

Suffolk School and Post-16 travel

Pre-consultation engagement July – November 2017

Summary of Results

Introduction

This summary document sets out the main findings from the recent pre-consultation exercise conducted by Suffolk County Council (SCC) into proposals to change the School and Post-16 travel policies.

The pre-consultation was initiated in July with the first meeting with selected impacted schools and colleges taking place in August 17, these meetings have continued and will continue throughout engagement and consultation periods. As well as discussions with the impacted schools and colleges we have undertaken workshops with transport operators, school business managers and attended sessions with focus groups like SCPN and governor advisors. A telephone survey of parents who contacted SCC contact centre was completed during September this recorded their current school travel situation and their views of the neighbouring authorities who have moved to a nearest school policy.

The pre-consultation has captured views from over 200 people, and has facilitated 28 different events, workshops, meetings and discussions.

Pre-consultation approach

The pre-consultation marked the start of a much longer period of selected engagement and was developed in line with the first Gunning Principle. This principle specifies that a public consultation should be carried out at a formative stage when there is still time to change an authority's decision, or in the case of pre-consultation, inform any options put forward for consideration by SCC's Cabinet.

Our aim was to undertake pre-consultation with impacted stakeholders and groups before announcing our proposal to consult was made public. We understood that this was a highly emotive subject and needed to be clear on our approach.

Pre-consultation analysis

As feedback from the events, workshops, meetings and discussions was received, this was fed into our engagement plans and demonstrated that we needed to include another stakeholder group in the form of the school and college business managers.

All of the feedback has been assessed and common themes have been identified throughout, providing a comprehensive picture of public and stakeholder feedback received during the pre-consultation phase.

Headline themes emerging

The most common themes raised across the pre-consultation communication channels were:

1. The need to consider the impact on children at a critical point in their education.
2. Recognition of the need for the authority to save money.
3. The differential impact of the proposed changes on urban and rural areas.

4. Complexity of the existing policies - many do not understand the differences between transport priority areas, catchment for admissions and nearest suitable school for transport, making it difficult to understand the impact of change.
5. Ability to exercise choice and that making a parental preference means responsibility for organising travel arrangements - parents would need to make financial contributions for school travel.
6. Concern about the impact on low income families.
7. Need to consider the impact on strategic and financial planning for individual schools and what it means for staff and the use of buildings.
8. Traffic congestion and environmental impact to surrounding areas of schools triggered by changing travel patterns and the safety of pupils using routes that may not be safe all year round.
9. The role of schools in providing transport and how they could work with SCC to provide a cost efficient network that would meet the needs of their business and marketing plans; some are already coordinating travel arrangements for their pupils
10. Changing role for commercial operators with opportunities to work directly with schools, identify new commercial routes in response to different capacity requirements, administer sale of spare seats, and to better align interests between SCC, operators and families. Potential for advertising, marketing and competition in the market.
11. The role of the Endeavour Card and how to make it available to all young people in the county and achieve more consistency in the offer.
12. Willingness to collaborate on local solutions to save money.

Next Steps

Having carefully reviewed all the feedback we have received, on 5 December SCC's Cabinet will consider the recommendation to run a two and half month public consultation on proposals to change the school and post-16 school travel policies. During this time, public meetings, stakeholder events, and further briefings would be undertaken to ensure that there is ample opportunity for all Suffolk residents to share their views and have their say.

Stay in touch

We are committed to continuing to listen to the views of Suffolk communities, and can be contacted by:

Email: SchoolTravel@suffolk.gov.uk

Write: School Travel, Suffolk County Council, Endeavour House, Gold Block Floor Three, Russell Road, Ipswich IP1 2BX