

Consultation on proposed changes to the School Transport Policy

Information pack

22 October – 10 December 2026



This document is also available in Easy Read format on our website at www.hants.gov.uk/school-transport-consultation

If you require a paper copy of this Information Pack or the Response Form, or a copy in another language or format, you can email insight@hants.gov.uk with the subject 'School Transport Policy Consultation'.

Introduction

The School Transport Policy (the Policy) sets out how Hampshire County Council meets its legal duty to provide transport assistance to school or another education setting for children and young people living in the local authority area.

The County Council is proposing updates to the wording of the Policy to make it easier for parents to understand how the County Council meets its legal duties as described in the Department for Education statutory guidance, “Travel to School for Children of Compulsory School Age”¹.

There have been a number of changes to central Government statutory guidance over the years. We want to make sure that the wording in Policy reflects this, as well as making changes to make the Policy clearer.

We are seeking the views of School Transport users, as well as other interested stakeholders and residents, to help us decide whether to make these changes.

You can share your views from Thursday 22 October 2026 until 11:59pm on Thursday 10 December 2026.

If the proposals set out below are approved, the Policy would be updated and published on the County Council’s website in Spring 2027.

Please Note:

References to “parent” in this document include birth parents, adoptive parents, foster parents, carers or legal guardians with parental responsibility.

There would be no change to existing transport arrangements, or the way the School Transport Service determines eligibility for transport, as a result of these proposed changes.

Regardless of any decisions made, the County Council will continue to meet its statutory requirements in relation to School Transport.

The Post-16 Transport policy is consulted on annually through a separate process and is not covered by this consultation.

The proposed changes would not have any significant impact on the County Council’s School Transport budget.

¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-to-school-travel-and-transport-guidance>

Why your views are important

The County Council is required by law to consult on any changes to its School Transport Policy.

Additionally, the County Council is committed to five principles of consultation, which are:

- To consult on key issues and proposals.
- To consult in good time.
- To be inclusive but with clear and appropriate limits.
- To consult using clear, simple information.
- To ensure that responses are taken into account when decisions are made.

It is important to the County Council that the views of parents, children and young people are carefully considered to ensure that users clearly understand the Policy and how the service is delivered. Feedback is also sought from Hampshire residents and other interested stakeholders.

The findings of the consultation will be published and presented to the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services in early 2027 to help inform their decision on the proposed changes to the School Transport Policy's wording.

About the School Transport Service

The County Council currently arranges daily transport to school for about **15,000** children and young people (September 2026). Of these, about 9,700 attend mainstream school places and about 5,300 attend places that provide for their Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) or other needs.

Information on the School Transport Service, eligibility criteria, and the application process is available at: www.hants.gov.uk/educationandlearning/schooltransport

Proposal: Replacing the term "nearer" school with "nearest" school in some scenarios where the Policy defines eligibility

What is the current situation?

The Policy primarily refers to "nearest" schools when describing School Transport eligibility; however, in some scenarios the word "nearer" is used. Eligibility is assessed against the nearest suitable school with available places.

What is being proposed?

Replacing the word "nearer" with "nearest" in paragraphs 4.7, 4.8, 4.15, 4.17, 4.19, and 4.28 of the Policy.

For example, the current wording:

“When determining whether a non-catchment school qualifies as a nearer school distances greater than the statutory walking distances will be measured on ‘road routes’, passable for a suitable motorised vehicle.”

Would be replaced with:

“When determining whether a non-catchment school qualifies as the nearest school distances greater than the statutory walking distances will be measured on ‘road routes’, passable for a suitable motorised vehicle.”

Why is this being proposed?

The current wording can create uncertainty due to differing interpretations. These different interpretations have led to a small number of successful appeals by parents on transport decisions. Replacing "nearer" with "nearest" would make the policy clearer and better reflect how eligibility is assessed in practice, aligned to central Government guidance.

How would this be implemented?

If this proposal is agreed, the Policy would be updated and published on the County Council's website in Spring 2027.

What would the impact of this change be on children and young people with school transport arrangements?

There would be no change to existing transport arrangements as a result of this change to the Policy. In addition, there would be no change to how the School Transport Service determines eligibility for transport. In the past 2 years there have been 3 successful appeals to transport decisions due to different interpretations of the Policy's use of the word "nearer", which should not be successful under the proposed wording.

Additional proposed changes to School Transport Policy wording

A summary of the proposed changes to policy wording is included below:

Description of wording change	Why this is being proposed	Existing policy sections ²
Adding reference to the Armed Forces Covenant within the Policy and explaining how service-related circumstances may be considered.	Hampshire County Council already recognises its commitments under the Armed Forces Covenant and considers service-related circumstances where relevant to school transport applications. While this information is available elsewhere, it is not currently included in the School Transport Policy. Adding it to the Policy would make this information easier for Armed Forces families to find and clarify that service-related circumstances may be considered without changing eligibility criteria. The proposed amendment would not create any new entitlement to free school transport. Statutory eligibility will continue to be determined in accordance with the Education Act 1996 and Hampshire County Council's School Transport Policy, while service-related circumstances may be taken into account where the County Council is exercising discretion or considering individual circumstances.	1.3
Updating the policy to reflect current Free School Meal categories and the end of transitional protections.	The current Policy does not reflect recent changes to free school meal arrangements, including the distinction between targeted and expanded free school meals and the end of transitional protections. This change would ensure the Policy accurately reflects current Government criteria and makes clear that eligibility for extended rights school transport remains linked to targeted free school meals for low-income families.	3.1, 4.6, 4.9, Appendix 1

² The current School Transport Policy can be viewed at <https://documents.hants.gov.uk/transport-home-to-school/schooltransportpolicy2026.pdf>

Description of wording change	Why this is being proposed	Existing policy sections ²
Removing references to Working Tax Credit so that the Policy reflects current benefit arrangements.	The Policy currently refers to Working Tax Credit when describing support available to low-income families. As Working Tax Credit has been replaced by Universal Credit, the policy needs updating to reflect current benefit arrangements. This change would not alter eligibility for support for children from low-income families.	3.1, 4.6, 4.9, Appendix 1
Amending the Policy to state that transport contributions are calculated on a half-term basis rather than by weeks.	The policy currently refers to contributions being calculated by weeks, but contributions are already calculated on a half-term basis. This change would align the policy wording with existing practice and would not affect how contributions are charged	Appendix 1
Adding references to the School Transport Appeals Code and Stage 2 Appeal Panel Terms of Reference.	The policy explains the appeals process but does not refer to the School Transport Appeals Code or Stage 2 Appeal Panel Terms of Reference. Adding references to these documents would provide parents and carers with clearer information about how appeals are considered and the role of the Independent Appeal Panel, improving transparency and accessibility.	Appendix 2
Updating policy wording to reflect the use of travel passes, QR codes and other ticketing methods.	The County Council already uses travel passes, QR codes and other ticketing methods to manage and monitor school transport. The current policy refers to electronic tickets and does not consistently describe current arrangements. Updating the wording would improve clarity and ensure the policy reflects existing practice	4.39, 4.49, 4.50 (new)
Replacing the term "designated catchment area school" with "catchment school".	The current Policy uses the term "designated catchment area school" in several sections relating to eligibility for transport assistance. The term "catchment school" is already widely used in admissions and school transport communications and has the same meaning as "designated catchment area school". Replacing the longer term would improve readability and consistency without changing eligibility criteria or practice.	4.15, 4.28, 5.5, 6.2

Description of wording change	Why this is being proposed	Existing policy sections ²
Explaining how Personal Transport Budgets (PTBs) are calculated, which includes the current HMRC mileage rate.	Personal Transport Budgets (PTBs) are currently calculated using the distance between a child's home and their nearest suitable school, with mileage payments based on the HMRC Approved Mileage Allowance Payment rate. Where a parent does not drive or have access to a vehicle, alternative arrangements may be considered, such as using taxi quotations. This change would make these arrangements clearer in the policy and ensure mileage rates automatically reflect future HMRC changes.	4.41
Clarifying that school transport is not normally provided for late starts, early finishes or activities outside normal school hours.	The current Policy states that transport is not normally provided for children attending school part time, except in limited circumstances. In practice, this provision is generally applied where attendance requires travel outside of the normal start and finish times of the school day, in line with Department for Education guidance. The revised wording would make this clearer by explaining that transport will not normally be provided where different start or finish times require separate transport arrangements. This reflects current practice and provides clearer information for families and schools.	5.4

How would these changes be implemented?

If these proposed wording changes are approved, the Policy would be updated and published on the County Council's website during the Spring term of the 2026/27 academic year.

What would be the potential impact of these changes?

There would be no change to the way the School Transport Service determines eligibility for transport as a result of these proposed wording changes. The County Council expects that the updated Policy would provide parents and other stakeholders with more information about how the service is administered in practice, helping to set clearer expectations.

Options considered, but not currently proposed

The County Council is not looking to change the School Transport Service, but to improve the wording of the Policy, so changes to service delivery have not been proposed in this consultation.

How to have your say

You are invited to give your views on the proposed changes to the School Transport Policy. You can do this by using the online response form on the consultation webpage at www.hants.gov.uk/school-transport-consultation.

The Information Pack and Response Form, along with an Easy Read version of both documents, are also available to view, enlarge, download and print from the consultation webpage. You can also listen to the documents here using a screen reader or a 'Read Aloud' function.

If you require a paper copy of the Information Pack or the Response Form, a copy in another language or format, or if you have any queries about the consultation, you can email insight@hants.gov.uk with the subject 'School Transport Policy Consultation'.

You can also submit your feedback on the proposed changes by:

- emailing insight@hants.gov.uk using the subject 'School Transport Policy Consultation', or
- writing to **Freepost HAMPSHIRE**. Please write **School Transport Consultation, B026R** on the back of the envelope. You do not need to use a stamp.

This consultation is open from Thursday 22 October 2026 and closes at 11:59pm on Thursday 10 December 2026. Please note that responses received after this date will not be considered as part of the consultation.

Your data: Privacy Notice

You can view the Privacy Notice for this consultation, which explains how we will use your information, how this will be stored, and for how long we will keep it, within the Response Form or at www.hants.gov.uk/school-transport-consultation.