



## Caerphilly County Borough Council

# Consultation Report on the proposal to change the way the Council provides home-to-school transport for learners across the borough from September 2026

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## **Background**

In February 2024, the council's Cabinet endorsed a series of budget proposals for 2024/25, based on the council's financial settlement from Welsh Government and UK Government. The report outlined a savings requirement of £45.213m for the two-year period 2025/26 and 2026/27. To address this huge funding gap, a programme of transformation has been established to address the significant financial challenges the council is facing.

The Council currently provides a high level of discretionary Home to School Transport. The Council is proposing to change the way it provides Home to School Transport for learners across Caerphilly County Borough from September 2026.

The proposed changes would see all mainstream home to school transport provision for English, Welsh and Faith primary and secondary schools fall in line with the relevant statutory distance criteria as determined by Welsh Government.

The proposal would see a continuation of discretionary transport for home to School Transport for learners who reside beyond the 2-mile distance criteria for those under statutory school age, subject to the vehicle having spare capacity and beyond the 3-mile distance criteria for post-16 learners.

Transport eligibility for learners with additional learning needs who attend special schools, pupil referral units and learning support classes would not be affected under this proposal.

Caerphilly is currently one of only 3 local authorities in Wales providing transport above the statutory minimum. One of the remaining 3 local authorities has recently taken the decision to reduce provision to statutory minimums from September 2026.

## **Purpose**

The council currently provides a high level of discretionary transport, well above the statutory requirements. The proposal seeks to consult on the potential removal of the discretionary mileage element for mainstream provision to bring it in line with relevant statutory distance criteria which would result in a large financial saving for the authority.

This consultation aims to seek the views of service users and stakeholders in relation to the proposed amendments to the Home to School Transport Policy.

Specifically, the consultation invited respondents to give their views in relation to several key areas:

- The impact of the proposed changes on respondents/families/children and specifically
- The impact of the proposal in relation to
  - choice of faith or Welsh language schools,
  - opportunities for learners to use and promote the Welsh language and whether the proposal in any way treats the Welsh language less favourably
- How any identified negative impacts could be reduced

A copy of the survey can be found here: <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/home-to-school-transport>

## **Methodology (What we did)**

The consultation period for the new Home to School Transport Policy ran from **Monday 16<sup>th</sup> September to Monday 28<sup>th</sup> October 2024** and was widely promoted.

The consultation was promoted in a variety of ways and made available across a range of platforms.

Methods used to promote the consultation included:

- A dedicated web page linked directly from the home page of the Council's website <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/home-to-school-transport> The primary consultation tool was a questionnaire, but the Council also held face to face drop-in sessions in secondary schools across

the borough as detailed below. A contact number and e-mail address were also provided for anyone who needed support in completing the survey or had any general queries or concerns. Maps showing the potentially affected areas were available online.

- A media release on launch of the consultation period <https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/news/news-bulletin/september-2024/%E2%80%8Bhave-your-say-on-home-to-school-transport>
- Regular social media posts throughout the duration of the consultation period (see **Annex 4**) Details of the consultation were shared via the Council’s Twitter feed and Facebook page.
- Posters displayed in libraries and other public facing Council venues.
- Schools and other stakeholders were e-mailed directly and asked to respond to the consultation and/or share details widely with their contacts and distribution lists. Please refer to **Annex 5**)

## Survey

The survey was made available online throughout the duration of the consultation. The survey could be completed online or printed for completion. Hard copies of the survey were also available from all council libraries, primary and secondary schools, and were made available at all drop-in sessions held in the community. To enable all those who wished to give their views to take part, a survey was made available bilingually and in a variety of formats.

The survey focussed on identifying the potential impact of this proposal on stakeholders as outlined above.

A copy of the survey can be found here: <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/home-to-school-transport>

## Face to face engagement

Six formal face to face drop-in sessions were scheduled at schools across the county borough. Three online sessions were also scheduled throughout the duration of the consultation period.

In addition, at the request of local elected members in those areas, a further three informal drop-in sessions were set up.

This enabled any resident who wished to do so, to speak directly with officers from the transport and engagement teams to seek clarification on the proposal and share their views on the proposed changes to Home to School Transport provision across the borough.

### Face to face drop-in sessions were held:

Date and time	Venue	Number of attendees
Monday 23rd September (3:30pm-5:00pm)	St Helens RC Primary School, Caerphilly	3 parents
Thursday 26th September (4:00pm-5.30pm)	Idris Davies 3-18 School, Rhymney	3 parents, 2 young people and 1 elected member
Thursday 3 <sup>rd</sup> October (3.30pm-5:00pm)	Ael y Bryn Community Centre, Rhymney (additional informal session at request of local elected member)	1 person attended
Thursday 3 <sup>rd</sup> October (5.30pm-7:00pm)	Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni, Gellihaf Campus	9 members of the public attended
Wednesday 9th October (5:30pm-7:00pm)	Islwyn High School, Oakdale	10 people attended – 4 family groups (parents/grandparents and young people)

Thursday 17th October (5:00pm-6:30pm)	Risca Comprehensive School	3 parents
Tuesday 22 <sup>nd</sup> October (3.30pm-5pm)	Ysgol Gyfun Cwm Rhymni, Y Gwyndy Campus (additional informal session requested by local elected representative)	2 parents attended (also teachers)
Wednesday 23rd October (5.30pm-7pm)	St Cenydd School, Caerphilly	8 parents/carers attended
Thursday 24 <sup>th</sup> October (3.30pm-5pm)	Machen RFC (additional informal session at request of local elected representative)	8 people attended including 3 local ward members

### Online drop-in sessions:

Date	Time	Number of attendees
Thursday 26th September 2024	6:00pm-7:30pm	3 parents
Tuesday 1st October 2024	6:00pm-7:30pm	This session did not run. Two individuals who had requested to attend were offered alternative ways to have their say.
Wednesday 16th October 2024	10:30am-12midday	1 resident and 1 elected member attended

## Results/Key Findings

*Note: The statistical data (percentages) presented within this report relates to survey responses only. The number of responses received for individual questions may be lower than the total number of completed questionnaires returned. Percentages are therefore based on the number of responses to individual questions (n=number of responses) and not necessarily the number of completed surveys received.*

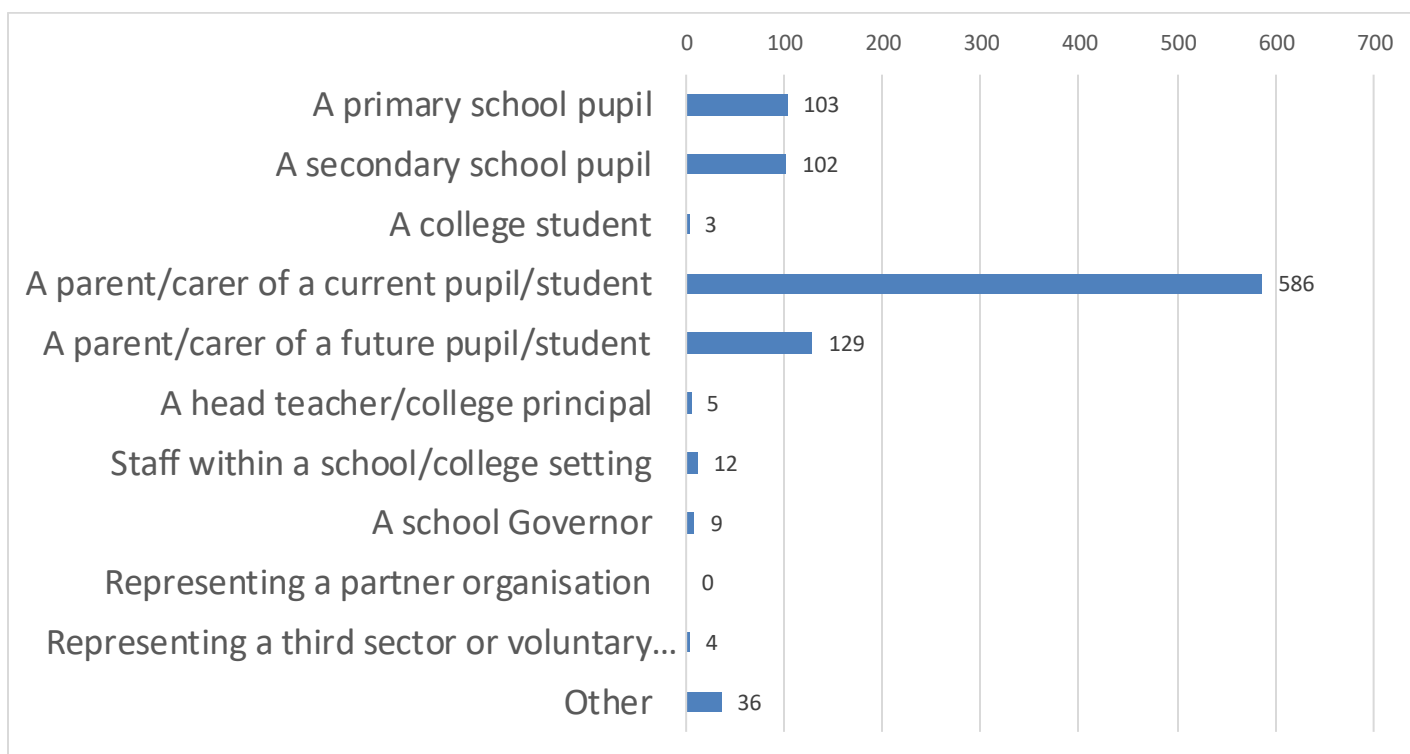
*Qualitative analysis incorporates both the open-ended responses to the survey **as well as** the qualitative feedback from conversations. **Participation in the consultation was self-selecting. The data should be considered within this context.***

**991** surveys were completed and received by the closing date.

### Survey respondent profile

As shown in **Graph 1**, the largest group of stakeholders to respond to the survey, were parents/carers of current and future pupils/students. The second largest group were current primary and secondary pupils. 'Others' included local members, wider family members and other concerned residents.

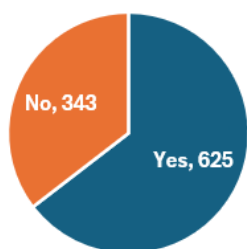
**Graph 1: Interest in consultation (number of respondents - multiple answers possible)**



**Graph 2** shows that just under two thirds (65%) of those who responded to the question (n=968) were current users of the transport service. Of these (n=625), 96% said they use the service every weekday with the 4% using the service 3-4 times a week.

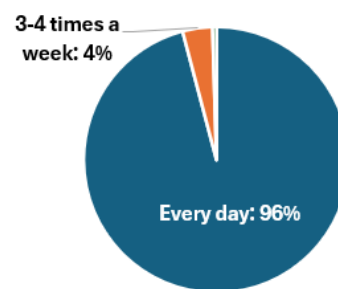
**Graph 2: Current users of the Home to School Transport service and frequency of use (n=625)**

Do you or your child/children currently use the home to school transport service provided by the local authority?



■ Yes ■ No

If yes, how often?



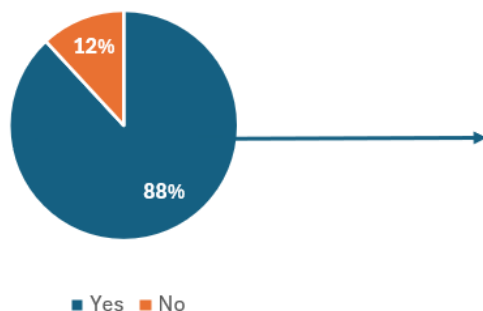
■ Every day ■ 3-4 times a week ■ 1-2 times a week

88% indicated that they would be of school/college age or have children of school age in September 2026 and as highlighted in **Graph 3**, said that the change would impact on them/their children directly.

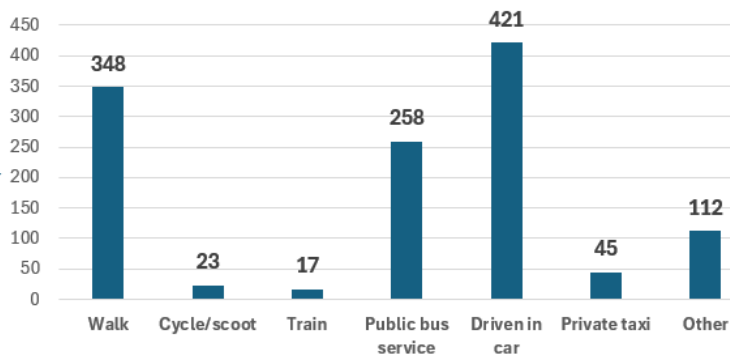
**Graph 3** further highlights that the main way their children would travel to school, should the proposal be implemented, was by car with just over a third (34%) giving this response. A further 28% said that their children would walk to school with 21% indicating that they would use the public bus services.

**Graph 3: Would the proposed change impact you/your children? (n=983)**

Would the change impact directly on you/your children?



If yes, how would you/your child get to school most often?



### Impact on Welsh Language and Faith schools

When asked which school they/their children currently attend, almost half (46%) mentioned a **Welsh-medium school**, whether primary or secondary school; 11% mentioned a **faith-based school**.

If implemented, 32% (293 respondents) said this proposal would affect their choice of school for **faith and/or Welsh language**.

### Respondent views and emerging themes

When asked how they felt they/their families would be impacted by the change, the key themes identified in the survey closely aligned with those raised at the face-to-face drop-in sessions. A full digest of survey comments and summary of feedback from the face to face conversations and correspondence from interested parties are included in **Annexes 1 - 3** and are summarised as follows:

By far, the main area of concern was the additional **distance and the time that it will potentially take for children to walk to school**. Those living just beyond the limit of the proposed distance criteria highlighted that children would have longer walks to reach their schools, affecting not only the amount of time taken commuting to and from school, but also sleep hours (having to get up earlier) and impact on participation in extra-curricular activities immediately after school.

Respondents were also concerned about:

- **Road safety:** busy roads, lack of pavements, heavy traffic, lack of lights on safe routes and wider safeguarding issues if the designated safe route is isolated e.g. cycle paths.
- **More traffic:** as the survey has identified that most pupils would be more likely to be driven to school rather than walking the extra distance, there were concerns that this would result in an increase in vehicles on roads; particularly at times when traffic is already heavy. Most schools are already struggling with parking spaces during drop off and pick up times.
- **Parents' working hours not compatible with school runs:** working parents said they rely on school buses as they do not have the time to drive them to school, exacerbated for those parents with children in different schools.
- **Socio-economic impact:** the cost of fuel, private taxis, buses, or the lack of revenue due to parents having to work less hours to drive their children to school.
- **A disproportionate impact on those from more deprived communities:** where attendance levels are lower, widening the gap between those from more affluent communities

- **Impact on mental health/well-being:** parents and children alike were worried about the change, how it would affect their daily lives. For pupils, their ability to concentrate during lessons after a long walk, especially in winter months and during bad weather. For parents, the stress of school runs whilst making sure it does not affect their work.
- **A lack of reliable public transport options.** Respondents to the consultation questioned whether conversations were taking place with public transport providers with a view to increasing provision on routes
- **Environmental impact:** more cars mean more CO2 emissions.

It is important to note that many of these themes are interlinked:

- Road safety will be worse if more cars are on the road, and will result in more pollution.
- The financial implications are exacerbated if parents' working hours are reduced and if they also must pay for more fuel to drive their children to school or pay for bus and train fares.
- The long walks during wet weather will affect **attendance**, which will impact mental health and well-being and this was considered to be a greater concern in areas of socio-economic deprivation where attendance levels are lower.

Concerns from parents whose children are attending **faith and Welsh language schools** reflected those outlined above, however, there were additional concerns that Welsh language and faith schools would be disproportionately affected and as already noted this may impact on parents' choice of school:

- Welsh language and faith schools have a wider catchment area and children generally have to travel further to their nearest catchment school than the local English medium/non-faith school.
- Due to centralised location, some of these schools are less accessible and not on public transport routes
- There are implications for the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) and Welsh Government's Welsh Language Strategy (Cymraeg 2050) and that this proposal could be contradictory to the obligations of the local authority

*"Mae'r ysgolion yma yn lleiafrifol sydd yn cael eu lleoli yn ganolog gyda'r holl disgyblion yn teithio pellteroedd i'w cyrraedd. Mae angen sicrhau nad ydy'r ysgolion yma o dan anfantais oherwydd y cynlluniau trafnidiaeth newydd"* (Translation: "These schools are minority which are centrally located with all the pupils traveling distances to reach them. It is necessary to ensure that these schools are not at a disadvantage due to the new transport plans")

*"If you proceed with the proposals we will have to send our children to English medium school Lewis Boys because this is more than 3 miles away and they will be able to take transport for free. Only 50% of children who go to a Welsh medium primary school go on to a Welsh medium secondary school. The council will be directly responsible for making this figure worse if you proceed with these proposals."*

A number of respondents also notes a disproportionate impact on:

- Parents with disabilities who are unable to drive or use public transport to take children, in particular, those of primary age to school
- Single parents
- Parents who have more than one child, particularly if children are at different schools
- Families where children have undiagnosed Autism/ADHD and who are not eligible for school transport but would be unable to use other forms of transport
- Younger secondary pupils – parents commented that the transition from primary to secondary school was difficult for many pupils and the safety of these children having to walk further distance or use public transport was a particular concern.

## **Mitigation**

When asked what could be done to reduce the impact of the proposal on the service user/family, by far, the most widely given response was to **keep the service as it is**.

The following themes also emerged:

- Keep the service but ask parents to contribute financially
- Find alternative sources of savings
- Improve cycling and walking infrastructure
- Make roads safer for pedestrians
- Offer discounted fares on buses and trains for pupils
- Improve public transport links throughout the borough – engage with public transport providers to consider capacity and scheduling of local bus service to accommodate additional demand on routes
- Improve parking/traffic management at schools to accommodate additional vehicles
- Change start and finish times at schools

Specifically in relation to **Welsh language schools and or faith school**, respondents felt that these schools should be exempt from the change in criteria. Others also suggested that moving forward, more Welsh language schools could be built and the location of these schools on accessible sites close to public transport would be key.

A more in depth analysis relating to equalities implications will be incorporated as part of the Equalities Impact Assessment. An updated IIA will be included on the Caerphilly Conversation page for this consultation <https://conversation.caerphilly.gov.uk/home-to-school-transport>

## **Next steps**

Comments from parents relating to specific routes have been passed on to the Transport team with home postcodes for context.

As detailed in a media release (1<sup>st</sup> November 2024), the consultation feedback will be considered by the council's Education Scrutiny Committee before being presented to Cabinet for a final decision in early 2025.

The key dates are as follows:

Thursday 23rd January 2025 – Joint Scrutiny Committee Meeting for consideration

Wednesday 19th February 2025 – Cabinet for final decision.

<https://www.caerphilly.gov.uk/news/news-bulletin/november-2024/home-to-school-transport-review-%E2%80%93-what-happens-next> .....

## **List of annexes**

- Annex 1: Feedback from drop in sessions
- Annex 2: Feedback from interested parties
- Annex 3: Digest of comments received through survey
- Annex 4: Social media feedback
- Annex 5: Stakeholder contacts