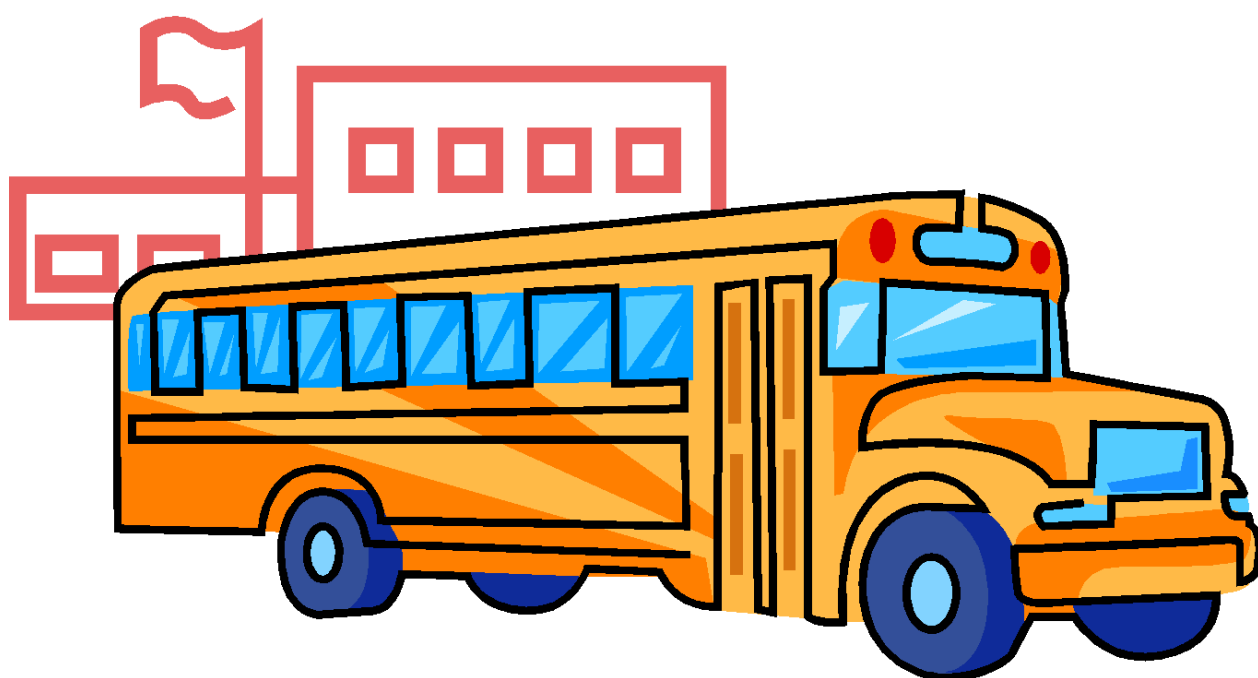


Consultation on Post-16 Transport in Northumberland

20 February 2018 – 2 April 2018



NORTHUMBERLAND

Northumberland County Council

The County Council is carrying out a consultation on some significant changes to its Post-16 Transport Policy, which would make free travel to their local school or college available for most 16-19 year-olds who live more than three miles away from that local school or college.

We need to find out what you think about these proposed changes and also to find out whether you have any workable alternative ideas to the proposals set out in the document. We would be particularly interested in alternative ideas which would not add to the overall cost of the scheme to the Council. The Council expects to have to make £65m of savings over the next four years, and is not likely to be able to afford significant further spending on transport beyond the projected £2.2m per year cost of the proposed new policy.

The Background

In September 2014, the Council's Post-16 Transport Policy was changed which resulted in free transport for sixth form and college students being largely withdrawn. In this consultation document it is proposed that free transport is reinstated for Post-16 students, subject to the current eligibility criteria being met.

What is the Council's Policy at Present?

In general terms Northumberland County Council does not normally provide, make arrangements for or meet the costs of transport required to enable Post-16 students to travel between home and their place of study. However there are some exceptions to this rule explained below.

If a student lives in an area served by public transport they are required to make their own travel arrangements and purchase the appropriate travel pass through a commercial operator such as Arriva, Go North East or Stagecoach.

However, free transport is provided for students from low income backgrounds as well as students with an Education, Health and Care Plan subject to meeting the eligibility criteria contained in the current policy.

For students who are unable to access public transport to their nearest learning provider a seat on a school bus or taxi is provided in return for an annual charge of £600.

What legal duties does the Council have?

All local authorities have a duty to set out their arrangements for enabling the attendance of Post-16 students at schools, colleges or other training establishments, i.e. to ensure that travel arrangements are in place to facilitate a student accessing Post-16 studies. However, this duty does not include a requirement to pay the actual fares of students.

What changes is the Council proposing to make?

There are two key changes the Council is intending making to its Post-16 Transport Policy.

The biggest change is that charges for transport would be removed for students qualifying for assistance under the Council's proposed new Post-16 Transport Policy which accompanies this document. In other words students who are provided with a place on a council contracted school bus or taxi service would not be required to pay the £600 charge. The Council will also fund the costs of travel for students accessing public transport providing they meet all the eligibility criteria for free transport.

Students with an Educational, Health & Care Plan would continue to travel free as long as they meet all the eligibility criteria.

The second key change concerns the introduction of a one-off "administration fee" of £50 payable upon submission of an application for Post--16 transport. The Council incurs significant time and resources accessing applications for transport, securing transport arrangements and providing bus passes. The introduction of an administration fee at the time of application will therefore fund the whole cost of administering the travel scheme that will be incurred.

The cost of the administration fee will be non-refundable but in exceptional circumstances families can request to have the cost reimbursed for example where they are able to demonstrate that their child has been unable to take up their chosen course of study due to their GCSE exam results.

It is not proposed that the administration fee would apply to students in receipt of an Education, Health & Care Plan.

Students from low income backgrounds will also be exempt from paying the administration fee provided they give proof of low income. Proof of low income will be required at the application stage and will involve the parent/carer of the applicant demonstrating they are in receipt of any of the following benefits.

- income support
- income-based jobseeker's allowance
- income-related employment and support allowance
- guarantee credit component of pension credit
- Child Tax Credit (but not entitled to Working Tax Credit) where your annual income, as shown on your Tax Credit award notice, is £16,190 or less
- 16–18-year-olds receiving the above benefits or tax credits in their own right.
- asylum seekers in receipt of support provided under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

Would there be any transport available if a student chooses to undertake a course at a learning provider that isn't the closest one to their home?

Under the Post-16 transport policy students are expected to attend their local high school or sixth form or their nearest further education college. Current criteria used to assess a student's entitlement to free transport would remain in place. These eligibility criteria can be accessed on pages 7-9 of this consultation document. It is therefore unlikely that the costs of transport would be met by the local authority where a student chooses to undertake a similar course of study in a particular vocational area that is available locally.

Would the proposed changes apply to existing Post-16 students who are currently paying the £600 charge for a place on council contracted school bus/taxi services?

Existing students would be required to submit an application for Post-16 transport for the 2018/19 Academic Year and pay the administration fee of £50. Assuming they continue to meet all the eligibility criteria a place on the school bus/taxi service would continue to be provided but there would be no requirement to pay the £600 charge.

What about existing Post-16 students who currently make and pay for their own travel arrangements via public transport - would they qualify for free transport?

Some students may qualify for free transport subject to applying for transport and meeting all the eligibility criteria. If your application was successful the Council would then determine the most appropriate transport arrangements to be put in place - this might involve the purchase of a travel pass to enable you to continue to travel on local bus services or it might be the offer of a seat on a dedicated school bus or taxi service.

Could other ways of travelling be made easier?

Because of the geography of Northumberland, we know that some of the travel options available for students in more urban areas, such as cycling, are not always realistic. However, we would be interested in any suggestions about steps we could take to make it easier for students to study without needing to use conventional school transport. For instance some areas operate moped schemes or provide some elements of courses in ways that do not involve attending a traditional campus.

Would I have to pay £50 just to find out whether I'm eligible?

No. We intend to make sure that it is easy to find out whether you are eligible without putting in an application. For instance:

- if you are not sure whether you count as living more than three miles from the educational establishment, because the Council measures the shortest route which it believes would be safe to walk, you can request the distance from your home address to your nearest appropriate learning provider is measured by contacting the school transport team.
- if you are not sure whether the Council will count the course you are going to as belonging within the same vocational area as one which is available locally then you can seek clarification by contacting the school transport team before you consider submitting an application for transport.

If an application was not eligible for any other reason which you could not reasonably be expected to know about after carefully reading the policy, we would refund the fee.

What if I wanted to take an A-level which my local school doesn't offer?

Unfortunately, we do not think we can afford to fund travel solely to expand students' choice of A-levels, unless the local school offers a very limited range of options (fewer than nine A-level courses). So you would have to pay travel costs.

If the nearest suitable vocational course is a long way away, would travel still be free?

We cannot promise that free travel to a course a long way away would always be approved. We would take account of whether the cost of travel would be a reasonable use of public resources, and of whether the journey time would be so great that it might interfere with your education (we don't think it is good for anyone to spend more than two and a half hours travelling to an educational establishment and back every day).

Would transport be available for a charge if I choose to go to a school other than my local school?

In some cases it may be possible for you to buy a spare seat on existing County Council contracted transport that serves a school which is not your nearest learning provider to your home address as defined on pages 7-9 of this consultation document. However, the first priority for the allocation of any spare seats is always for those students in pre-16 or post-16 education who are eligible for free transport. Spare seats will **not** be allocated until after the start of the school year and they can be withdrawn without notice at any time if the seat is subsequently required for students who are eligible for free travel. The cost of a concessionary fare for a Post-16 Student from the start of the 2018/19 Academic Year is £360 per year.

How do I let you know my views about these proposals?

A Response Form is attached at the end of this document which sets out the options for you to let us have your views. We do not expect to be able to consider any comments which arrive after **9.00 a.m. on Monday 2 April 2018.**

What happens at the end of the consultation?

All the feedback received during consultation will be analysed and presented in a report to the County Council's Cabinet in early May 2018, when a decision will be made on whether or not to approve the changes described in this consultation document.

What is the eligibility criteria that I need to meet in full to qualify for free Post-16 Transport?

ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA

Free transport will only be considered if you meet **all** of the following criteria:

- You are a Northumberland resident; and
- You are 16 years old or over, but under 19, on 31 August 2018. Arrangements will not be made for new courses that start in Year 14 except possibly for students with special educational needs, but will be made for courses that start in Year 13 and continue into Year 14; and
- Your course is undertaken at your nearest appropriate learning provider, as defined below; and
- Your course is full time, which is a minimum of 12 hours a week, within each academic year; and
- Your course is at a higher level than your previous achievements and provides appropriate progression to further learning or employment; and
- Your course is foundation learning, level 1, 2 or 3, but not level 4 or higher education or if you are an Apprentice. Students undertaking work placements, apprenticeships or traineeships are advised to contact their employer or learning provider; and
- You live 3 or more miles, by the shortest route measured and indicated by the local authority, from your nearest appropriate learning provider, or you live less than 3 miles from your nearest appropriate learning provider but the route is not deemed to be a safe walking route by the Authority. The walking distance is measured using the County Council's approved GIS system, the current version which is in use is Arc View 10. Distance measures between home and school will be strictly applied. This means that in some cases pupils living in the same street or even adjoining properties may not all be eligible for free home to school transport. Routes are measured from the main entrance to the property that opens onto a road or street that is maintained at public expense to the main school entrance. Private driveways or roads not owned or maintained by Northumberland County Council are **not** included in the measurements.

Decisions about the safety of walked routes follow the guidelines on the Assessment of Walking Routes issued by the Road Safety Officers Association (ROSA). Such assessments of walking routes address issues from a road safety perspective. They do not consider matters of personal security which is deemed to be the responsibility of parents; and

- Your estimated journey time to your chosen learning provider will be no more than 75 minutes (150 minutes daily travelling time). This calculation will be based on using public transport, typically local bus services, to get to and from your learning provider; and
- The cost to the Council of your proposed journey is in the opinion of Northumberland County Council an efficient use of public resources; and
- You make the appropriate contribution (e.g. payment of administration fee at the time of application) towards the costs as determined by the Authority.

For the purposes of this policy the nearest appropriate learning provider is as follows:

- the educational establishment you want to attend post-16 is the nearest learning provider to your home address; or
- the educational establishment you want to attend post-16 is not the nearest school but is the school named by the local authority as the catchment area school for your home address; or
- the educational establishment you want to attend post-16 is not the nearest school but is the nearest school which would be consistent with your religion or beliefs and you supply the necessary evidence of that religion or belief; or
- the educational establishment you want to attend post-16 is not the nearest establishment to your home address but it is the nearest that offers the course you wish to study in accordance with the following:
 - i. For a student wishing to study one or more A-levels, this will be the nearest educational establishment that offers 9 or more different A-levels. For the avoidance of doubt, the student's choice of A-levels, A-level subject combination, timetable clashes etc. will **not** be taken into account when determining eligibility.

- ii. For a student wishing to undertake a vocational course, this will be to the nearest education establishment that offers a course in the relevant vocational area at the appropriate level. To facilitate this, all courses are categorised by the Authority under “vocational areas” and transport will only be provided for students who express a desire to study at their nearest educational establishment that offers a course under their chosen vocational area at the appropriate level of study. There are approximately 30 separate categories, including “Travel & Tourism”, “Art & Design”, “IT & Computing/Media” or “Catering & Hospitality”. The full list of vocational areas is set out below. For the avoidance of doubt, the student’s precise choice of course within each of these areas of vocational study will **not** be taken into account when determining eligibility.

Normally, the only exception in applying these criteria will be where an individual has applied to the appropriate provider at the appropriate time, but has been refused admission by the school/college, in which case that establishment will be ignored when considering eligibility. In such cases, written evidence of refusal will be required.

List of Vocational Areas

Aerospace	Fashion
Accounting	Foundation Learning
Agriculture	Hairdressing
Animal Management & Care	Health & Social Care
Arboriculture	Horse Management & Care
Art & Design	Horticulture
Beauty Therapy	IT & Computing/Media
Business & Administration	Motor Vehicle
Catering & Hospitality	Outdoor Education & Activities
Childcare	Renewable Energies
Construction	Sports & Leisure
Countryside Management	Public Services
Customer Service	Science & Technology
Engineering	Skills for Working Life
Floristry	Travel & Tourism

THANK YOU FOR TAKING THE TIME TO READ THIS DOCUMENT.



Northumberland County Council

Proposals for changes to the Post-16 Transport Policy in Northumberland – Consultation Response Form

Your name:
(optional)

Are you responding mainly as a (tick one box only):

Parent/carer of current Post-16 student ☐

Parent/carer of young person becoming a Post-16 student from 1 September 2018 ☐

Current Post-16 student ☐ Potential Post-16 student from 1 September 2018 ☐

Chair of Governors ☐ Headteacher ☐ Other (please give details) ☐

If you are a parent or carer, a Post-16 student or a potential Post-16 student, please give the postcode for the place where the student/potential student resides:

YOUR VIEWS ON THE POST-16 TRANSPORT PROPOSALS

1) Do you agree with the Council's proposal to make Post 16 transport free for eligible students (please answer here about the principle of this change – tell us further down if you have any detailed comments about the eligibility criteria)?

I fully agree; ☐

I partially agree; ☐

I partially disagree; ☐

I completely disagree ☐

Please give any additional comments:

2) Is it reasonable for the Council to introduce a one-off payment to cover the cost of administering the scheme, with the exceptions described in this document?

I fully agree; ☐

I partially agree; ☐

I partially disagree; ☐

I completely disagree ☐

Please give any additional comments:

3) Do you agree with the proposal that parents of Post 16 students with Educational, Health & Care Plans are exempt from paying the fee?

I fully agree; ☐

I partially agree; ☐

I partially disagree; ☐

I completely disagree ☐

Please give any additional comments:

4) Do you agree with the proposal that parents of Post 16 students from low income backgrounds are exempt from paying the fee?

I fully agree; ☐

I partially agree; ☐

I partially disagree; ☐

I completely disagree ☐

Please give any additional comments:

5) To qualify for free transport a student must meet all the eligibility criteria outlined on pages 7-9 of the Consultation Document. Do you agree that the Council should include eligibility criteria?

I fully agree; ☐

I partially agree; ☐

I partially disagree; ☐

I completely disagree ☐

Please give any additional comments:

5b) Do you agree that these eligibility criteria are reasonable?

I fully agree; ☐

I partially agree; ☐

I partially disagree; ☐

I completely disagree ☐

Please give any additional comments:

6) Would there be any specific impacts on particular groups of young people which we need to consider further (for instance young people who are disabled, young people of a particular gender, ethnic group or religion/belief; bisexual, heterosexual, lesbian or gay young people; transgender young people; or teenagers who are parents/pregnant)?

Yes, I think there would be ☐

No, I do not know of any ☐

If you have said yes, please explain in detail what these impacts would be, and what changes to the policy you think we should make to address them:

7) If you have any additional comments not covered by the questions above please give them here:

SUBMITTING YOUR RESPONSE FORM:

There are three ways that you can submit your response form;

- 1) You can use the electronic form on the Council's website at <http://northumberland.gov.uk>**
- 2) You can return this form attached to an email email jane.jack@northumberland.gov.uk**
- 3) You can return your Response Form in hard copy to: FAO Jane Jack, Children's Services,
FREEPOST MP135, County Hall, MORPETH, NE61 1BR**

THANK YOU FOR TAKING PART IN THIS CONSULTATION

THE CLOSING DATE FOR CONSULTATION IS 9am on 2 April 2018