



LONG WITTENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

BARN CLOSE, HIGH STREET, LONG WITTENHAM, OXON OX14 4QJ
+44 (0) 1865 407942

Home to School Transport Consultation
FREEPOST
OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

By email to transport.consultation@oxfordshire.gov.uk

15 December 2013

Dear Sir

Home to School Transport consultation

Long Wittenham Parish Council is pleased to respond to Oxfordshire County Council's Home to School Transport consultation.

Key points

1. Long Wittenham is a village of over 300 households located on the River Thames, north east of Didcot and north west of Wallingford.
2. We have a village primary school which takes up to 105 children from Long Wittenham and neighbouring villages. Long Wittenham is the **only** village in Oxfordshire to fall within dual catchment areas for both single sex and mixed secondary schools.
3. Children from our village either go on to St Birinus School (3.8 miles from Long Wittenham), Didcot Girls School (4.4 miles) or Wallingford School (5.2 miles).
4. We understand the financial challenges that Oxfordshire County Council faces and in particular the need to reduce costs. The Parish Council chairman has represented our community at one of the recent roadshows to discuss the consequent impact on services.
5. We are concerned at the impact of this policy in terms of its potential to limit parents' choice for the most appropriate school for their children. This decision, potentially the most important a parent can make for a child, will inevitably be influenced by the cost of transport and consequent affordability.

LONG WITTENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

6. Should this policy be adopted, parents in Long Wittenham will only receive free transport to schools providing single sex education – either St Birinus School for boys or Didcot Girls School, currently the only secondary schools in Didcot. Parents with children of both sexes will no longer be able to have their children educated together at the same school. They will have to accommodate different starts and ends to terms, parents evenings and inset days as well as the other events in school that parents are expected to attend. For households where both parents work, this could mean having to take additional days off as holiday or incurring additional child care costs for their children when their schools are closed on different days.
7. Single sex education is not appropriate for all children and some will be more suited to a co-education environment, for a number of reasons beyond parental preference. This policy as it stands will force parents of such children who may struggle to pay for school transport to send them to a school which is unsuited to them. This could have long term consequences for the child's education.

Our responses to your specific questions

Section A – to which schools should free travel be provided?

8. We believe that the policy should be amended to accommodate the specific situation that families in Long Wittenham are in, given the only option under this policy would be to provide free transport to single sex schools.
9. We therefore propose that the policy should be extended to provide free transport to the nearest co-educational school where a village is within that school's catchment area.

Section B – when should the policy change be implemented?

10. We do not have a view on the timings of the policy changes. We are concerned however at the lack of detail in your consultation document on transition arrangements and in particular whether or not children will be able to switch schools to continue to receive free transport.

Section C – concessionary fares scheme

11. We are concerned that the proposed rises to concessionary fares will not only affect families of children who already receive concessionary fares today but also those who, as a result of the changes being proposed in this consultation, will stop receiving free transport to school.
12. Should the Council decide not to adopt our alternative proposal, we would urge it to continue to subsidise the transport to school for children up to year 11 and that the subsidy provided should be equal to the cost of providing free transport to the nearest school. Whilst this will not realise savings to the level envisaged, we believe it would be a fairer and more equitable approach.

LONG WITTENHAM PARISH COUNCIL

Should you require any further information on our response to your consultation or like to discuss in more detail any of the points we have raised, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours faithfully



Councillor Simon Thompson
Vice chair

Email: simon.thompson@longwittenham.com

cc. Councillor Lynda Atkins, Oxfordshire County Council
Councillor Celia Collett, South Oxfordshire District Council
Carol Dunne, Head Teacher, Long Wittenham Primary School
Kate Thompson, Chair of Governors, Long Wittenham Primary School
Long Wittenham Parish Councillors