

Warwickshire County Council – Summary of key policy changes relating to Home to School Transport

Background

During 2011 Elected Members have approved a number of key changes to Warwickshire County Council's Home to School Transport Policy. The main changes affecting transport provided to students under the age of 16 are set out below.

Changes to the support offered with transport to students over the age of 16 are not included, but can be made available at the next meeting if required.

1) Denominational Transport

From September 2012, new applicants will only receive free transport to Church Aided schools if it is the nearest qualifying school to their home address. The distance from home to school will need to exceed the relevant statutory walking distance (two miles for children up to the age of eight, and three miles for children over the age of eight). Extra help may also be available to students from low-income families (this is currently subject to review by Central Government).

Where an existing bus or taxi route operates, it may be possible for students to travel under the Council's Vacant Seats Scheme. This already operates and allows students not entitled to free transport to travel on Council services. A payment will be required and the current charges are set out below.

Children receiving free transport on denominational grounds in July 2012 will continue to receive this until they leave their current school or transfer into the sixth form (subject to there being no change in their circumstances such as a house move).

2) Vacant Seats Scheme

This allows those students not entitled to free transport to travel on Council services. A parental contribution is required. Students affected by the changes to Denominational Transport may wish to travel under the Vacant Seats Scheme. In order to reflect the increasing costs of providing passenger transport, and to bring the Council's charges in line with commercial operators, charges for the 2011/12 academic year are shown below. Charges for the 2010/11 academic year are also included.

Category of student	Current Termly Charge	New Termly Charge	Current Annual Charge	New Annual Charge
Students living more than three miles from school	£175	£220	£475	£660
Students living more than three miles from school from a low-income family	£87.50	£110	£262.50	£330
Students living less than three miles from school	£95	£110	£250	£330
Students living less than three miles from school from a low-income family	£47.50	£55	£142.50	£165

3) Monthly payments

As a result of Cabinet's recommendation on Thursday 14 April, parents not considered to be from a low-income family will be able to pay the annual Vacant Seats charge by Standing Order over a period of eight months. As soon as the Council's new financial system is rolled out, it is hoped that payment by direct debit will be available.

3) Passenger Assistants

From September 2011, passenger assistants will only be provided on vehicles conveying children to primary schools if one or more of the following applies:

- A passenger assistant is considered necessary because of the age of the children being transported (For example, where children from primary and secondary schools are being transported together);
- The transport is provided on a double deck vehicle (Such vehicles only ever serve primary schools if no other vehicle is available. For example, due to a breakdown of the normal vehicle);
- The pick-up / drop-off point at schools requires children to be escorted between the vehicle and the school premises (or vice versa) and it is not possible for the driver to carry out this task;
- There is a risk of behavioural problems occurring on the vehicle if a passenger assistant is not provided. Previous issues will be taken into account and schools will be asked to provide details of any children travelling on the vehicle where the removal of a passenger assistant could cause problems (e.g. vulnerable children).

Before a decision is taken on whether or not to remove a passenger assistant, the service will be individually assessed, with comments invited from the school. Parents and the school would be notified in advance of any changes being made.

4) Low-income families

Students considered to be from a low-income family are entitled to purchase a Vacant Seat at a reduced rate. The Council's current policy is that only those families in receipt of Income Support, Income Based Jobseekers Allowance, or The Guarantee Element of State Pension Credit are considered to be from a low-income family.

In order to bring our definition of a low-income family in line with the one included in the Education and Inspections Act 2006, from September 2011, if a student or their parent(s) are in receipt of any of the following benefits, we will consider them to be from a low-income family for transport purposes.

- Free School Meals (of which the following are qualifying benefits).
 - Families in receipt of Income Support;
 - Families in receipt of Income Based Jobseekers Allowance;
 - Families who receive Child Tax Credit and have an annual income below the relevant threshold;
 - Families who receive Employment and Support Allowance (Income related);
 - Families who receive The Guarantee Element of State Pension Credit;
 - Families who receive support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999;

- The maximum level of Working Tax Credit.

As a result of this change, a number of additional families will be able to purchase a Vacant Seat at a reduced rate.