

Buckinghamshire County Council PR 2427 17/10/2011 [For Immediate Release]

Parents invited to have their say on new home to school transport proposals

Parents' views are absolutely vital to help the County Council shape its future policies for home to school transport. That's the clear message from Mike Appleyard, BCC's Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, as the council prepares to carry out further consultation, before making its final decisions in March 2012.

The consultation which will start in November 2011 and run until January 2012 will be available to complete online at [www.buckscc.gov.uk/haveyoursay](http://www.buckscc.gov.uk/haveyoursay).

Mr Appleyard said: "I am pleased to announce that we will be carrying out a further detailed consultation on the developing proposals between the end of November and mid January. My aim is to develop new arrangements which enable us to meet our statutory responsibilities and are cost effective and fair to parents and council tax payers, across the county.

"Cuts to public sector funding mean all councils have to make difficult decisions about where to target scarce resources. In terms of the costs of home to school transport, I need to achieve savings of over £1.4m which will mean making changes to current policy. At the moment, Buckinghamshire's approach is more generous than the current statutory requirements and that of many other local authorities; however the money simply is not there for this to continue.

"The stark reality is that if the savings don't come from home to school transport, they will possibly impact more directly on children's education."

Earlier in the year BCC consulted with parents and schools to gauge initial opinions and ideas on the way forward, and this dialogue has continued over the summer.

Mr Appleyard said that the feedback received so far had been extremely helpful. He said: "We are still in the process of working up the detail, however parents need to be aware that if they are considering applying to a school that is further away than their closest secondary school, there is a possibility they may need to contribute to the costs of transporting their child to that school from September 2012. That said, I can confirm that pupils who are eligible for free school meals will continue to receive free home to school transport as per the current policy."

BCC has already sent letters to all Year 6 parents, currently making secondary school choices so they are aware they may need to contribute towards costs, and can factor this into their choices. If, in light of the information parents change their mind about a school, they will still have time to amend their preferences.

Statutory guidance for the period of consultation is 28 working days in term time. However, mindful of the fact this is a hugely important decision that will have an impact on many families throughout the county, the council is extending the time of the consultation to include School Christmas holidays. This will allow additional time for parents to take part, and attend parents meetings to put their suggestions forward.

Parents and schools will be kept informed of the dates of the consultation, and the schedule for the parents meetings. Parents will also be able to join in the conversation through the council's facebook and twitter pages.

Mr Appleyard said the council was aiming to confirm home to school transport details for pupils in the latter part of the Spring Term. He said: "Clearly parents must also be aware that their child will be in secondary school for at least the next 5 years and the County Council cannot guarantee that any policies (including home to school transport) will remain the same for that length of time."