ampthill	15	Aylesbury Vale	2
Arlesey	16	Bedford	5
Aspley and Woburn	16	Cambridge	1
Barton-le-Clay	19	Milton Keynes	7
Biggleswade North	2		
Biggleswade South	6		
Caddington	12		
Cranfield and Marston Moretaine	82		
Dunstable-Central	1		
Dunstable-Icknield	2		
Dunstable-Manshead	2		
Dunstable-Northfields	5		
Dunstable-Watling	4		
Eaton Bray	2		
Flitwick	9		
Heath and Reach	30		
Houghton Conquest and Haynes	14		
Leighton Buzzard North	6		
Leighton Buzzard South	6		
Linslade	7		
Northill	20		
Parkside	4		
Potton	11		
Sandy	13		
Shefford	13		
Silsoe and Shillington	22		
Stotfold and Langford	20		
Tithe Farm	2		
Toddington	43		
Westoning, Flitton and Greenfield	33	Central Bedfordshire Total	437

Further analysis of the postcodes has allowed us to profile respondents. The analysis below uses Experian Mosaic data. This is a segmentation tool that looks at a wide range of data for every household in the country and then groups similar households together, including information on their preferences. This helps us to understand more about the characteristics of the respondents to the survey. It is only possible to use where we have the full, accurate postcode within Central Bedfordshire.

79% of consultation respondents gave a postcode that was valid to use in this analysis.

Compared to CBC residents



This data allows us to identify groups that may have been over or under represented in the consultation. Bars to the left indicate which groups have been under-represented and bars to the right represent groups which have been over-represented. The data shows that lower income groups have not been as active in taking part in the consultation in comparison with more affluent groups.

j. Additional analysis

Crosstab analysis was conducted on several demographic areas to identify any differing opinions between groups. Groups included; parent/carers, those applying for a 2018 school place, those aged 60 and above, and those who identified as having a disability.

Following analysis it was found that none of these groups gave vastly different answers to that of the overall results. It is important to conduct this cross-referencing task to mitigate against one particular group of people not being heard over the wider community.

5. Conclusion

The results of the consultation have broadly speaking uncovered considerable concern regarding the proposed policy changes. Whilst there were some elements of the proposals that have failed to attract support, others faced less opposition with the proposals allowing schools to run their own mini buses and to only provide transport for over-5s being supported. However, all of the proposals have highlighted issues that would require further thought, as summarised below.

Inconsistencies in approach

Firstly there was concern about the approach taken with the proposed changes. Respondents highlighted perceived inconsistencies and contradictions that the new policies created such as only providing transport to the nearest school. This proposal is not seen as being in line with council's wider approach to school admissions, with many school's still using catchment systems. Parents were concerned about applying for and accepting a place at a catchment school and then not being able to access school transport because it was not their nearest school. There was confusion about why the council is still using catchments if transport was no longer going to be provided to them.

Similarly, the proposal to only provide transport to children over the statutory school age of five was met with concern as parents claimed schools actively encourage pupils starting school following their fourth birthday with the school admissions team making provisions to allow this. Again, this highlighted to parents an inconsistent approach to children and schooling with accusations of a lack of joined up thinking within the council.

Impact on children and young people with disabilities or special educational needs

Secondly, respondents indicated that some of the proposals were unfair and targeted groups that were not able to adapt to these proposed changes. The Motability vehicle proposal drew criticism from service users i.e. parents with Motability vehicles. They explained that the proposal would severely impact their ability to maintain work as often appropriate schooling for their SEN children was much further afield than local mainstream schools, making the 'school-run' and reaching work on time unlikely to be viable. They felt this proposal unfairly penalised

them and their families for having to attend specialist schooling outside of the local area.

These sentiments were echoed in the proposal to require a contribution towards the cost of transport from post-16 SEN students, with respondents saying the need to attend a specialist school/college outside of the local area is not the fault of the students and they should not be penalised for having to access schooling outside of a local mainstream school/college.

Safety and Sustainability

A final theme from the consultation findings was the notion of safety and sustainability. The proposal to provide travel passes for public transport to pupils aged 9-16 years old was met with strong opposition with regards to the lower limit being nine years old. Safeguarding was a massive issue for parents who were concerned about the idea of their young children mixing with the public and having to navigate their way to school unaccompanied.

Some also highlighted concerns about whether the current public transport provision could sustain an influx of school children or whether it was currently suitable for transporting children at school times. There was a concern this had not been factored into the proposals with many parents citing current poor provision in rural areas as a barrier to getting to school.

There were similar thoughts with the proposal to provide a contribution to schools to allow them to run their own min buses, but again concerns were raised about whether this was sustainable for schools given current budget pressures. Some saw this proposal as passing the burden on to schools and they did not want to see education budgets spent on transport, which was seen solely as a council responsibility.