

## **CONSULTATION BY ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL ON THE QUALIFYING DISTANCE FOR THE TRANSPORT TO SCHOOL OF CHILDREN OF PRIMARY SCHOOL AGE**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report seeks Members' comments in respect of proposals being put forward by the County Council to alter the "qualifying distance" criteria for primary school children.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 It is the present policy of the County Council to provide free home to school transport for children of primary school age to the designated school for their home address who meet the "qualifying distance" criteria. These distances are currently:

- 1.5 miles or more for children of infant school age
- 2 miles for children of junior school age.

This qualifying distance is measured from the home address to the school via the nearest route that is available to be walked accompanied as necessary by an adult. This is more generous in Essex than required by law as set out in the Education Act 1996. The statutory distances are:

- 2 miles for children under the age of eight
- 3 miles for children aged eight and older.

Many local authorities only provide transport for children of primary school age based on this minimum statutory requirement.

### **3 DETAILED CONSIDERATIONS**

- 3.1. Expenditure on home to school transport is increasing above the rate of inflation. This is taking funds that would otherwise be delegated to schools for the provision of education to children. Also, the budget settlement for Essex County Council for the year 2003/2004 is well below the rate of expected increase in the cost of home to school transport if there is no change to policy.

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The County Council is therefore consulting on a change in its policy for the provision of transport for children of primary school age. It is proposed that with effect from September 2003 the qualifying distance for the provision of transport for children of primary school age will increase to:

- 2 miles for children under the age of eight
- 3 miles for children aged eight and older.

If the proposal is agreed it will be implemented from 1 September 2003 for all new applications. For children aged eight the change in entitlement if agreed will be implemented from the beginning of the school year following the year in which they attain the age of eight. For most children this will be from the start of year four. This proposed change will bring Essex into line with the national requirement and with many other authorities.

In the event therefore that the change in policy is agreed the position for children remaining at their existing school including a linked junior school will be as follows –

**From September 2003:**

- A. **If the child is in year 1 or year 2** they will continue to receive transport under the existing policy, ie., the 1.5 mile qualifying distance criterion, until they start year 4 when they will be re-assessed on the 3 mile qualifying distance. This will mean that exceptionally when they enter year 3 they will not be re-assessed on the current 2 mile qualifying distance criterion.
- B. **If the child is in year 3**, exceptionally they will receive transport under the current 1.5 mile qualifying distance criterion rather than be re-assessed under the current 2 mile qualifying distance criterion. However, they will be re-assessed for the following year (year 4) on the 3 mile qualifying distance criterion.
- C. **If the child is in year 4, 5 or 6** they will continue to receive transport under the existing policy ie., the 2 mile qualifying distance criterion, until they transfer to secondary education when a new application for transport provision will need to be made on the basis of the existing policy and the 3 mile qualifying distance criterion.

These transitional arrangements will only apply for children remaining at the same school, including a linked junior school. For children who move school during the transition period entitlement to transport will be assessed against any policy change that is agreed.

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The County Council is now seeking responses on this proposal by 31 March 2003.

**4. OFFICER COMMENT**

- 4.1. This proposed change is prompted by a budget issue which the County Council is seeking to address. The number of children likely to be affected by this proposal within Rochford District is not yet known, although the County has been asked for this information and it is hoped to have the details available on the night.
- 4.2. The change in policy may affect school catchments and may also result in more traffic generated movements by parents, as a result of the loss of the free travel privilege.

**5 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1. This extension of qualifying distances may result in more traffic generated movements as parents transport their children to school.

**6 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1. Nothing specifically for the District Council, although this proposed change of policy has clearly been prompted by resource issues at the County Council.

**9 RECOMMENDATION**

- 9.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That the Committee determine its views on the County Council's proposals as set out in this report. (CE)

Paul Warren

Chief Executive

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**Background Papers:**

Letter from Essex County Council Planning and Admissions Service dated 14 February 2003.

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