

Isle of Wight Council Home to School Transport Consultation

On Tuesday 10 June 2014, the Isle of Wight Council's Executive agreed that a consultation should be carried out on possible changes to the council's Home to School Transport Policy. The council is reviewing its transport policy following the opening of the Island Free School in September 2014 and the removal of priority areas for Island secondary schools. In addition, the council is facing huge financial challenges given the reduction in government funding and must consider the discretionary services it provides and look at alternative ways of delivering services. It is also good practice to review the Home to School Transport arrangements regularly to ensure that they provide the most cost effective service. Any changes will take effect from September 2015.

The Council has a statutory duty to provide the following services which will continue to be provided after September 2015.

Category	Statutory Entitlement
Pupils up to the age of 8 (year 3)	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school ¹ if it is more than 2 miles walking distance from home.
Pupils between the ages of 8 and 16 (years 4 to 11)	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school if it is more than 3 miles walking distance from home.
Pupils from low income families aged between 8 and 11 (years 4 to 6)	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school if it is more than 2 miles walking distance from home.
Pupils from low income families aged between 11 and 16 (years 7 to 11)	Free transport to one of the three nearest qualifying schools if it is between 2 and 6 miles away. Or the nearest school preferred by reason of a parent / carer's religion or belief that is more than 2 miles by the shortest available walking route and not more than 15 miles away.
Pupils with Special Educational Needs or disability or mobility problems	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school, where the pupil lives within the statutory walking distance from school and where due to their special needs or disability they are unable to walk in reasonable safety even when accompanied.
Pupils living within the statutory walking distance but who are unable to walk in safety to school because of the nature of the route	Free transport to the nearest qualifying school, where the pupil lives within the statutory walking distance from school and where, due to the nature of the route, they are unable to walk in reasonable safety even when accompanied.

As well as statutory transport, the Isle of Wight Council also provides discretionary transport. This is the area that is being consulted on. It is proposed that under the new policy, the council removes the discretionary transport and only provides the statutory level of home to school transport.

Under the proposals, those pupils currently entitled to services under discretionary provision would continue to receive the same service until the end of their current phase of schooling, providing there are no change of circumstance (for example change of address or school). If circumstances do change then the new policy will apply.

The three main areas of transitional arrangements are shown below:

1. Post 16 transport

The Isle of Wight Council currently provides subsidised transport to Post 16 students – a service currently used by just over 800 families. In the 2013/2014, the service cost the council £230,000.

The current cost of providing the service is £549.10 per year per pupil, with the student contributing £153.45 per year and the remaining £395.65 being met by the Isle of Wight Council.

Administering this service requires approving entitlement and the processing of payments made by parents, ending this service would lead to some efficiency savings although it would not lead to a reduction in posts.

The council will work with local transport operators to develop alternative options for Post 16 travel should subsidised provision be removed.

The recommendation is that this discretionary provision be removed to generate savings for the council.

2. Alternative school clause

The existing policy includes the clause that a pupil is entitled to receive free home to education transport to an alternative school (chosen by parental preference) that is also more than three miles from their home address, provided that the alternative school is not more than 3 miles from their priority area school.

Following the recent decision by the council to end the use of priority areas, in advance of the opening of the Free School and Studio School, this clause automatically becomes obsolete.

Examples of how school transport is currently provided with the clause.

A pupil living over three miles from Carisbrooke College and Medina College and in Carisbrooke's priority area might also receive transport to Medina (because the schools are just over two miles apart).

Students living in Ventnor currently receive transport to Medina College but because Christ the King College and Carisbrooke College are less than two miles from away from Medina College they can receive transport to them.

Under the proposals, pupils will only receive free transport to their nearest school (if over two miles from the home for primary and over three miles for secondary).

The recommendation is that this provision be removed as priority areas will no longer applicable and the introduction of two new schools into the education system

3. Transitional transport arrangements

There are some longstanding transitional transport arrangements in place following the school reorganisation that allow children in Chale to be transported to either Niton Primary or Brighstone CE Primary School. Currently children there are able to attend either of the named schools with a free home to school transport service. The option of both schools as a destination is the discretionary element.

The council is proposing that transport is provided to the child's nearest school in line with the rest of the Island, which over time would create a more efficient arrangement.

The recommendation is that this transitional arrangement be removed to bring Chale pupils in line with the rest of the Island.