

A summary of responses to Cheshire East Council's

School Transport Policy Consultation 2023



Executive Summary

Introduction

Between 15 November and 22 December 2023 Cheshire East Council consulted on several proposed changes to its school transport policies. These changes were proposed to enable the council to continue to deliver its statutory duties in a cost-effective manner, at a time when savings are needed across all services run by the council.

In total there were 444 consultation responses, including 439 online survey responses and 5 email responses.

A large majority of survey respondents, 88%, were parents or carers of a child or young person who uses school transport.

Survey respondent feedback on the proposed changes

Proposal to make the application process “digital by default”

63% of survey respondents supported the proposal to make the application process “digital by default”, 17% opposed this.

Those expressing opposition to this proposal felt there should be equality of access, that some don’t have internet access, are not able to use computers, and require support when completing application forms.

Proposal to make people reapply for travel support whenever there is a change in the phase of education

29% of respondents supported the proposal to make people reapply for travel support whenever there is a change in the phase of education, 54% opposed this.

Those expressing opposition to this proposal felt it was unnecessary and a waste of time, that needs are lifelong, that this adds extra stress for parents and creates more paperwork for the council. They felt people should only have to reapply under certain conditions e.g. when moving house or changing schools.

Proposal around post-16 travel support

49% of survey respondents felt the council should “continue with the current parental contribution and increase the charge” for travel support for post-16 students.

25% felt the council should “only offer a personal travel budget, based on individual home to college mileage, for all eligible students to enable parent/carers to make their own travel arrangements”.

Just 3% felt the council should “end all travel support for post-16 students”.

Survey respondents felt that as children have to remain in education until age 18, that school transport support should continue until then. Many also felt this support should be free instead of being charged, especially for those in rural areas, or for those a long way away from the students setting. Some suggested that if support is stopped, or increased significantly, some would not be able to continue to send their child to school.

Large proportions of survey respondents (between 71% and 79%) felt the following 4 of the exceptions for post-16 travel support should be considered:

- If a specialist vehicle is required for accessibility
- When students medical needs would generally require a Passenger Assistant
- Only if most suitable appropriate placement is a long distance from home
- When family income is low

A large proportion of survey respondents, 65%, felt that when dealing with increases in charges for post-16 travel, “charges should be increased and reviewed every 2 years”. Just 9% felt “charges should be increased and adjusted by inflation each year and backdated to 2018”.

Proposal relating to spare seats and charging

66% of survey respondents felt the spare seat scheme should continue, even as a non-statutory provision, 10% disagreed.

42% of survey respondents agreed that charges for spare seats should be increased and standardised in-line with other school transport charges, 30% disagreed.

A large proportion of survey respondents, 62%, felt that when dealing with increases in charges for charges for spare seats, “charges should be increased and reviewed every 2 years”. Just 9% felt “charges should be increased and adjusted by inflation each year and backdated to 2018”.

When asked to comment respondents felt spare seat provision should continue with no extra charge for those that need it, and the consequences of removing or increasing charges for this service would be that some would not be able to continue to send their child to school.

Proposal to collect payments for school transport by regular direct debit

75% of survey respondents supported the council's proposal to collect charges monthly by direct debit, 7% opposed this proposal.

Proposal to remove travel assistance for under 5-year-olds

31% of survey respondents supported the removal of travel support for under 5 year olds, 48% opposed this proposal.

Those that opposed this proposal suggested that transport should be provided regardless of age, and that pre-school starts as early as 3 and 4 years old. They felt this proposal would be discriminatory and inappropriate, and that early years education would be impacted if these children cannot get to their preferred setting.

Some were concerned about children under 5 using transport without parent/carer assistance.

Proposal to update policies around school transport eligibility

Some survey respondents expressed opposition to the council changing school transport eligibility criteria based on parental placement preference, feeling that parents/carers know better what a child needs than the Local Authority. They felt this policy change could impact on the education of the child and the ability for children to go to school.

Some felt that Foster Carers should be treated the same as parent/carers, and that the proposal discriminates against foster children, while others felt foster carers are paid a salary and should cover the costs of transport.

General improvements to travel to school

When survey respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a list of suggested ways of improving school transport:

- 83% agreed with “encouraging transport operators to introduce more bus services where there is demand, 8% disagreed
- 72% agreed with “working with schools / colleges to enable them to increase capacity within their own fleet of vehicles”, 13% disagreed
- 51% agreed with “developing a programme for independent travel training”, 22% disagreed

Final comments

Final comments from survey respondents about the consultation included that:

- This service is vital and the council should look elsewhere for savings, that the council should “leave us alone”
- SEN children’s needs must be the priority, and not saving money
- Central government should be lobbied for extra funds

- The removal of services, or increases in charges, could have significant negative impacts on the lives of the children and families who will be affected

Finally, survey respondents suggested the service needed to be made more efficient.

Email feedback

5 emails received during the consultation covered the following topics:

- Happy with current arrangements
- Believes the cost of school transport is currently too high and should be reduced
- Queries what the implications of the proposals are
- Feels there are a lack of safe walking routes to the nearest school
- Expresses the difficulty in getting spare seats

Conclusions

It is clear from consultation feedback that any changes to this service may have an impact on some families living in Cheshire East who rely on school transport assistance.

Proposals that were well supported

Proposals put forward during the consultation which seemed to be well supported included the proposal to make the application process “digital by default” (63% support, 17% oppose), and the proposal to collect payments for school transport by regular direct debit (75% support, 7% oppose).

Though these proposals should strongly be considered for adoption, they should be implemented with regard to those who may be adversely affected by these changes, particularly those that don’t have internet access, or those that struggle to use computers without assistance – mitigations must be put in place for these people.

Proposals which were strongly opposed

The proposals that seemed to be strongly opposed included the proposal to make people reapply for travel support whenever there is a change in the phase of education (29% support, 54% oppose), and the proposal to remove travel assistance for under 5-year-olds (31% support, 48% oppose). Consideration should be given as to whether these proposals are taken forward.

There also seemed to be opposition to proposals to change policies around school transport eligibility based on parental preference for school setting, and arrangements for Foster Carers, therefore any proposed changes should ensure that they are compliant with latest guidance.

Proposals with mixed results

A large proportion of respondents indicated that they felt post-16 travel support should continue, particularly given some students have to remain in education until the age of 18. Furthermore, a larger proportion of respondents felt the council should continue with the current contribution and increase the charge, rather than only offering personal travel budgets, but there was significant support for both options.

A large proportion of respondents also felt the spare seats scheme should continue, though there were mixed results on whether charges for spare seats should be increased and standardised in-line with other school transport charges.

For both these proposals some respondents felt they should be provided free, with no charge at all. Of those who felt a charge was acceptable, large proportions of respondents for both these proposals preferred charges being increased every 2 years, rather than being backdated to 2018.

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Introduction

Purpose of the consultation

Between 15 November and 22 December 2023 Cheshire East Council consulted on several proposed changes to its school transport policies.

These changes were proposed to enable the council to continue to deliver its statutory duties in a cost-effective manner, at a time when savings are needed across all services run by the council.

The full material that was consulted on is outlined in Appendix 1.

Consultation methodology and response

Consultation responses were invited from anyone who wished to respond – the consultation was not run as a referendum nor as a statistically robust random sample survey. Results should therefore be treated with caution and should be interpreted within the context in which they were gathered.

The consultation was promoted through direct contact via email with all those who might be affected by proposals. Responses were also invited from anyone else who wished to respond.

In total there were 444 consultation responses, including:

- 439 online survey responses
- 5 email responses

Reading this report

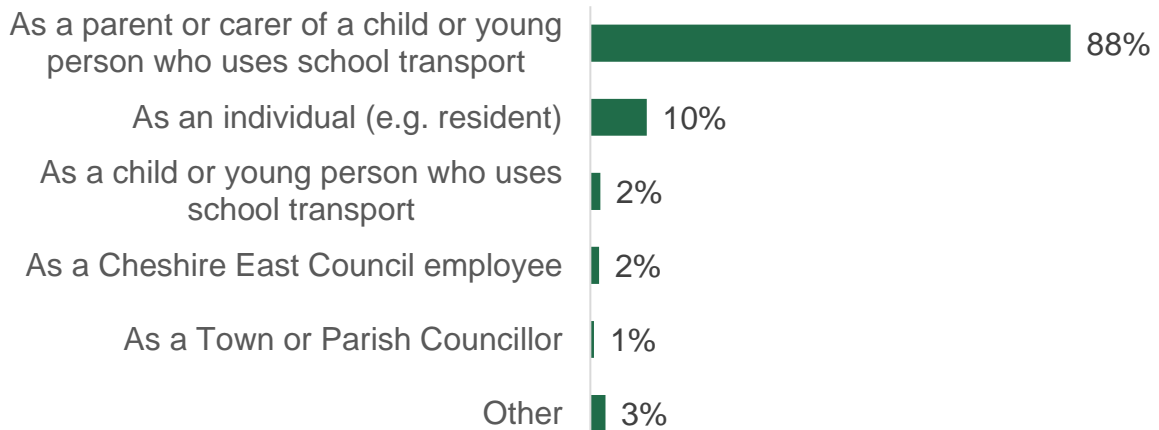
The main sections of this report contain an analysis of the survey responses received during the consultation.

Feedback received via email is summarised in the appendices.

About the survey respondents

A large majority of survey respondents, 88%, were parents or carers of a child or young person who uses school transport. Percentages in the chart below may not add to 100% as respondents could choose as many answer options as they wished to.

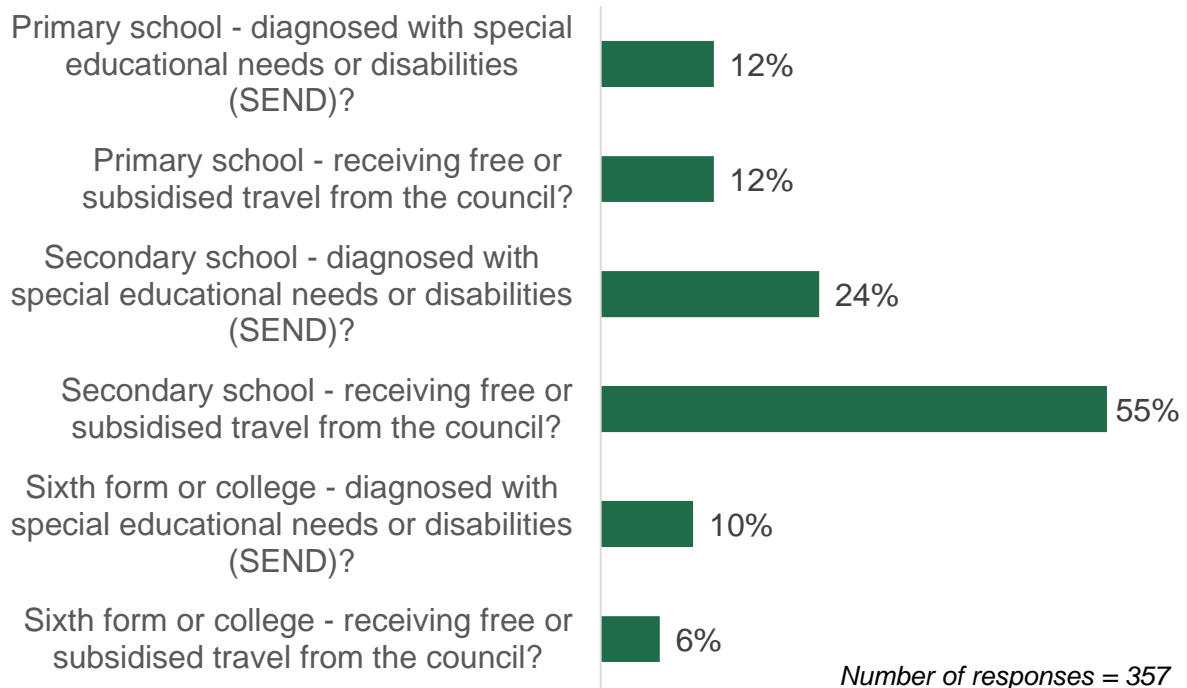
How are you responding to this survey?



Number of responses = 438

Of those responding on behalf of children and young people that use school transport, 55% were responding on behalf of a young person in secondary school who receives free or subsidised travel from the council.

Do you, or do any of the children / young people you are parent or carer for, attend any of the following? *Those that use school transport only*



Number of responses = 357

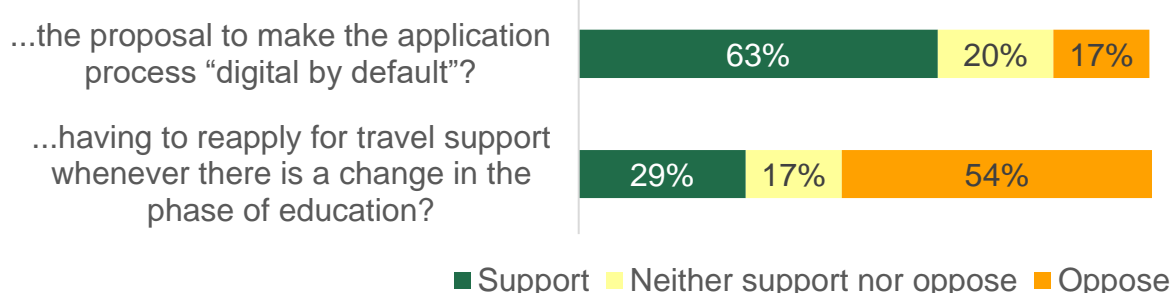
Proposal to amend the application process

Support and opposition to proposals

63% of survey respondents supported the proposal to make the application process “digital by default”, 17% opposed this.

29% of survey respondents supported the proposal to make people reapply for travel support whenever there is a change in the phase of education, 54% opposed this.

How strongly do you support or oppose...



Number of responses between 410 and 412

Comments on proposals to amend the application process

Survey respondents were asked for comments about the proposals to amend the application process.

In total, 215 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to making people reapply for travel support whenever there is a change in the phase of education	152
This is unnecessary and as waste of time, especially when children are staying in the same setting	46
Needs are lifelong, if a child needs transport they need transport	24
Puts extra stress on SEN parents who already have too much on	23
This is too much paperwork for parents and carers	19
You should only need to reapply under certain circumstances e.g. moving house, changing schools, moving to post 16 education	15
This doesn't save money and is extra work/admin for council	15
A child's transport needs are the same even if transitioned	6
It should be parental choice to opt out if they wish to do so	3
This is not needed at every phase change	1
Opposition to Digital by Default	32

Disagree with digital by default. There should be equality of access. What about those without computer or internet access, or for those not tech savvy	13
You need to allow for non-generic circumstances, or allow for individual cases and special requirements which is more difficult digitally	9
The council needs to provide support for those needing help completing forms. They need a point of contact	6
Some SEND parents may also have learning difficulties and find this difficult	4

Comments on the application process	13
The council needs to send reminders, and communicate well especially if going digital by default	6
Online applications need to be easy to complete	3
Yearly reviews are required	2
Decisions should be made more quickly	1
Digital by default might enable a quicker and clearer decision process	1

Other comments	18
Parents rely on this transport provision, the cost is prohibitive if withdrawn	6
It's not parents' fault specialist schools aren't close by	4
The council has a responsibility and duty of care to provide this service	3
As long as this doesn't mean more cars on the road	2
Taxi services are not appropriate for SEND / autistic children. Drivers lack an understanding of needs	1
School travel should be free for foster children	1
Focus on not wasting money e.g. taxis with only one child in	1

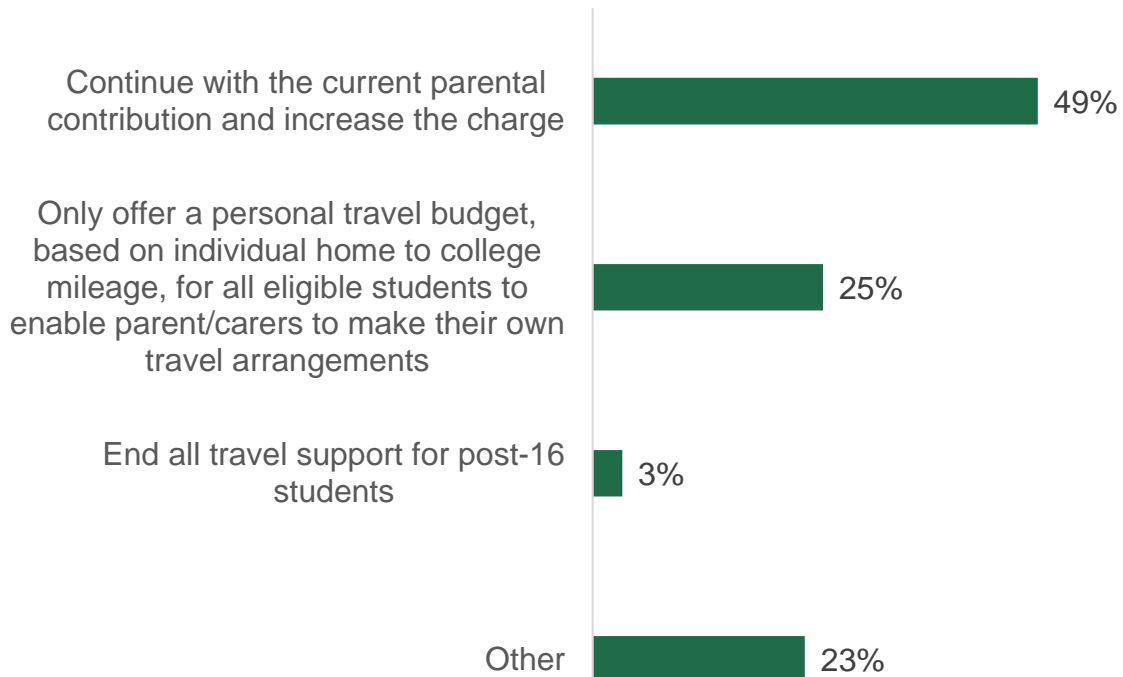
Proposal around post-16 travel support

What should post-16 travel support look like?

When survey respondents were asked how the council should continue offering travel support for post-16 students:

- 49% felt the council should “continue with the current parental contribution and increase the charge”
- 25% felt the council should “only offer a personal travel budget, based on individual home to college mileage, for all eligible students to enable parent/carers to make their own travel arrangements”
- 3% felt the council should “end all travel support for post-16 students”.

Indicate how you think the council should continue offering travel support for post-16 students:



Number of responses = 402

23% of survey respondents gave an “other” answer to this question, with a total of 90 other alternatives being suggested. These other suggestions have been summarised in the below table:

Other answers - Please indicate how you think the council should continue offering travel support for post-16 students:	No. of comments
It should be free. It is now compulsory to stay in education until age 18. There should not be a charge for post-16 students to use school transport to their nearest post-16 education option. There is a legal requirement for them to be in education or work and therefore this	38

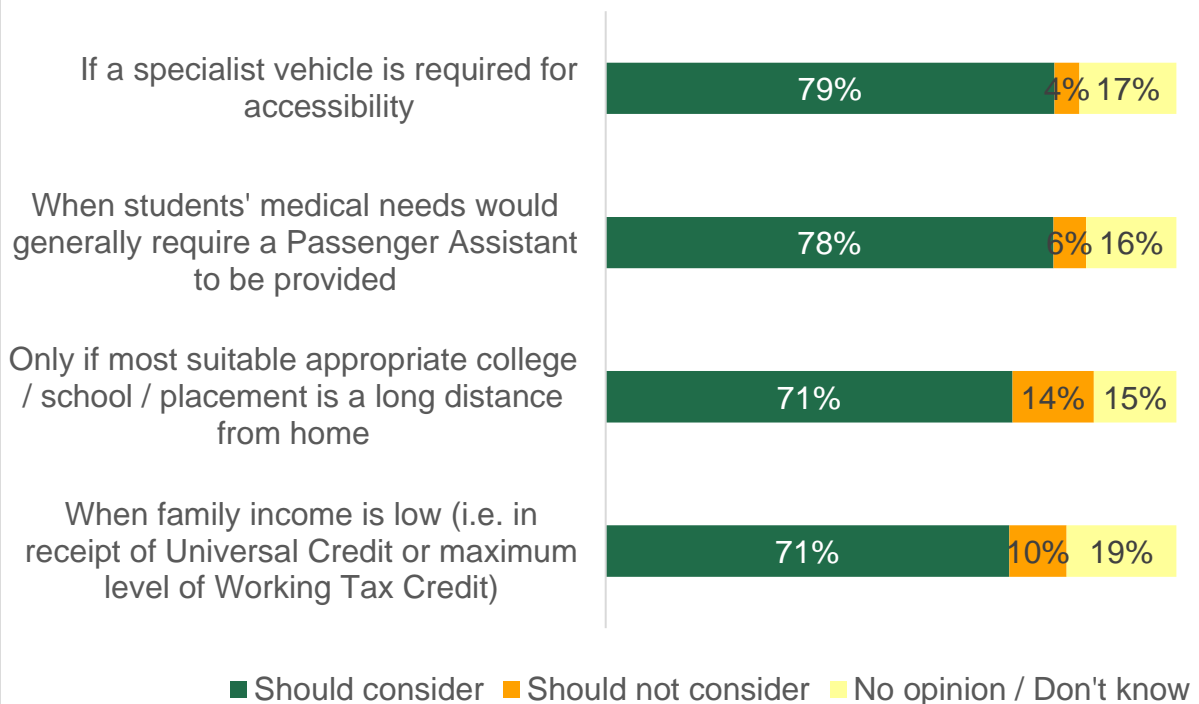
should be facilitated by the council, especially where there is no public transport available. If the government insist all kids stay in education until 18 then the government should subsidise the council. Explain how charging for post 16 transport when it is now compulsory is not massively discriminatory and a disincentive for young people most likely to be encountering barriers to learning.	
Continue with the current parental contribution but do not increase the charge. Post 16 education is compulsory; increases will be difficult for families to manage.	19
Offer a combination of options 1 and 2 - offer a choice of either parental contribution or the personal travel budget, as that would which allow parents to choose based on their individual needs.	8
Not sure / Not enough information to give an opinion.	7
Encourage more use of bus services. Public transport is not safe enough to send children on.	5
The £9,840 figure seems extortionate. If you are paying nearly £10,000 per pupil for a 39 week term you have to consider the commercial contracts in place and find efficiency there before charging rates payers yet more money. Review the amount taxi tenders are putting forward which is currently excessive. I am not sure you have explained the costs correctly, surely it is not costing the council £9840 per pupil per year. This would be £50 per day. It would be cheaper to buy each child a taxi.	4
Build more SEN schools locally, so parents don't have to send their children a long way. There are no local alternatives.	3
Continue with the current parental contribution but increase in-line with inflation.	2
Ending support should not be an option, it is a lifeline for parents.	2
The solution would depend on individual circumstances.	2

Post-16 travel support exceptions

Large proportions of survey respondents felt that all 4 of the exceptions for post-16 travel support should be considered:

- 79% felt the exception “If a specialist vehicle is required for accessibility” should be considered
- 78% felt the exception “When students' medical needs would generally require a Passenger Assistant to be provided” should be considered
- 71% felt the exception “Only if most suitable appropriate college / school / placement is a long distance from home” should be considered
- 71% felt the exception “When family income is low” should be considered

Should the council consider any of the following exceptions for post-16 travel support?

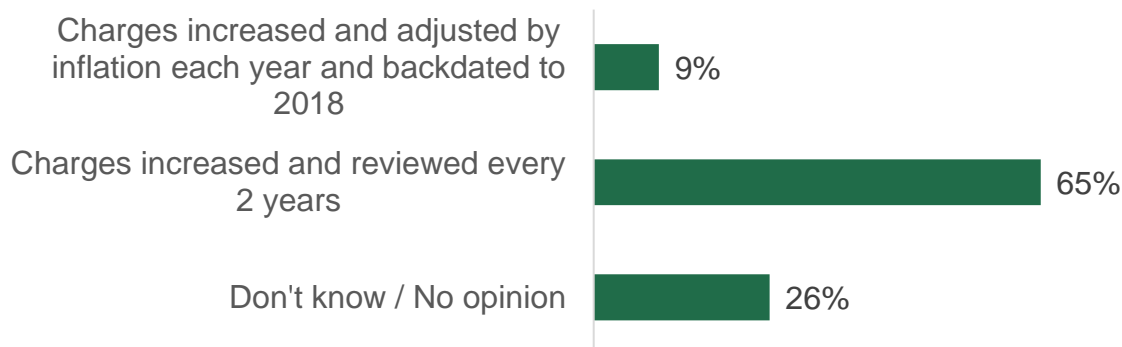


Number of responses between 385 to 393

Dealing with increases in charges for post-16 travel support

A large proportion of survey respondents, 65%, felt that when dealing with increases in charges for post-16 travel, “charges should be increased and reviewed every 2 years”. Just 9% felt “charges should be increased and adjusted by inflation each year and backdated to 2018”.

Generally speaking, how would you prefer us to deal with an increase in charges for travel support for post-16 students?



Number of responses = 391

Comments on proposals relating to post-16 travel support

Survey respondents were asked for comments about the proposal to amend travel support for post-16 students.

In total, 190 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Travel support for post-16 students must continue		96
Children should remain in education until 18, therefore school transport should continue until age 18		19
All post 16 school transport should continue for free		19
Post-16 transport is essential, especially to those in rural areas, and given the lack of adequate public transport		17
Free school transport should always be available for SEND / special needs children		14
Parents shouldn't be charged just because the setting that meets their needs is far away and needs transport provision		14
These families are already disadvantaged as it is, this is a charge for being disabled		7
The council should be encouraging / supporting education		6
Potential consequences of stopping post-16 travel support		38
Our family is already struggling financially and will not be able to afford it		15
Our child might not be able to continue in education as a result, this disadvantages those who can't afford to pay for transport		14

We would have to give up work in order to transport child or claim benefits	6
Parents are already under immense pressure and this will only add to stress	3

Other comments	56
Comments related to the questionnaire, its questions and answer options	10
Do not backdate charges to 2018, this would be unfair	8
Come up with other solutions: subsidise public transport instead of providing school transport, charge according to actual travel costs (i.e. distance to school)	8
Do not increase charges excessively - only marginal if you have to	7
Any charges should be means tested	5
Review transport provider costs - Costs per child seem very high	4
Not currently eligible for free transport anyway	4
Changes should be well communicated with polite reminders	3
The council will have to increase the mileage allowance to cover the rise in fuel then	2
Allow monthly direct debits to help spread costs	2
This proposal is likely to be challenged	2
This proposal does not make any sense	1

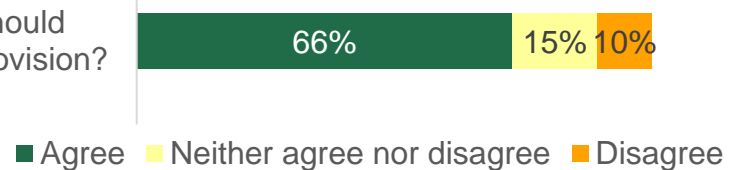
Proposal relating to spare seats and charging

Should the spare seat scheme continue

66% of survey respondents felt the spare seat scheme should continue, even as a non-statutory provision, 10% disagreed.

How strongly do you agree or disagree that...

...the spare seat scheme should continue as a non-statutory provision?



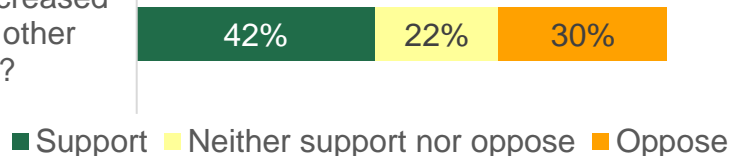
Number of responses = 370

Dealing with increases in charges for spare seats

42% of survey respondents agreed that charges for spare seats should be increased and standardised in-line with other school transport charges, 30% disagreed.

How strongly do you support or oppose that...

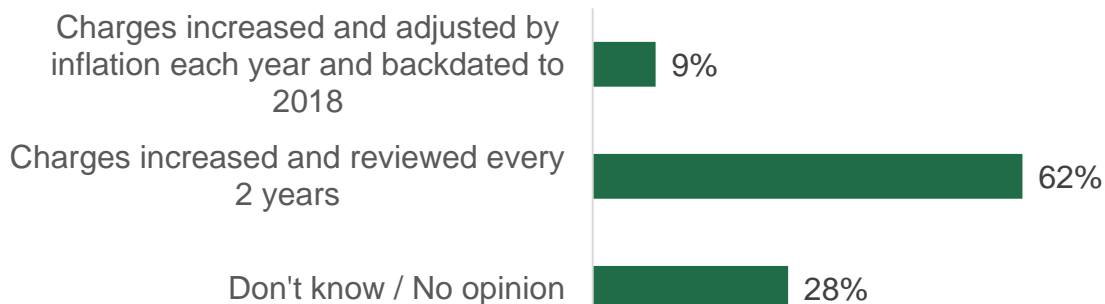
...charges for spare seats be increased and standardised in-line with other school transport charges?



Number of responses = 381

A large proportion of survey respondents, 62%, felt that when dealing with increases in charges for charges for spare seats, "charges should be increased and reviewed every 2 years". Just 9% felt "charges should be increased and adjusted by inflation each year and backdated to 2018".

Generally speaking, how would you prefer us to deal with an increase in charges for spare seats?



Number of responses = 405

Comments on proposals relating to the spare seat scheme

Survey respondents were asked for comments about the proposal relating to spare seats and charging.

In total, 102 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Spare seat provision should continue with no extra charge	35
Transport / spare seats should be provided for those that need it	9
There should be no price increases or charges for spare seats	8
Spare seats should be available for any child	6
This discriminates against / disadvantages those living in rural areas	6
This is unfair and discriminates against/ disadvantages disabled children and those in need	4
Spare seats should be available for other students	1
Spare seats should be discounted for those who don't qualify	1

Potential consequences of price increases for spare seats	34
We can't afford an increase in charges, we're already struggling financially, especially with the cost of living crisis	15
If you increase charges then it may prohibit people paying and reduce income for the council	7
This will impact on my child being able to attend a suitable school	9
This may lead to parents having to give up work in order to transport children	3

Comments on how to increase charges	12
Do not backdate inflation to 2018, that would be harsh, 5 years would be too much	7
Any increases going forward should be in line with inflation	2
Any charges should be means tested	2
Review charges every 2 years	1

Supportive of the proposal	8
The proposal makes sense and should go ahead if appropriate and if it makes financial sense	7
In support, as long as proposals don't impact on existing users	1

Other comments	13
Public transport would work out cheaper, people shouldn't be paying more than public transport fares	4
Advertise the service more, maximise spare seat capacity	2
Not currently eligible for spare seats anyway	1
This will increase the number of cars on the road, and have an environmental impact	1

There aren't ever any spare seats	1
Taxis aren't necessarily appropriate for a child with issues e.g. autism	1
Allow payments via direct debit	1
Where does the money go? Back into transport costs?	1
More information on spare seat charges is needed	1

Proposal to collect payments for school transport by regular direct debit

75% of survey respondents supported the council's proposal to collect charges monthly by direct debit, 7% opposed this proposal.

How strongly do you support or oppose...

...the council's proposal to collect charges monthly by direct debit?



Number of responses = 400

Comments on proposals relating to paying by direct debit

Survey respondents were asked for comments about the proposal to collect charges monthly by direct debit.

In total, 63 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Supportive of the proposal	29
Direct Debit helps parents budget / spread the costs	19
Make sense if it reduces admin costs	6
Agree	2
Current system is difficult to use / it's easy to forget / miss payments	2
Different payment frequencies preferred	13
Needs to be an option / alongside termly / yearly payment options	10
Need to be flexible payment dates to match different paydays	1
Need a weekly payment option	1
Prefer just one payment	1
Queries about the proposal	5
If it reduces admin costs then provide a discount to parents	2
How are we refunded if we end up in credit?	1
Need an option for part-time travel needs	1
What if child is ill - can't use transport / are we still charged for those days	1
Opposed to the proposal	8
Do not want to pay via Direct Debit	4
Need an alternative for those who can't pay via Direct Debit	4

Opposed to any charges	8
Disagree with any charges for children 16 to 18	5
Disagree with any charges for parents of SEND children / council should cover	2
Should be means tested / no charges for those on low income	1

Proposal to remove travel assistance for under 5-year-olds

31% of survey respondents supported the removal of travel support for under 5 year olds, 48% opposed this proposal.

How strongly would you support or oppose...

...the removal of travel support for under 5 year olds?

31%

21%

48%

■ Support ■ Neither support nor oppose ■ Oppose

Number of responses = 366

Comments on proposals relating to travel assistance for under 5-year-olds

Survey respondents were asked for comments about the proposal to remove travel support for under 5 year olds.

In total, 119 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Opposition to the removal of travel assistance for under 5-year-olds	96
Early years education will be impacted if child can't get to school e.g. if parents can't drive, they are taking other children or have no car). Reception class starts at 4 years old, sometimes 3	32
Transport should be provided if a child needs a specialist setting regardless of age, this primarily impacts SEN children	15
Children of this age are in genuine need, a child under 5 wouldn't need transport otherwise	11
This discriminates against / impacts those who rely on the service	10
It is difficult to find an appropriate setting as is, they are usually far away therefore transport is needed e.g. settings are not in walking distance and there is no public transport	8
These families are already disadvantaged, and would be even more so	6
This proposal is immoral, shameful and ill thought out	5
It will impact children later in life if early years education is missed	5
This primarily relates to SEN children	4
Concerns about children under 5 using transport	14
It is inappropriate, worrying and preposterous to put a young child in a taxi. This raises concerns around safeguarding, child anxieties, taxi drivers not	5

being equipped to look after children, children being uncomfortable with other children	
Children under 5 should be taken to school by their parent/carer	4
Don't understand why a child under 5 would need transport to school	4
They are too young to travel alone	1
Other comments	9
Every family should be means tested and assessed on their own merit	9

Proposal to update policies around school transport eligibility

Survey respondents were asked for any comments about potential changes to School Travel eligibility criteria based on parent preference and foster carer status.

In total, 78 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

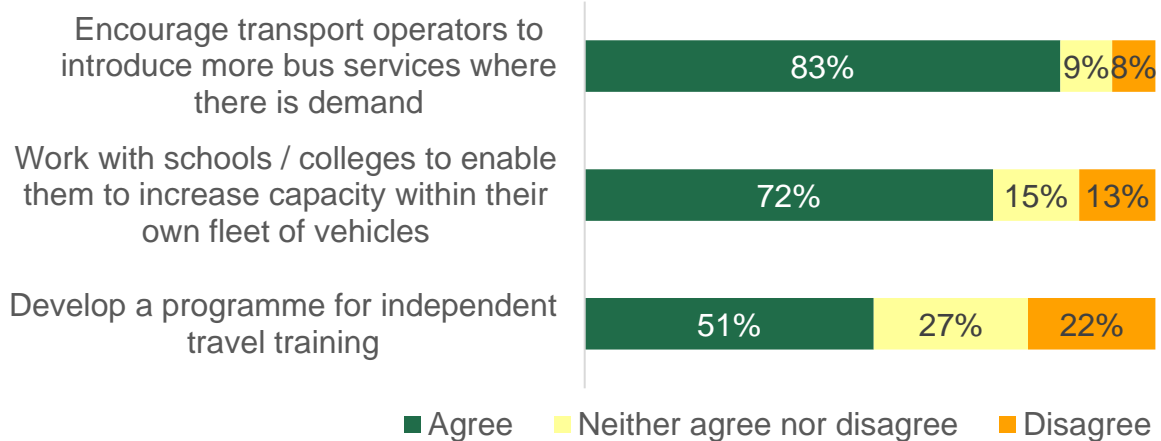
Opposition to the council ignoring parental preference	30
Parental preference is usually because it's the best option for the child. Parents know where and what is best for the child, not the Local Authority	14
Parents should not have transport withdrawn for rejecting a school the Local Authority has named	11
This is wrong, mean, callous and cruel	4
Transport should be provided for disabled and SEN children, even if it is parental preference	1
Potential consequences of ignoring parental preference	16
This will impact on education and the ability for children to go to school. Parents might be unable to take child to school if they have no car, don't drive, there is no public transport or parents can't afford it	8
This is discriminatory and punishes the disabled	6
This is a false economy and has wider implications for the system if children can't go to their preferred schools	2
Support for the council ignoring parental preference	8
Transport should just only be provided for catchment areas or the nearest schools	5
This is not about parental preference it's about wherever is nearest	2
Free School Transport should only apply when it's only parental preference	1
Comments about Foster Carers specifically	9
Treat foster children the same. This discriminates against foster children. The child's needs are not foster parents' needs. The council should support foster carers	6
Foster carers are paid and should cover transport costs in salary	3
Other comments	31
Individuals should be means tested, look at individual circumstances	9
School might not be in walking distance / rural	9
Transport should be provided (if need specialist setting) regardless of age	9
Make the criteria, eligibility, wording clearer	3
Why does this council charge when others don't?	1

General improvements to travel to school

When survey respondents were asked whether they agreed or disagreed with a list of suggested ways of improving school transport:

- 83% agreed with “encouraging transport operators to introduce more bus services where there is demand, 8% disagreed
- 72% agreed with “working with schools / colleges to enable them to increase capacity within their own fleet of vehicles”, 13% disagreed
- 51% agreed with “developing a programme for independent travel training”, 22% disagreed

How strongly do you agree or disagree the council should do each of the following to try and improve travel to school?



Number of responses between 385 and 420

Comments on general improvements to travel to school

Within the survey, consultees were asked if they had any suggestions as to how the council can promote healthier and greener options for getting children to school.

In total, 101 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Suggestions for improving transport	73
Improve bus services, routes and timetables, so therefore fewer cars will be used	20
Promote cycling and walking more, have better/safer provision for cycling and walking	19
Provide school bus services, so therefore fewer cars are used	11
Have more electric buses and vehicles	7
Enforce parking restrictions around schools and crossing points. Improve road safety around schools	6

Maximise occupancy of taxis and mini buses	5
Have cheaper / subsidised fares on public transport (school and public)	4
Promote and incentivise parent car pooling / sharing	1

SEN specific comments	28
Transport for SEN children is about their needs, not about being greener and healthier. Travel training may not be appropriate	11
Increase SEN capacity at local schools, have more local SEN schools	9
Have effective and properly trained support assistants for transport so SEN children can use	4
Have more reliable SEN transport - missed and late service impacts the mental health of children	2
School transport should be free	2

Final comments

Survey respondents were asked if they had any final comments to make about the consultation.

In total, 142 comments made in response to this question have been analysed, and these comments have been grouped into categories and summarised below.

Do not make changes, this service is vital	76
This service is vital, (free) transport is essential. Look elsewhere to save money, do not charge us, do not remove this service	27
SEN children's needs must be the priority, not saving money	19
We and our children have enough to deal with. We didn't ask for disabled children, stop punishing us	11
School Transport is essential with the lack of local transport provision	10
Children are required to be in education until 18, so therefore school transport should still be provided for post 16 (SEN) children	9

Comments on school transport funding	5
Lobby / challenge central government on funding	3
Do not hike prices too much	2

Potential consequences of proposals	10
This will impact my child's ability to attend school, and will impact their education	7
We are already facing financial hardship, and this will impact our finances further	3

Improve service efficiency	36
Provide a consistent and better service to get children to school on time	10
Have longer contracts with transport providers, as change causes upset with children and adds admin time / costs)	8
Negotiate cheaper transport provider costs	4
Incentivise parents to use car if eligible for transport. Make mileage payments and the allowance more attractive	4
Give specific disability training for assistants, drivers and escorts	4
Make the application process quicker, ensure arrangements are in place before term starts	3
Have taxis only for severely disabled children	1
Disappointment with the appeals process	1
Digitise free school passes	1

Environmental comments	8
Forcing more car use is not environmentally friendly	4
Promote and prioritise safer walking and cycling	3

Encourage school bus use	1
Other comments	7
Individual applications should be means tested	4
Comment on the questionnaire	2
Reduce car parking charges for parents who don't qualify or have to use car	1

Conclusions

It is clear from consultation feedback that any changes to this service may have an impact on some families living in Cheshire East who rely on school transport assistance.

Proposals that were well supported

Proposals put forward during the consultation which seemed to be well supported included the proposal to make the application process “digital by default” (63% support, 17% oppose), and the proposal to collect payments for school transport by regular direct debit (75% support, 7% oppose).

Though these proposals should strongly be considered for adoption, they should be implemented with regard to those who may be adversely affected by these changes, particularly those that don’t have internet access, or those that struggle to use computers without assistance – mitigations must be put in place for these people.

Proposals which were strongly opposed

The proposals that seemed to be strongly opposed included the proposal to make people reapply for travel support whenever there is a change in the phase of education (29% support, 54% oppose), and the proposal to remove travel assistance for under 5-year-olds (31% support, 48% oppose). Consideration should be given as to whether these proposals are taken forward.

There also seemed to be opposition to proposals to change policies around school transport eligibility based on parental preference for school setting, and arrangements for Foster Carers, therefore any proposed changes should ensure that they are compliant with latest guidance.

Proposals with mixed results

A large proportion of respondents indicated that they felt post-16 travel support should continue, particularly given some students have to remain in education until the age of 18. Furthermore, a larger proportion of respondents felt the council should continue with the current contribution and increase the charge, rather than only offering personal travel budgets, but there was significant support for both options.

A large proportion of respondents also felt the spare seats scheme should continue, though there were mixed results on whether charges for spare seats should be increased and standardised in-line with other school transport charges.

For both these proposals some respondents felt they should be provided free, with no charge at all. Of those who felt a charge was acceptable, large proportions of

respondents for both these proposals preferred charges being increased every 2 years, rather than being backdated to 2018.

Appendix 1 – Email feedback

In total 5 emails were received during the consultation.

All emails have been published verbatim below in the date order they were received and have been anonymised to protect the identity of the individual sending the response, unless the individual is a Member of Parliament or local Councillor. Brief summaries of the content of each email have also been provided.

Email response #1

Date email received: 23/11/2023

Summary of content:

Happy with current arrangements. Has a complaint about too many students being transported in one taxi.

Full Email:

Good morning.

My son travels by taxi from [redacted] to [redacted].

I am generally very happy with the arrangements apart from one very important issue. 4 students travel in a saloon car which means that 3 are cramped in the back seat. [Redacted], my son, is quite stocky so feels squashed in the back seat. He also gets verbal abuse from another student if he is using his iPad to draw as his elbow digs into her. [Redacted] often needs to draw to regulate his behaviour before college.

I really don't think that it is appropriate for 4 SEN students to travel in a saloon car on such a long journey.

I look forward to your comments.

Many thanks.

Email response #2

Date email received: 23/11/2023

Summary of content:

Believes the cost of school transport is currently too high, and should be reduced. Suggests setting up more cycle ways and cycling networks, with cycle leaders in place, to provide a greener and more economical travel alternative.

Full Email:

In response to the recent email I would like to make some comments.

The consultation should look to reduce the cost for families. It currently costs me £1400 to send my children to school!

Those who don't live close to a high school are in essence penalised financially!

My children attend [redacted], yes [redacted] is our closer school but we are still over 3 miles from there and would not have been accepted as my children did not go to a feeder school – something we did not consider when applying for primary schools!

My children and their friends who also get the bus to [redacted] are very capable of cycling they previously cycled to [redacted] Primary from [redacted] on a regular basis, but the [redacted] is very muddy and unlit in the direction of [redacted] unlike the other way which has lights and is well surfaced.

I would love Cheshire east to put some resources together to improve cycle to school access especially [redacted] - [redacted] - [redacted]. It would tick environment boxes, health boxes and reduce financial costs. Even better would be the employment of a responsible adult, just like a bus driver is required to drive the bus – how good would it be to have a group leader to supervise a mass cycle to school along [redacted]. It could have set collection points at set times. A bus driver without the bus – and all the associated environmental and financial costs.

If you are not sure about this why not run a pilot scheme or reach out to discuss further. I know a lot of children attending (past and present) are pro cycling and green travel as we set up our own carbon free commute group. Wouldn't it be good if Cheshire east council, parents and high schools could set up a similar scheme, children are the future and if we normalise cycling to school this will be something that goes forward into future generations.

If you are looking to make changes please think outside the box and consider the above changes – they are a little bit different but really solve a lot of the problems.

Thank you.

Email response #3

Date email received: 05/12/2023

Summary of content:

Queries what the implications of the proposals are.

Full Email:

Hello,

I have received an email asking for my comments as to changes to the travel system regarding charging for travel.

My children receive a bus pass currently because the walking route to my school (whilst being really close) is incredibly unsafe. Is the plan to charge me for this service going forward?

The same issue will apply next year when my oldest son will start [redacted] (the closest high school to us).

Email response #4

Date email received: 05/12/2023

Summary of content:

States there are a lack of safe walking routes to the nearest school, and that they are unable to afford the available transport options.

Full Email:

Hi

My [redacted] currently travels to [redacted] from [redacted], there is no safe on foot route for him to do this, and my [redacted] will shortly be joining that school, it would be unacceptable to expect the children from this area to either walk down the country lanes or across fields to get to school. From our own personal financial situation we would not be happy to be paying for the transport from this area.

Email response #5

Date email received: 05/12/2023

Summary of content:

Expresses the difficulty in getting spare seats.

Full Email:

We live in [redacted] both my children stayed on in their 'feeder' school 6th form at [redacted]. My [redacted] left just over 2 years ago and failed to get a spare seat and getting him to and from school was both challenging and expensive as both me and his Dad work full time. My [redacted] has managed to get a spare seat even though this was challenging to organise and expensive.

My issue with paying is firstly because she has to remain in education as per government rules and is attending her feeder school – we haven't chosen to move her – I believe if it is expected children should stay in full time education then transport should be provided and paid for by the councils.

I am aware any changes will be too late for us as my youngest is [redacted] this school year but hope it changes for future families.

Kind regards

Appendix 2 – The consultation material

During the consultation the council set out its proposals within its consultation material, that respondents could then feedback on. A summary of this material is provided below. Please do not complete this questionnaire – this below is provided for information only.

School Travel Policy Consultation 2023 – Questionnaire

Proposed changes to school travel policies

Cheshire East Council is proposing a number of changes to [its school transport policies](#).

The revised policies will reflect [updated Department of Education "Travel to school for children of compulsory school age" guidance](#). We are also looking at how we can simplify our processes for the mutual benefit of both the council and its residents.

Reasons for the proposed changes

Free travel to school is a valuable service for many families, but budget pressures mean that the council often has to make difficult decisions about how to make best use of the limited resources available to them. The council must comply with their duty to arrange free travel for eligible children, but it has some discretion in how they do this.

Like many councils across the country, Cheshire East Council currently spends a significant amount of its budget on providing transport for children and young people. As these costs are expected to continue to rise, it will adversely affect the level of service we are able to provide to children and their families. Many school travel charges have not been reviewed or been subject to inflationary increases since 2018.

Therefore, changes are required to enable the council to continue to deliver its statutory duties in a cost-effective manner. We have already made some changes, including increasing the value of the personal travel budget and simplifying the process for parents who choose to take this option. This increase has been positively received by parent/carers.

Give your feedback on the proposed changes to school travel policies

We now want your feedback on these proposed changes. You can give your feedback by:

- Completing this online survey (click "Next page" below to start)
- Emailing randc@cheshireeast.gov.uk
- Writing to the Research and Consultation Team, Westfields, Middlewich Road, Sandbach, CW11 1HZ
- Calling 0300 123 55 00

This consultation will close on **[Consultation closed – Do not respond]**.

Contact us

If you have any questions about this survey or if you want this questionnaire in a different format:

- Email randc@cheshireeast.gov.uk
- Call 0300 123 55 00

Keeping your data safe

Any personal information you give us will remain private, be stored securely, and be used in line with the Data Protection Act 2018. To read more about how we use your data read our Privacy Notice at www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/Privacy.

The proposed policy changes to give feedback on

The key proposed changes to the policy are listed below - select the aspects of the policy you want to view more information about and give your feedback on:
Tick all the sections you wish to view

The application process

Travel support for post-16 students

Proposals relating to spare seats and charging

Collecting payments for travel support by regular direct debit

Other policy changes

About you

How are you responding to this survey? *Tick all that apply*

- As a child or young person who uses school transport
- As a parent or carer of a child or young person who uses school transport
- As an individual (e.g. resident) – *Go to page 6*
- As a Cheshire East Council Ward Councillor – *Go to page 6*
- As a Town or Parish Councillor – *Go to page 6*
- As a Cheshire East Council employee – *Go to page 6*
- On behalf of a group, organisation, club or local business – *Go to page 6*
- Other (write in):

If you are responding on behalf of a group, organisation, club or business, write its name in the box below: *Write in below*

About you or your child

Do you, or do any of the children / young people you are parent or carer for, attend any of the following? Please also confirm if any of the other categories are applicable. *Tick all that apply*

- Primary school - diagnosed with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)?
- Primary school - receiving free or subsidised travel from the council?
- Secondary school - diagnosed with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)?
- Secondary school - receiving free or subsidised travel from the council?
- Sixth form or college - diagnosed with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND)?
- Sixth form or college - receiving free or subsidised travel from the council?

Are you, or are any of the children / young people you are parent or carer for... *Tick one box only in each row*

	Yes	No	Don't know
...purchasing a spare seat on council transport?			
...in foster care			

Proposal to amend the application process

The council is seeking consistency and clarity in the application process for travel support – from how applications are made, through to eligibility assessments, onto the provision of travel support and process for appeals.

The proposal is that all applications, reapplications and regular reviews of entitlement and provision are conducted digitally by default, meaning that applications for travel assistance will be made by parents / carers online. Support from the council will be provided for parents / carers who are unable to make an online application.

How strongly do you support or oppose the proposal to make the application process "digital by default"? *Tick one box only*

- Strongly support
- Tend to support
- Neither support nor oppose
- Tend to oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know / No opinion

The council is also proposing that whenever there is a change in the phase of education e.g. after Year 6, parents and carers will need to reapply for travel support, even if the place of learning remains the same.

How strongly do you support or oppose having to reapply for travel support whenever there is a change in the phase of education? *Tick one box only*

- Strongly support
- Tend to support
- Neither support nor oppose
- Tend to oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know / No opinion

Do you have any comments to make about these proposals to amend the application process? This may include a description as to how these proposals may affect you. *Write in below*

Proposal to amend travel support for post-16 students

Travel support for post-16 students is discretionary and therefore the council can choose how to support these children and young people.

Currently, parents / carers of post-16 students in Cheshire East can apply for travel support and, if eligible, may have to make a financial contribution towards any transport provision. This is currently set at £450 per year, which equates to approximately £2.50 per day. This is a small proportion of the average cost to the council, which is currently £9,840 per post-16 student per year.

Current charges have not been reviewed or been subject to an inflationary increase since 2018, and as the provision of travel support for post-16 students is discretionary, the council is proposing to change its policy for these students to one of the following options:

- Continue with the current parental contribution and increase the charge
- Only offer a personal travel budget, based on individual home to college mileage, for all eligible students to enable parent/carers to make their own travel arrangements
- End all travel support for post-16 students.

Please indicate how you think the council should continue offering travel support for post-16 students: ***Tick one box only***

Continue with the current parental contribution and increase the charge

Only offer a personal travel budget, based on individual home to college mileage, for all eligible students to enable parent/carers to make their own travel arrangements

End all travel support for post-16 students

Other (write in):

Should the council consider any of the following exceptions for post-16 travel support? ***Tick one box only***

	Should consider	Should not consider	No opinion / Don't know
Only if most suitable appropriate college / school / placement is a long distance from home			

Should consider	Should not consider	No opinion / Don't know
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If a specialist vehicle is required for accessibility

When students' medical needs would generally require a Passenger Assistant to be provided

When family income is low (i.e. in receipt of Universal Credit or maximum level of Working Tax Credit)

Generally speaking, how would you prefer us to deal with an increase in charges for travel support for post-16 students? *Tick one box only*

Charges increased and adjusted by inflation each year and backdated to 2018
 Charges increased and reviewed every 2 years
 Don't know / No opinion

Do you have any comments to make about the proposal to amend travel support for post-16 students? This may include a description as to how this proposal may affect you. *Write in below*

Proposal relating to spare seats and charging

The council currently offers the opportunity for parent/carers to purchase a spare seat for students that are not eligible for free home-to-school travel assistance on existing contracts, if they are available. This provision is non-statutory. The price of a spare seat is currently set at £460 per year and has not increased since 2018.

The council is reviewing whether we continue offering spare seats and whether charging should be increased and standardised in-line with other transport charges.

How strongly do you agree or disagree that the spare seat scheme should continue as a non-statutory provision? *Tick one box only*

Strongly agree
 Tend to agree
 Neither agree nor disagree
 Tend to disagree
 Strongly disagree
 Don't know / No opinion

How strongly do you support or oppose that charges for spare seats be increased and standardised in-line with other school transport charges? *Tick one box only*

Strongly support
Tend to support
Neither support nor oppose
Tend to oppose
Strongly oppose
Don't know / No opinion

Generally speaking, how would you prefer us to deal with an increase in charges for spare seats? *Tick one box only*

Charges increased and adjusted by inflation each year and backdated to 2018
Charges increased and reviewed every 2 years
Don't know / No opinion

Do you have any comments to make about this proposal relating to spare seats and charging? This may include a description as to how this proposal may affect you. *Write in below*

Proposal to collect payments for school transport by regular direct debit

Charges for school transport, including post-16 and spare seats are currently collected every half term or annually.

We know for some parents, spreading this cost across the year via direct debits would be helpful. Direct debits are also easier for the council to process than other payment methods, and reduce the amount of administration for the council.

Therefore the council is proposing to collect charges monthly by direct debit.

How strongly do you support or oppose the council's proposal to collect charges monthly by direct debit? *Tick one box only*

Strongly support
Tend to support
Neither support nor oppose
Tend to oppose
Strongly oppose
Don't know / No opinion

Do you have any comments to make about this proposal relating to making payments by direct debit? This may include a description as to how this proposal may affect you. *Write in below*

Removal of travel assistance for under 5-year-olds

One of the criteria to be eligible for travel support is that the child must be 5 to 16 years old. We currently provide support to some children under 5 – this is a non-statutory service. The council is considering the removal of travel support for under 5 year olds, to save costs for the council.

How strongly would you support or oppose the removal of travel support for under 5 year olds? *Tick one box only*

- Strongly support
- Tend to support
- Neither support nor oppose
- Tend to oppose
- Strongly oppose
- Don't know / No opinion

Do you have any comments to make about the removal of travel assistance for under 5 year olds? This may include a description as to how this proposal may affect you. *Write in below*

Proposal to update policy following recent guidance from Department of Education

Following recent Department for Education guidance we would like our policy to be more specific about eligibility for travel support when the school / place of learning is the preferred option of parents. Note - parental preference schools may not be a qualifying school for the purposes of assessing home-to-school travel eligibility.

In addition we would also like our policy to be more specific on how travel support applies to foster carers and detail the circumstances on which eligibility is determined. Note – eligibility criteria differs based on the category of foster carer and the contracts that the council has in place with them.

Do you have any comments to make about these potential changes? This may include a description as to how this proposal may affect you. *Write in below*

General improvements to travel to school

How strongly do you agree or disagree the council should do each of the following to try and improve travel to school? *Tick one box only*

Strongly agree	Tend to agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Tend to disagree	Strongly disagree	Don't know / Not sure
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Develop a programme for independent travel training

Encourage transport operators to introduce more bus services where there is demand

Work with schools / colleges to enable them to increase capacity within their own fleet of vehicles

Do you have any suggestions as to how the council can promote healthier and greener options for getting children to school? *Write in below*

Final comments

Do you have any final comments you would like to make about this consultation? *Write in below*

About you

It would help us if you could answer the questions below - the information will be used to see if there are any differences in views for different groups of people. You do not need to answer any of the following questions if you do not wish to.

What is your home postcode? We ask this so we can be sure we have obtained a range of views from across the borough *Write in below*

What is your gender identity? *Tick one box only*

Male

Female

Prefer not to say

Prefer to self describe (*write in below*)

What age group do you belong to? *Tick one box only*

16-24

25-34

35-44

45-54

55-64

65-74

75-84

85 and over

Prefer not to say

Are your day-to-day activities limited because of a health problem or disability which has lasted, or is expected to last, at least 12 months? This includes problems related to old age. *Tick one box only*

Yes

No

Prefer not to say

You have now reached the end of the survey, thank you.

Please click "Finish survey" below to submit your consultation response.

