

Surrey County Council

Consultation on Surrey's Home to School Transport Policy - 2015

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1. Is Surrey County Council proposing any changes to its home to school transport policy for 2015?

In the current economic climate, Surrey County Council is not currently proposing any change to its home to school transport policy for 2015. With the cost of transport increasing, Surrey is working hard to ensure that its expenditure under existing policy remains within budget.

Any proposal to extend or vary policy would lead to an increase in expenditure on home to school transport. Any increase in expenditure would be likely to impact on other services that the Council offers as Surrey would need to consider making savings elsewhere to fund an increase in home to school transport expenditure.

2. Why is Surrey County Council carrying out a consultation?

In 2006 there was a clear commitment from Surrey's Executive and Full Council that there should be no exceptional arrangements applied to Surrey's transport policy and that all pupils should be considered against a policy that should be applied equally and transparently across the County. As a result it was agreed at that time that any area or school based exceptional arrangements should cease and that all pupils across the County should be assessed according to common eligibility criteria.

A number of years have passed since that review and Surrey County Council now wishes to ensure that its home to school transport policy remains fair and equitable to all its residents and that the policy contributes to its commitment for all children to have fair access to education.

Whilst the County Council has not proposed any changes to its policy, it is interested to hear:

- the views of Surrey residents and schools on the equity of the existing policy
- details of any home to school transport difficulties that Surrey parents might currently face; and
- details of any suggestions for change (recognising that any additional expenditure on home to school transport would mean that Surrey would need to make savings elsewhere).

In submitting comments, respondents are asked to consider that Surrey remains committed to a County wide policy that can be applied equally and transparently in all areas. As such, if any changes are to be suggested they should relate to a policy change and not one that would apply to just one school or in one area.

3. Legislative framework of Surrey's home to school transport policy

The legal responsibility for ensuring a child's attendance at school rests with the child's parent. Generally, parents are expected to make their own arrangements for ensuring that their child travels to and from school.

A local authority is only under a statutory duty to provide transport if the nearest qualifying school is not within statutory walking distance of the child's home by the nearest available route (section 444(5) of the 1996 Education Act) or to certain children whose families are on a low income (Schedule 35B to the 1996 Education Act). The provision of transport beyond these requirements is at the local authority's discretion.

A local authority must publish its home to school transport policy in time for parents to take account of it when applying for a school place. As the policy for 2014 has already been published in Surrey's school admissions booklets for 2014, this consultation relates to the policy for 2015.

4. Surrey's current home to school transport policy

Surrey's home to school transport policy provides only for those Surrey children who are eligible by law to receive free home to school transport, as follows:

- Children who are under the age of 8 who attend a school which is their nearest suitable school which is more than 2 miles from their home
- Children who are aged 8 years and over who attend a school which is their nearest suitable school which is more than 3 miles from their home
- Children who are aged 8 years and over but under the age of 11 who are in receipt of free school meals or whose parents receive the maximum amount of Working Tax Credit and who attend a school which is their nearest suitable school which is more than 2 miles from their home
- Children who are of compulsory school age who are aged 11 years and over who are in receipt of free school meals or whose parents receive the maximum amount of Working Tax Credit and who attend one of their three nearest schools between 2 and 6 miles from their home
- Children who are aged 11 to 16 who are in receipt of free school meals or whose parents receive the maximum amount of Working Tax Credit and who attend a school on the grounds of their religion or belief which is between 2 and 15 miles from their home

Generally, whilst a parent has the right to apply for a school of their preference, the local authority has no duty to provide transport to that school if there is another school which is nearer which could have offered a place had the parent applied.

Whilst there is no longer any provision within Surrey's policy for children to receive discretionary support for transport to faith schools on denominational grounds (this was withdrawn for new applicants from September 2012), there are still some children in receipt of this discretionary support because they were assessed as entitled before September 2012. **It is not intended for this review to consider the reinstatement of transport to faith schools on denominational grounds.**

Currently, under this policy, Surrey County Council is providing free home to school transport for approximately 6,300 compulsory aged mainstream pupils at a cost of approximately £9.3m per annum.

5. Common queries on home to school transport

- **Why does Surrey County Council take account of schools outside Surrey when assessing entitlement to free home to school transport?**

The local authority has a duty to ensure that a school place is available for each child in its area, but does not have a duty to provide a place at a Surrey school for each child. Many parents choose to apply for schools across the County boundary and some are successful. Where parents live close to the County boundary and have a nearer school which is in the area of another local authority, Surrey will usually consider this school in the assessment of home to school transport. This is because it would not be a good use of public funds to pay for a child to travel to a school which is further away when there is a school which is nearer which they could travel to.

- **Are the admission arrangements of a school taken in to account when assessing eligibility for free home to school transport?**

No, in order to ensure that a consistent policy is applied across the County, admission arrangements are not taken in to account when assessing eligibility to free home to school transport. In this way feeder links or a catchment within a school's admission criteria do not confer an automatic right to free transport to that school for eligible pupils.

- **Will my child be eligible to receive free transport if other children or siblings have received it in the past?**

Not necessarily. The assessment of free home to school transport is considered for each child individually rather than on an area by area basis and so parents should not presume that because other children from an area or siblings have received free transport to a particular school in the past, that their child will be entitled to free transport to that school in the future. Each year the pattern of admissions and availability of places can change and this can influence the outcome of home to school transport applications if a parent has not applied to their nearest schools.

- **Will I receive free home to school transport if I don't apply to my nearest schools?**

Your child will normally only be eligible for free home to school transport if they are attending the nearest available school that could have offered them a place. If your child would have secured a place at a nearer school had it been named as a preference, then they will not be eligible for free transport to a school that is further away (although some exceptions may apply for secondary aged children whose families are on Working Tax Credit or who are entitled to free school meals).

- **Does the County Council have regard to transport links or costs when considering eligibility for home to school transport?**

No, eligibility is generally based on the shortest walking or straight line distance to the school from the home address. If the parent prefers a school which is further away but

which is easier or cheaper to get to by public transport, the child will not generally be eligible to free home to school transport if the parent chooses that school over another nearer school.

The consideration of transport links and cost in establishing eligibility for home to school transport would not provide for an equitable, consistent or transparent policy across the County as it would provide for different outcomes for different pupils. The availability and cost of public transport is also a factor outside the local authority's control and can be subject to change.

6. Who is being consulted as part of this consultation?

Surrey County Council is consulting with parents, schools, the Diocesan Bodies that represent the church schools in Surrey, Early Years establishments, Members of Surrey's Admissions Forum, County Councillors, Borough & District Councillors and Parish Councils.

7. How can I respond to the consultation?

Respondents should complete the online response form which is available at www.surreycc.gov.uk/schooltransportconsultation or send the paper response form to: Principal Manager Admissions and Transport (Strategy), Quadrant Court, 35 Guildford Road, Woking GU22 7QQ.

8. What is the timetable for the consultation?

The closing date for responses is Friday 20 December 2013. An analysis of the responses will then be prepared and recommendations put forward for consideration by Surrey County Council's Cabinet for a decision on 22 April 2014. The transport policy for 2015 will then be published on Surrey's website and in the school admissions booklets for 2015 which will be available from the beginning of September 2014.

Surrey County Council

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Response form

In submitting comments, respondents are asked to consider that Surrey remains committed to a County wide policy that can be applied equally and transparently in all areas.

1. Have you read the consultation document on Surrey's Home to School Transport policy?

Yes	No
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(tick box as appropriate)

2. Are you familiar with Surrey's current policy on home to school transport?

Yes	No
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(tick box as appropriate)

3. Do you think that Surrey's current home to school transport policy delivers an equitable policy that can be applied County wide?

Yes	No
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(tick box as appropriate)

If No, please provide details:

4. Do you think that Surrey's current home to school transport policy enables parents to clearly understand how decisions are made in individual cases?

Yes	No
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(tick box as appropriate)

If No, please provide details:

5. Have you ever faced any difficulties as a result of Surrey's current home to school transport policy?

Yes	No
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(tick box as appropriate)

If Yes, please provide details including the name of the school involved:

6. Do you think that Surrey should provide free home to school transport for a child to attend a Surrey school, even if there is a school outside Surrey which is nearer to the child's home address which the child could be offered?

Yes	No
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(tick box as appropriate)

If Yes, please provide reasons:

7. Do you think that Surrey should provide free home to school transport for a child to attend a feeder school, even if there is another school which is nearer to the child's home address which the child could be offered?

Yes	No
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(tick box as appropriate)

If Yes, please provide reasons:

8. Do you think that Surrey should provide free home to school transport for a child to attend the same school as a sibling if the sibling has already qualified for free home to school transport to that school?

Yes	No
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(tick box as appropriate)

If Yes, please provide reasons:

9. Do you wish to make any suggestions for change to Surrey's current home to school transport policy? **(Any suggestions should relate to a policy change and not one that would apply to just one school or in one area)**

Yes	No
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(tick box as appropriate)

If Yes, please provide details (recognising that any additional expenditure on home to school transport would mean that Surrey would need to make savings elsewhere)

10. Other comments – please attach additional information as required:

Your details:

Please provide your name and address below. Individuals should only make one response to the consultation. Checks will be carried out to ensure there are no multiple responses. Only response forms which are fully completed with the respondent's name and address will be accepted.

Title: _____ First Name: _____ Surname: _____

Address: _____

_____ Post Code: _____

Name of your school/organisation (if applicable): _____

Please tick the category that most applies to you:

- | | | | |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------|
| Chair of Governors | <input type="checkbox"/> | Headteacher | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| School Governor | <input type="checkbox"/> | School staff member | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Early years establishment | <input type="checkbox"/> | Representative from the Diocese | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Parent | <input type="checkbox"/> | Family member (other than parent) | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Member of Admissions Forum | <input type="checkbox"/> | Surrey County Councillor | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Borough/District Councillor | <input type="checkbox"/> | Parish Council member | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Local community group | <input type="checkbox"/> | | |

Other (please specify):

Signed: _____

Date: _____

Please respond by **Friday 20 December 2013** by completing the online form at www.surreycc.gov.uk or by returning this form to:

By Post: Principal Manager Admissions and Transport (Strategy), Quadrant Court, 35 Guildford Road, Woking, GU22 7QQ

Email: schoolsconsultation@surreycc.gov.uk

For queries regarding this consultation please telephone the Surrey Schools and Childcare Service on 0300 200 1004. Please note that we are unable to give individual responses.