

Public Consultation on the Warwickshire County Council Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Home to School Transport Service 2022

5 December 2022 – 26 February 2023

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Public Consultation on Warwickshire County Council's Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Home to School Transport

Introduction

In Warwickshire, we are working to provide children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) the best service experience. As part of the wider consideration of service we are looking at proposed changes to the SEND Home to School Transport Service.

We need views from as wide a range of people as possible including those who have experience of using the service.

Please read this document all the way through before sharing your views.

What is this consultation about?

This consultation seeks to gather views on changes that we are proposing to make to the SEND Home to School Transport Service. These are:

- changes specifically relating to the way that parents/carers apply for home to school transport;
- the way that transport options are identified for eligible children and young people;
- and clarifications to the Home to School and College Transport Policy.

Our vision for learners with SEND is that:

“All our children and young people have the right to lead a fulfilling life and to be part of their community. We want our learners with SEND to feel fully included in their local schools, wherever appropriate, by giving schools the resources and skills to meet their special educational needs.”

An important part of ensuring that we can deliver this vision, is to provide effective support to those children and young people who are eligible for home to school transport to travel to and from their educational setting safely.

Currently in Warwickshire, there are approximately 1,800 children and young people accessing SEND home to school transport.

The SEND Home to School Transport Service is responsible for processing all applications the Council receives for specialist home to school transport which includes checking eligibility against the published criteria, carrying out risk assessments, arranging transport providers, planning transport routes and providing independent travel training.

We would like to make improvements to the way SEND home to school transport is provided for children and young people in Warwickshire and would welcome views from stakeholders and the wider public on the following proposals:

- A simplified application process for parents and carers;
- A more consistent and transparent approach to determining transport options for children and young people who are eligible for home to school transport;
- Updates to the Home to School and College Transport Policy, to make this clearer and easier to understand

We would like to hear all views including levels of support or opposition and how you think the proposals might impact people in the community. We are also seeking views on any suggestions you may have to improve our proposals.

The consultation will inform the future application and assessment process for home to school transport for children and young people with SEND in Warwickshire, and the Home to School and College Transport Policy.

Please note that an Equalities Impact Assessment has been prepared and is available for you to review.

We would like to know whether you think the proposals will create any equalities or other impacts, and if so, what these might be and how you think they will affect you or other people. We would also like you to tell us if you have any ideas on how we could overcome or reduce these impacts.

The Equalities Impact Assessment will be updated after the consultation taking account of the feedback we receive.

The consultation will run from 5 December 2022 to 26 February 2023.

Why are we consulting?

In 2021, an external review of the SEND Home to School Transport Service was carried out. This involved engagement with key stakeholders: parents and carers, children and young people, Warwickshire County Council staff, Warwickshire Parent Carer Voice and transport providers. The review identified opportunities to make some changes with a focus on providing a better overall quality of service to families.

In developing these proposals, we have engaged with a range of people to understand the factors that would provide a better quality of service. These have included:

Who	How	When	What on / Outcome (What did we do as a result)
Parents/carers	Virtual engagement sessions Online Survey Face to Face Workshop Needs Assessment / Matrix testing	March 22 – May 22 March 22 June 22 November 22	The purpose of this engagement was to understand what Parents/ Carers views were on the changes being made. We took feedback on what parents/ carers thought about the project. Key outputs were as follows: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Assessment for transport needs to be done earlier 2. Parents would like to be considered in their child's assessment 3. Need for increased independence These have all been considered as part of the new proposal and are reflected in the process Warwickshire Parent Carer Voice are currently reviewing the needs assessment with the view that the content of the tool could be better
Warwickshire Parent Carer Voice	Virtual engagement session	November 22	The purpose of this engagement was to re-engage with Warwickshire parent carer voice following proposals being further developed. This gave an understanding of potential impacts and feedback specifically on the Needs Assessment Matrix.
Children and young people	Face to face workshops with children and young people	April 22	This engagement was facilitated by an external agency who specialise in working with young people to gather their views on transport and specifically independent travel training.
Warwickshire County Council staff	Virtual engagement sessions	March 22	
External transport providers	Virtual engagement sessions Online survey	May 22 March 22	This engagement was to provide an overview of the proposals and to gain a detailed understanding of the pressures that Transport Providers in Warwickshire face in the current climate as well as how the council can better help these external providers give a better service

What areas of the SEND Home to School Transport Service are we consulting on?

The following pages will set out the proposed changes, alongside the existing offer from the SEND Home to School Transport Service. This will be split into three sections covering the following proposals:

1. Change to the application process for parents and carers;

2. Introduction of a needs assessment to identify appropriate transport options for children and young people who are eligible for home to school transport;
3. Updates to wording in the Home to School and College Transport Policy to make this easier for parents and carers to understand.

1. Proposals to change the application process for SEND home to school transport

Current arrangements

Currently, if a parent/carer would like their child to be considered for SEND home to school transport they must submit an application. This form can be time-consuming and complicated for parents/carers to complete. It is also usually submitted only when the child or young person's school place has been confirmed. This can leave parents/carers with little time to prepare their child/young person for changes in routine or to put transport arrangements in place for when they start school.

The timing can also make it difficult for the transport team to plan transport efficiently and effectively, meaning options chosen may be more costly than necessary.

Proposed arrangements

The proposed change to the application process would remove the need for parents/carers to make a separate application for transport. Instead, they be asked to make an expression of interested for Home to School transport at the same time as applying for the child's school place:

- A simple 'Yes/No' tick box on the school application form would let us know that parents / carers wish their child to be considered for SEND home to school transport.
- Once the school/setting is named in the EHC Plan a check would be carried out to see if the child or young person is entitled to transport.
- If they are eligible, the specialist transport risk assessment team will work with children, young people and their families to assess the needs of the child or young person using the Needs Assessment Matrix. Transport options will then be presented to parents/carers.
- If the child or young person is not eligible for transport, their parent/carer will be informed and would be responsible for arranging suitable transport to get their child or young person to and from their school/setting.

Parent/carers would have a second opportunity to apply for home to school transport once the school placement has been confirmed by responding to the placement confirmation email.

A simplified application form would also be available on the County Council website all year round for any parents/carers who have not applied at either of the points

mentioned above.

The potential benefits to this proposed new application process are:

- A simpler and easier application process for parents/carers;
- Transport options presented to families in a timelier way;
- Parents/carers given longer to prepare their child or young person for changes in routine or to make alternative travel arrangements if required;
- More efficient planning of the transport service resulting in better value for money.

If approved, the new application process would be introduced in time for parents/carers applying for a school place for September 2024.

2. Introduction of a Needs Assessment Matrix (NAM)

The Needs Assessment Matrix (NAM) is a tool that has been designed to help identify potential travel options for a child or young person, based on their level of special educational need and/or disability.

The tool is meant to identify **how** we transport a child or young person to their educational setting, not **if** we will transport them. This means that it will not affect eligibility for transport. There are clear eligibility criteria that we must adhere to when deciding if a child or young person will be offered home to school transport – these are set out in the current Home to School Transport Policy.

Once the school/setting is named in the EHCP a check would be carried out for transport assistance. If they are eligible, the specialist transport risk assessment team will work with children, young people and their families to assess the needs of the child or young person using the Needs Assessment Matrix. Transport options will then be presented to parents/carers.

The NAM would also be used to make an assessment if a child or young person moves to a different educational setting mid-way through the year.

Transport options could include:

- Travel allowance or Direct Travel Payment
- Bus pass for public transport supported with independent travel training if necessary.
- Travel allowance for reimbursement of rail pass, supported with independent travel training if necessary
- School bus
- School bus with passenger assistant

- Taxi
- Taxi with passenger assistant
- Accessible/adapted vehicle with passenger assistant

The potential benefits of introducing the NAM are:

- A more inclusive, needs-based approach to supporting all children and young people;
- More opportunities to prepare young people for adulthood and to increase their independence;
- A more consistent and clear decision-making process to identify transport options.

We are seeking views on whether people agree with the introduction of this tool. The actual content within the tool does not form part of this consultation.

If approved, the NAM would be introduced in May 2023 and used to identify transport options for children and young people starting school in September 2023.

Children currently accessing home to school transport will not be immediately affected but will be reassessed under the new if they move educational settings or house after 1 May 2023.

3. Updates to the Home to School and College Transport Policy (2020)

The Home to School and College Transport Policy (2020) sets out our approach to providing transport to schools/educational settings for children and young people aged 3 to 19 years old (up to 25 years for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities).

We are proposing some updates to our current policy to make it clearer and easier to understand.

This includes the introduction of new wording as well as updates to current wording to provide clarification on the following:

- The Council's protocol following any damage that occurs to a transport operator's vehicle as a result of actions of a child or young person;
- Ensuring supported internships include apprenticeships (5.1)

- The allocation of passenger assistants for children and young people of compulsory school age with SEND;
- The use of Direct Travel Payments for children and young people of compulsory school age;

A summary of the proposed changes is set out in the supporting information document (below).

We want to hear your views on whether these updates have made our policy easier to understand.

If approved, the changes to the policy will take effect from May 2023.

Children currently accessing home to school transport will not be immediately affected but will be reassessed under the Home to School Transport Policy if they move educational settings or house after 1 May 2023.

Supporting Information

The following documents are available on www.warwickshire.gov.uk/ask to help you understand the proposals in more detail and to inform any response you wish to make:

- Easy-read version of consultation
- Consultation information leaflet
- Equality Impact Assessment
- Question and Answers
- Home to School Transport Policy 2020
- SEND Code of Practice, DfE 2015

How can I take part in the consultation?

You can respond to the consultation in the following ways:

Online: Complete the questionnaire by visiting www.warwickshire.gov.uk/ask

By post: You can return a paper copy of the questionnaire or a written response to; Warwickshire SEND & Inclusion Services, Shire Hall, Warwick, CV34 4SP.

By email: Send an electronic copy of the questionnaire or a written response to sendchange@warwickshire.gov.uk.

By phone: Contact the Family Information Service on 01926 742274.

We are currently arranging drop-in events and online broadcasts for you to find out more. These will be held in January 2023.

Once confirmed details of these events will be added to the consultation page on www.warwickshire.gov.uk/ask.

You can also phone the Family Information Service on 01926 742274 for details.

If you require a paper copy of the questionnaire or an alternative format, please contact us by phoning 01926 742274 or email. sendchange@warwickshire.gov.uk.

The questionnaire is anonymous and does not ask for any personal information.

Schools and other educational settings will be consulted through informal and formal meetings and events.

Contact Details

For further information on this consultation please contact:

Email: sendchange@warwickshire.gov.uk

Tel: Family Information Service on 01926 742274, Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm.

Closing date

The consultation will close at midnight on 26 February 2023.

What will happen after the consultation?

Following the consultation all feedback will be analysed and will be used to inform any changes made to the home to school transport assessment and application process, and any changes of wording in the Home to School and College Transport Policy document.