



Middlesbrough Council

Consultation on faith school transport policy

Consultation Document

Closing date for responses – 16 December 2011

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Introduction

Like most local authorities across the United Kingdom, Middlesbrough Council is facing significant financial challenges over the next few years as a result of the nationwide reduction in public sector funding. It is currently estimated that, in order to keep up with the pace of the reductions in Middlesbrough, savings of £38 million must be made over the next three financial years.

Alongside other Council departments, the Children, Families and Learning directorate is required to make substantial savings in order to deal with these financial challenges. It is with regret, therefore, that the department is having to review the discretionary services that it provides, including some parts of the home to school and college transport services.

This document is part of a consultation giving parents, schools, diocesan authorities and other interested parties the opportunity to voice their opinions on proposed revisions to elements of the home to school and college transport policy. Specifically this consultation covers transport for children to attend a school (other than the normal or local school) chosen by parents because they adhere to a particular faith (known as faith school transport) which the Council provides on a discretionary basis, that is to say the Council does not have a legal duty to provide this service.

Whilst the principle reason for proposing revisions to this policy is financial, the changes would also bring greater fairness and equity in transport provision, as the current policy gives additional entitlements to some pupils that others do not enjoy.

Please take time to look at the proposals being put forward and then send us your views. We look forward to hearing from you.

Home to school and college transport policy

Middlesbrough Council maintains a Home to School and College Transport Policy, setting out the circumstances under which assistance is offered with pupils' journeys to and from school at the start and end of the day. This policy is updated regularly to reflect changes in national policy and/or changes in local circumstances.

Under the current policy, children of compulsory school age who attend their nearest appropriate school are provided with free transport if they live over the statutory walking distance from the school (this is two miles for a primary aged pupil and three miles for secondary aged pupils), measured by the shortest walking distance. Secondary age pupils whose parents are on a low income (i.e. they are entitled to free school meals or their parents are in receipt of the maximum level of working tax credit) are offered transport if they attend one of their three nearest suitable schools and the school is between two and six miles away.

The policy also covers a number of special circumstances where support might be offered, for example, where a pupil has a temporary medical condition or where a pupil is in the care of the local authority and does not attend their catchment school.

Pupils of compulsory school age who attend their closest appropriate faith school on the grounds of religion or belief, are provided with free transport to that school if they live outside the statutory walking distance as defined above. Secondary age pupils whose parents are on a low income, receive free home to school transport if they live between 2 and 15 miles from the nearest faith school and have chosen that school on the grounds of religion or faith.

Middlesbrough Council's current Home to School and College Transport Policy is available to download and read on the Mgrid website at www.mgrid.org.uk/ccm/navigation/cfl/special-educational-needs/school-transport

Proposed changes

It is proposed that pupils starting at faith primary and secondary schools in the 2013/2014 school year onwards will no longer be offered free travel to their school. The exceptions to this would be those pupils who are statutorily entitled to free travel on the grounds of low income, or where the denominational school is their closest appropriate school and over the statutory walking distance.

Pupils who previously qualified for free travel under the council's current faith school transport policy, would continue to receive free travel whilst they remain at their current primary or secondary school or until they move address. Where a pupil changes school or moves home, their eligibility would be reassessed as soon as the council is made aware of the change and may no longer qualify for free transport.

The effect of the proposal would be to phase in these changes by introducing them to new entrants from September 2013, while continuing to provide free faith school transport to the majority of pupils who were admitted to schools before this date. The full removal of faith school transport would therefore take seven years in primary schools and five years in secondary schools, as the last cohorts of pupils eligible under the current policy progress through school and the older age groups leave.

The Council is committed to supporting children to access school. With this in mind, the Council would facilitate the registration of their existing routes into public service routes, in order that non-qualifying pupils can access the transport to school and pay a half fare of the normal adult rate.

Who would this affect?

This change would affect those pupils starting at a faith-based primary or secondary school from September 2013 onwards. In reality, most primary age pupils in Middlesbrough are within easy walking distance of a faith-based primary school and so generally do not qualify for free home to school transport. It is therefore expected that it is those pupils who anticipate attending Trinity Catholic College, as the only faith secondary school in Middlesbrough, from September 2013 onwards that would be most affected.

Pupils provided with faith school transport, having been admitted to their nearest suitable faith-based primary or secondary school before September 2013, would not be affected unless they change school or address after this date.

The proposal would not affect pupils who are statutorily entitled to faith school transport on the basis of being from a low income family or where the faith school is their closest appropriate school and over the statutory walking distance (two miles for primary school aged children and over three miles for secondary aged pupils).

Similarly, the proposed changes do not affect any other pupil who is statutorily entitled to assistance with their home to school journeys.

Why is the Council proposing these changes?

These changes are required to ensure the necessary savings can be made to deal with the council's reduction in funding. While the initial savings may seem quite modest, the cumulative effect is substantial. The council currently spends about £20,000 per year group per year on faith school transport. With this in mind, within the first five financial years the following savings are anticipated:

| | Financial Year | Annual saving | Total saving |
|---------------|-----------------------|----------------------|---------------------|
| Year 1 | 2013/14 | £11,667 | £11,667 |
| Year 2 | 2014/15 | £31,667 | £43,333 |
| Year 3 | 2015/16 | £51,667 | £95,000 |
| Year 4 | 2016/17 | £71,667 | £166,667 |
| Year 5 | 2017/18 | £91,667 | £258,333 |
| Year 6 | 2018/19 | £100,000 | £358,333 |

From the sixth year onwards, the annual savings would be approximately £100,000 per year. These figures are based on current costs and have not been adjusted to show any anticipated increases in delivering the service, should the proposal not be approved.

The Council is under no obligation to provide free faith school transport but has historically done this so that parents seeking a faith-based education for their children did not find the length of school journeys to be a barrier. Since adoption of the policy by Middlesbrough Council in 1996, the number of parents exercising their right to choose a school, other than their local school, has become commonplace. These parents make their choices for a variety of reasons but do not qualify for assistance with their child's home to school journeys and must therefore pay these costs themselves.

The current policy gives an additional entitlement to qualifying pupils attending faith schools that others do not enjoy. The proposed revisions to the policy would therefore bring greater fairness and equity to transport provision.

The statutory entitlement to free transport

The local authority has discretionary powers to make arrangements for children who are not entitled to free home to school transport to facilitate their attendance at school. There is no requirement for those discretionary arrangements to be provided free of charge.

None of the proposed changes above affect the Authority's duty to provide free transport for "eligible children" under Schedule 35B, Education Act 1996 (as amended).

The Equality Act 2010, Schedule 3, Part 2 provides an exemption to discrimination on the grounds of religion or belief in relation to transport to or from school. Local authorities remain under a general duty to 'have regard' to the wish of a parent for their child to be provided with education at a particular establishment on the grounds of the parents' religion or belief. However, other than the statutory duty towards secondary school pupils who are from low income families, there is no duty to provide free transport to faith schools for children generally.

The local authority has a statutory duty to have regard to the Department for Education's "Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance" May 2007. Whilst the local authority has a duty to avoid unreasonable public expenditure this must be weighed against recommended good practice to phase in changes to come into effect as pupils start school.

Section 508A of the Education Act 1996 places a general duty on local authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport.

Getting involved

Middlesbrough Council values your comments and opinions on the proposed changes to the faith school transport policy. You are encouraged to attend one of the meetings that have been arranged or use any of the other methods below to find out more information or submit your views.

The closing date for all responses is 16 December 2011. While all endeavours will be made to consider all comments and views submitted, those received after this date may be too late to affect the final decision.

School and public meetings

A number of meetings have been arranged to provide an opportunity to further understand the changes being proposed, ask questions, and form a considered opinion as to the best way forward. You are invited to attend one of the relevant meetings below.

School meetings (for Head Teachers and Chairs of Governors)

5:00pm, 22 November 2011 at Trinity Catholic College, Saltersgill Avenue

Public meetings (for parents and others)

Please note that the consultation meeting arranged to take place on 30 November 2011 has been rescheduled as a result of planned industrial action.

6:00pm, 1 December 2011 at Trinity Catholic College, Saltersgill Avenue

6:00pm, 8 December 2011 at Trinity Catholic College, Saltersgill Avenue

Contact details

You can use the attached response form to give us your views. All completed forms, written responses and queries should be directed to:

Gary Maddison, Strategic School Planning Officer, PO Box 501, Vancouver House, Gurney Street, Middlesbrough, TS1 9FU

Email: gary_maddison@middlesbrough.gov.uk

Telephone: 01642 728722

Online

This document and the attached response form is available as an online questionnaire on our website at <http://consult.middlesbrough.gov.uk/>

Next steps

The consultation period closes on 16 December 2011. Following the consultation, all views received by the Council will be reported to the Executive Member for Children, Families and Learning early in 2012. After considering all of the responses received, the Executive Member will decide whether to proceed with the proposed changes.

It is expected that parents and other stakeholders will be informed of the outcome of the consultation by March 2012.

If a decision is taken to continue with the proposal, the Council's Home to School and College Transport Policy will be amended to reflect this, with the changes coming into effect in time for the start of the 2013/14 school year.

Who are we consulting?

Head teachers and governors of all Middlesbrough schools
Head teachers and Chairs of Governors of neighbouring local authority faith schools
Neighbouring local authorities
Diocesan Directors of Education
Local Members of Parliament
Council Members
Community and Parish Councils
Parents of pupils attending faith-based primary and secondary schools

Consultation response form

Middlesbrough Council wants to hear your views on the proposed changes to the faith school transport policy. Please complete this form and return by **16 December 2011** to Gary Maddison, Middlesbrough Council, PO Box 501, Vancouver House, Gurney Street, Middlesbrough, TS1 9FU.

1. Please indicate in what capacity you are responding (tick all that apply):

- Parent/Guardian
- Governor
- School staff
- Community member/resident
- Other (please specify).....

2. Do you have a child/children attending a faith school in Middlesbrough or whom you anticipate will attend in the future?

- Yes
- No
- If yes, please state which school(s).....

3. What other interest do you have in this consultation?

.....
.....

4. Do you agree with the Council's proposal to remove free faith school transport for pupils who are not statutorily entitled to it from September 2013?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know

5. Do you anticipate that these changes would affect you or your family and if so how?

- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
-
.....
.....

6. Would the changes affect your choices for a faith based education and if so how?

- Yes
 - No
 - Don't know
-
.....
.....

7. Other comments

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

8. Name:..... Postcode:.....

Any information provided on this form will be collated anonymously prior to any publication. The information you provide will only be used for the purposes of this consultation.

We can provide this information upon request, in an alternative format that meets your needs.

Please contact **01642 728722**

or email **gary_maddison@middlesbrough.gov.uk**

يمكننا توفير هذه المعلومات بتنسيق آخر عند الطلب، حسب احتياجاتك.

01642 728722

رجاءً اتصل على الرقم
أو راسلنا على البريد الإلكتروني

gary_maddison@middlesbrough.gov.uk

我们可以根据请求以符合您的需要的格式提供本信息。

请致电**01642 728722**

或

发送电子邮件至 **gary_maddison@middlesbrough.gov.uk**

与我们联系。

हम यह जानकारी आपकी आवश्यकतानुसार एक वैकल्पिक प्रारूप में उपलब्ध करा सकते हैं

कृपया **01642 728722** पर संपर्क करें, या

gary_maddison@middlesbrough.gov.uk पर ई-मेल करें.

ਬੇਨਤੀ ਕਰਨ ਤੇ, ਅਸੀਂ ਇਸ ਜਾਣਕਾਰੀ ਨੂੰ ਇਕ ਬਦਲਵੇਂ ਫਾਰਮੈਟ, ਜੋ ਤੁਹਾਡੀਆਂ ਜ਼ਰੂਰਤਾਂ ਨੂੰ ਪੂਰਾ ਕਰੇ, ਵਿਚ ਪ੍ਰਦਾਨ ਕਰ ਸਕਦੇ ਹਾਂ।

ਕਿਰਪਾ ਕਰਕੇ ਸੰਪਰਕ ਕਰੋ **01642 728722** ਜਾਂ ਈਮੇਲ ਕਰੋ

gary_maddison@middlesbrough.gov.uk

درخواست کرنے پر ہم یہ معلومات ایسے متبادل فارمیٹ میں فراہم کرسکتے ہیں جس سے آپ کی ضرورت کی تکمیل ہوتی ہے۔

01642 728722 یا ای میل کریں

براہ کرم رابطہ کریں

gary_maddison@middlesbrough.gov.uk