

Public Questions for Flintshire County Council – Tuesday 24 September 2024

Response to Public Questions

I would like to thank the members of the public for their question/s to Council regarding school transport.

The School Transport Policy is very clear on the eligibility criteria for the receipt of school transport.

The policy is strictly in line with the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 and the associated statutory guidance and provides for free home to school transport, on a statutory basis, for primary aged learners who live more than two miles from their nearest suitable school and for secondary aged learners who live more than three miles from their nearest suitable school.

The Local Authority also provides free transport for pupils of statutory school age:

- where the route to school is considered to be hazardous by the LA in consultation with the Environment Directorate
- where transport to a named school is identified in a pupil's Statement of Special Educational Needs. This would normally be on medical or educational grounds and would be deemed essential in the context of other criteria identified in the policy
- where a child requires transport on medical grounds and no suitable public transport exists.

The policy also provides free home to school transport on a discretionary basis and is already generous in its criteria. Discretionary free transport is provided

- where a child whose parents are in receipt of Income Support or Working Tax Credit and resides more than 2.5 miles from the nearest appropriate school
- to the nearest Welsh medium school under the criteria identified above, as the Council has a statutory duty to promote Welsh medium education
- to the nearest voluntary aided school where the admission to the school is on denominational grounds, subject to the distance criteria and suitable evidence of faith
- for post-16 pupils attending a first-time course of study at school or college, based on the distance criteria and providing the student is attending the nearest educational establishment offering the courses they wish to study

The definition of the Appropriate School Criteria is the nearest school which provides education for the relevant age and ability of a pupil, the nearest Welsh medium school or the nearest Voluntary school.

The expression of parental preference for a school and the offering of a place in that preferred school does not automatically entitle the learner to free transport. The eligibility criteria of the transport policy is then applied.

The Council uses a Geographical Information System (GIS) based on Ordnance Survey maps which are used to determine the distance from home to school. The starting point for a route assessment is determined as the nearest point on the walking route network from the pupil's address (usually the main entrance to the property) to the centre point of the school building. The network is updated annually. This ensures

Public Questions for Flintshire County Council – Tuesday 24 September 2024

that all applications are assessed using a consistent methodology to determine distance and therefore eligibility.

The Council does not determine transportation eligibility by designating whole settlements. The Council is also aware that in some Flintshire settlements, the distance measurements will differ based on actual locations within that settlement, sometimes even in the same street.

The Council undertakes regular reviews of walking routes to schools and if they meet the hazardous route criteria, free school transport is provided under the policy. There has been significant investment to improve active travel options to schools within the County.

It is this individual measurement which determines the nearest school for eligibility decisions. However frustrating this may be; this methodology ensures a fair and equitable approach to distance calculations and is rigorously applied to ensure consistency.

The Council has taken into consideration the needs of families suffering from financial hardship and that is why, under its discretionary provision, has reduced the distance criteria to 2.5 miles rather than 3 miles for secondary aged pupils whose families are in receipt of particular benefits. It also provides for discretionary post-16 transport which is not the case in many other local authorities.

In light of the competing pressures on the Council budget, we are not in a position at this point in time to extend our discretionary policy further.