

Equality Impact Assessment

What is an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) and why does the County Council do them?

The [Public Sector Equality Duty](#) (PSED) is an obligation within the [Equality Act 2010](#) (“the Act”), which asks public authorities, like Hampshire County Council, to give ‘due regard’ to equality considerations, in particular to:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

This includes assessing the impact of policies and practices on individuals and communities with a protected characteristic, as defined in the Act and some other specific groups. The County Council uses EIAs to ensure it has paid ‘due regard’ to equalities considerations when there are changes to a service or policy, a new project or certain decisions.

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Title:	Proposed changes to the School Transport Policy (2026)
Related EIAs:	EIA Number: 960
EIA for Savings Programme:	No
Service affected	The School Transport Service
Description of the service/policy/project/project phase	Hampshire County Council (the Council) has a statutory duty to provide free of charge School Transport for eligible children (eligibility as set out in the Council’s School Transport Policy). The school transport statutory guidance published by the Department for Education states that local authorities should consult on proposed changes to Policy. This EIA supports an Executive Lead Member of Children's Services decision day report to request permission to consult on changes to the School Transport Policy.
New/changed service/policy/project	Approval is being sought to introduce changes to the School Transport Policy as a result of a recent consultation. The proposals are as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proposal One: For the County Council to cease to offer a formal Spare Capacity Seat scheme • Proposal Two: Update the School Transport Policy to provide greater clarity on the practices and processes associated with delivering the School Transport Service. Regardless of any decisions made, the County Council will continue to

meet its statutory requirements in respect of school transport. The impact of the changes on young people with different protected characteristics will be captured as part of this consultation.

Engagement

A consultation was undertaken on proposed changes to the School Transport Policy, and was live from 3 November 2025 - 7 December 2025.

A detailed communications plan was developed and delivered to ensure wide awareness of the consultation. An email was sent to all parents/carers of children and young people who use the School Transport service, as well as to operators, passenger assistants and schools.

189 participants responded to the consultation.

50% of consultation respondents who expressed a view disagreed or strongly disagreed with Proposal 1 (stopping the Spare Capacity Seat scheme). 34% agreed or strongly agreed.

Comments from those who disagreed with this proposal included concerns that parents would struggle with work commitments, that stopping the scheme would have a negative impact on families (such as increased stress or worry), that those living in rural areas were more likely to be impacted due to fewer alternative transport options in these areas and that the changes could result in increased isolation.

Respondents were given the opportunity to leave a specific comment against any of the 21 proposed updates to the Policy wording which fell under Proposal Two: To update the information in the Policy to provide improved clarity of how the Policy is already applied and how the service is currently delivered. Between 6 and 43 comments were left against each of the small, specific updates to wording.

Key themes mentioned across multiple comments included: safety as a top concern, particularly in relation to the wording change from 'safe' to 'available' and the safety of waiting at or travelling to pick-up/drop off points; the importance of considering individual circumstances, along with requests for flexibility, exceptions and reasonable adjustments to be maintained; not all of the policies were felt to be suitable for children with SEND, and some were felt to be discriminatory / in breach of the County Council's statutory duty; some felt the policies may disproportionately affect children in rural or unsafe areas, impact working parents, and increase car use; and there were concerns that the policy could be used to remove or reduce transport assistance.

Respondents were asked to comment on any perceived impacts of the proposals, including on different groups and protected characteristics. These are detailed in the final consultation report appended to the 24 February Decision Day report.

Respondents identified the following groups as being impacted: Disability (48%), Rurality (43%), Age (31%), Environmental Impact (31%), Poverty (29%), Pregnancy and/or maternity (11%), Marriage and/or civil partnership (6%), Race (5%), Religion or belief (5%), Sex (5%), Sexual orientation (5%), Gender reassignment (4%), Don't know (6%), None of these / not applicable (16%).

This EIA principally the potential impact of the proposed changes on the Public. There are no impacts on staff so this is assessed as neutral throughout.

Equalities considerations - Impact Assessment

Age

Impact on public	Negative - Low
Impact on staff	Neutral
Rationale	<p>As the school transport service is provided for eligible children and young people of school age (eligibility as set out in the Council’s School Transport Policy), it is recognised that they and their families/carers would be disproportionately affected by the proposed change in regard to age as a protected characteristic.</p> <p>31% of respondents selected 'Age' as an impacted characteristic. Those who selected age mentioned the distances require to walk, having to travel or wait at bus stops unaccompanied being unsuitable due to their child’s age.</p> <p>Department for Education guidance ("Travel to School for children of compulsory school age"), states that "Parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school. This means they must take all the action necessary to enable their child to attend school. For most parents, this includes making arrangements for their child to travel to and from school. Local authorities must make arrangements, free-of-charge, for eligible children to travel to school.</p> <p>Proposal one – Negative - Low - Ceasing the formal Spare Capacity Seats scheme.</p> <p>Ceasing the Spare Capacity Seats scheme could limit additional flexibility to children (and their families) who are ineligible for School Transport who currently benefit from the use of a spare capacity seat. In 2022/23 this was 87 children, in 2023/24 61 children, 66 in 2024/25 and 14 as of December 2025. However, currently spare capacity seats may only be offered if there is an available seat on an existing vehicle. Seats are already withdrawn if the space is required for an eligible child, or if there are changes to the route which reduce the number of concessionary seats. Furthermore, Spare Capacity Seats are not allocated until October half term at the earliest, and so alternative temporary arrangements will have needed to be found in the interim.</p> <p>Proposal two – Neutral – Updating the Policy to provide greater clarity on practices and processes.</p> <p>The County Council proposes to update the information in the policy to provide improved clarity of how the policy is already applied and how the service is currently delivered. Whilst these specific changes would not have an impact on how the service is delivered to this</p>

	group, they could help all groups to gain a better understanding of how the service is run.
Mitigation	<p>Families with a low income/in receipt of certain benefits would still be able to apply for discretionary transport in exceptional circumstances. Whilst the Spare Capacity Seat Scheme is being ceased, the County Council could still make decisions in exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>Children who are currently allocated Spare Capacity Seats would see these seats withdrawn in line with the timescales set out in the current Policy, which would mean by the end of the 2025/26 academic year. These children would be encouraged to walk or cycle to school (active travel), as they are within the statutory walking distance to school according to DfE guidelines, making them ineligible for free transport assistance.</p>

Disability

Impact on public	Neutral
Impact on staff	Neutral
Rationale	<p>48% of respondents selected 'Disability' as an impacted characteristic. Those who selected disability mentioned their perceived negative impact of the proposed changes on SEND children, particularly those who may face challenges being able to walk either due to their needs/disabilities (for example, less road sense or awareness for personal safety) or that they have been placed in a SEN school further away so require transport. Some also mentioned some of the specific wording changes such as transport only waiting for 3 minutes and walking to pick up points as being inaccessible for children with SEND.</p> <p>Proposal One – Neutral - Ceasing the formal Spare Capacity Seats scheme.</p> <p>There is no identified disproportionate impact based on disability and therefore the impact has been assessed as neutral. People with disabilities and those without would be impacted equally by this change. If someone has a disability that means they cannot walk to school, then they would already be eligible for free transport assistance, and wouldn't be using a spare capacity seat. A mix of people with disabilities and those without can currently apply for a paid spare capacity seat, and the same impact would be felt for both groups.</p> <p>Proposal Two - Neutral - Updating the Policy to provide greater clarity on practices and processes.</p> <p>There is no identified impact based on disability and therefore the impact has been assessed as neutral. The policy is being updated to provide more detailed information for all users, but the service itself isn't changing, so there is no impact on users. As an example, the</p>

	'vehicles waiting for 3 minutes' policy wording change mirrors what is already within the Behaviour Code of Conduct. Leaving on time also benefits children picked up further down a route who expect transport to arrive at a particular time.
Mitigation	

Gender Reassignment

Impact on public	Neutral
Impact on staff	Neutral
Rationale	There is no identified impact based on gender reassignment and therefore the impact has been assessed as neutral.
Mitigation	

Pregnancy and Maternity

Impact on public	Neutral
Impact on staff	Neutral
Rationale	There is no identified impact based on pregnancy and maternity and therefore the impact has been assessed as neutral.
Mitigation	

Race

Impact on public	Neutral
Impact on staff	Neutral
Rationale	There is no identified impact based on race and therefore the impact has been assessed as neutral.
Mitigation	

Religion or Belief

Impact on public	Neutral
Impact on staff	Neutral
Rationale	There is no identified impact based on religion or belief and therefore the impact has been assessed as neutral.
Mitigation	

Sex

Impact on public	Neutral
Impact on staff	Neutral
Rationale	There is no identified impact based on sex and therefore the impact has been assessed as neutral.
Mitigation	

Sexual Orientation

Impact on public	Neutral
Impact on staff	Neutral
Rationale	There is no identified impact based on sexual orientation and therefore the impact has been assessed as neutral.
Mitigation	

Marriage and Civil Partnership

Impact on public	Neutral
Impact on staff	Neutral
Rationale	There is no identified impact based on marriage and civil partnership and therefore the impact has been assessed as neutral.
Mitigation	

Poverty

Impact on public	Negative - Low
Impact on staff	Neutral
Rationale	<p>29% of respondents selected 'Poverty' as an impacted characteristic. Those that selected poverty mentioned that some parents may not be able to afford to pay for transport or parents having to give up work to transport their children to school.</p> <p>Proposal One - Negative Low - Ceasing the formal Spare Capacity Seats Scheme</p> <p>As of June 2025, 66 spare capacity seats were in use. Of the applications received for the 2024/25 academic year, 34% were approved. The charge was waived for approximately 23% of successful applications. Data is unavailable for charges being waived in 2025/26, however only 14 Spare Capacity Seats were in place in December 2025.</p> <p>Whilst these spare capacity seats were not guaranteed, were not put in place until mid-way through the Autumn term (at the earliest), and could be withdrawn at any time should an eligible child need them, the removal of the spare capacity seats could mean that parents would need to source alternative transport that might incur a charge. Whilst</p>

	<p>most families were already paying for these seats, those with waived fees may be disproportionately affected by these changes as a result.</p> <p>The existing extended rights would minimise the impact and are designed to support low-income families to exercise school choice and support eligibility for school transport. A child is eligible for free travel to school if they are eligible for free school meals or a parent with whom they live receives maximum Working Tax Credit and they are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aged 8 or over but under 11, attend their nearest suitable school and it is more than 2 miles from their home; or • Aged 11 to 16 years, and attend one of their three nearest suitable schools provided it is more than 2 miles but not more than 6 miles from their home; or • Aged 11 to 16 years, attend a school that is more than 2 but not more than 15 miles from their home that their parents have chosen on the grounds of their religion or belief if, having regard to that religion or belief, there is no suitable school nearer to their home. <p>Proposal Two - Neutral - Updating the Policy to provide greater clarity on practices and processes.</p> <p>There is no identified impact based on poverty and therefore the impact has been assessed as neutral.</p>
Mitigation	<p>Families with a low income/in receipt of certain benefits would still be able to apply for discretionary transport in exceptional circumstances. Whilst the Spare Capacity Seat Scheme is being ceased, the County Council could still make decisions in exceptional circumstances.</p> <p>Children who are currently allocated Spare Capacity Seats would see these seats withdrawn in line with the timescales set out in the current Policy. These children would be encouraged to walk or cycle to school (active travel), as they are within the statutory walking distance to school according to DfE guidelines, making them ineligible for free transport assistance.</p>

Rurality

Impact on public	Neutral
Impact on staff	Neutral
Rationale	<p>43% of respondents selected 'Rurality' as an impacted characteristic.</p> <p>Those who selected rurality mentioned that lack of realistic or safe alternatives to travel to school, such as no suitable public services or unsafe walking routes in rural areas. Increased traffic on the roads was also mentioned.</p> <p>Proposal One - Neutral - Ceasing the formal Spare Capacity Seats Scheme</p>

	<p>People in rural areas may live further away from the nearest schools, so may already qualify for free transport assistance and would be less likely to apply for a spare seat. In addition, in rural areas, it is even less likely that there would be an existing route that a child could join.</p> <p>As such, whilst the comments within the consultation have been acknowledged, a <u>disproportionate</u> impact based on rurality has not been identified and therefore the impact has been assessed as neutral.</p> <p>Proposal Two - Neutral - Updating the Policy to provide greater clarity on practices and processes.</p> <p>There is no identified impact based on poverty and therefore the impact has been assessed as neutral.</p>
Mitigation	

Geographical Impact: All Hampshire

Equality Statement

Additional information:

This EIA accompanies an Executive Lead Member for Children's Services decision report on the 24 February 2026.

This EIA principally focusses on considering the potential impact of the proposed changes on the Public rather than Staff as there are no proposed changes to staff terms and conditions. Therefore, the impact has been assessed as neutral for Staff throughout.

Overview Statement:

A summary assessment to show that due regard to the Public Sector Equality Duty has been paid, which is undertaken when a full EIA is not needed:

EIA reference number: 01071

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