

HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT – USE OF ACCESSIBLE VEHICLES AND PROVISION OF TRANSPORT FOR NON-ENTITLED AND POST 16 PUPILS

Consultation 21 February – 19 April 2020

Summary document

Background

North Yorkshire County Council spends in excess of £24 million per year on home to school transport, and aims to provide a safe and good quality service, whilst balancing costs to ensure that it provides overall value for money.

Home to school transport is provided using vehicles that meet the needs of entitled pupils. Where entitled pupils have mobility needs that require accessible vehicles an accessible vehicle is provided.

The Council would like to use only accessible buses for home to school transport but a recent tender has shown that the additional annual cost of requiring accessible buses is, on average, approximately £12,000 per bus. If we were to only use accessible buses for all home to school transport it could cost another £2.7million per year.

This level of additional cost would impact significantly on Council resources and it is proposed that the Council continues to allow operators to use non accessible vehicles for home to school transport, unless otherwise required by law or to meet the mobility needs of pupils.

Vehicles used for home for school transport often have spare seats which we have made available for non-entitled and post 16 pupils for a charge. The Council received £610,000 in income from selling spare seats in 2018/19 but a legal challenge has meant that we had to stop charging for some spare seats from September 2019 and our annual income has gone down to about £270,000.

The Council is only allowed to charge for spare seats where the vehicle used meets the requirements of the Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) or is otherwise exempt. PSVAR requires vehicles to be accessible for anyone to use regardless of disability or mobility needs. Most vehicles used on home to school transport, especially to mainstream schools, are not accessible but the Government has recently allowed further exemptions potentially up to 2023 that would allow us to reintroduce charges on most of our services.

The Council is therefore proposing to reintroduce charges for the use of spare seats on home to school transport where it would be legal to do so, and to allow those pupils currently using spare seats on vehicles where the Council cannot charge to continue to travel for free up to July 2021.

This is not an ideal situation as it means that for a short time some pupils will have to pay and others will not, but the alternatives are either not affordable, or mean we have to immediately stop allowing some or all non-entitled and post 16 pupils to travel using spare seats.

This would significantly inconvenience up to 2,300 pupils and their families, add to congestion and emissions from having more vehicles on the road, and would mean the Council was unable to collect circa £535,000 p.a. of income it would be entitled to recover.

Consultation Questionnaire

The County Council is now consulting on:

- The use of accessible vehicles for home to school transport
- Whether spare seats should be made available for non-entitled and post 16 pupils
- The criteria to be used for allocating spare seats if the demand is greater than the number of seats available
- How the council should respond to consider the needs of people with disabilities when considering the use of spare seats

If you would like to contribute your views, please ensure you have read the full consultation document before answering the survey questions. It can be downloaded from:

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/home-to-school-transport-consultation>

The survey is accessed here

<https://consult.northyorks.gov.uk/snapwebhost/s.asp?k=158021689688>

An easy read version of this summary is available from:

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/home-to-school-transport-consultation>

The detail of how the Council goes about delivering its statutory obligations in relation to home to school transport are contained in its Home to School and College Transport Policy which is available at:

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/sites/default/files/fileroot/Education%20and%20learning/School%20transport/Amended%20-%20Post%20PTP%20Home%20to%20School%20Transport%20Policy%202019.pdf>

You can also find out more about our home to school transport services at:

<https://www.northyorks.gov.uk/school-and-college-transport>