South Gloucestershire Council

Delivering for you

Post-16 Home to School Transport

Consultation report

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Executive Summary

This report summarises the views of people who responded to the consultation exercise undertaken between 16 September 2024 and 02 December 2024 about proposed changes to the support offered to help young people with special educational needs and disabilities get to school or college.

This consultation followed an earlier consultation conducted as part of the council's budget for 2023/24, which approved plans to investigate options to reduce the rapidly increasing costs of providing home to school transport support.

The consultation explored three main options:

- Removing all post-16 home-to-school travel support,
- Switching to an expenses-based model, or
- Making no changes.

The council's preferred option was to switch to an expenses-based model, where families would arrange transport and be reimbursed at 45 pence per mile for two round trips per day.

As well as capturing views on the three options, the consultation sought to better understand the potential impacts of introducing this change.

97 responses were received, primarily from parents and carers of young people with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND). 88.6% of respondents opposed the removal of discretionary support, making this the least favoured option. More people opposed than supported the switch to an expenses-based model, with the preference amongst this respondent group not to make changes to the support provided for home to school transport and instead find savings elsewhere. The feedback from residents who wouldn't be impacted contrasts with others' feedback, with much more support for the proposed changes. However, it should be noted that there are very few responses from

this group, and it would be unwise to surmise that feedback from this small number of respondents is representative of the wider population of South Gloucestershire.

Those who oppose the proposals cite concerns about the practical and financial challenges of arranging transport themselves. These issues are particularly important in South Gloucestershire because of the long distances many young people need to travel to attend a setting which meets their needs twinned with the lack of public transport options. Therefore, the findings emphasise the need for the council's officers and councillors to consider the complexities of individual families' situations in agreeing a way forward.

Many respondents highlighted the practical challenges of transporting young people so far to get to and from school, citing conflicts with working schedules, care and home to school transport for other dependents. They anticipate negative impacts on family finances and mental health and wellbeing should the proposals go ahead.

Others share concerns about the impacts for young people who may lose some independence and opportunities for social interaction if parents are taking them to school.

Despite assurances about support for families with extenuating circumstances, some respondents believe that switching to an expenses-based model would lead to young people being forced out of education or pressured to prioritise a local setting over one which best meets their needs, limiting their life chances. Whilst the additional support scheme is designed to prevent this scenario, respondents highlight potential broader societal impacts if young people's opportunities were restricted, including higher social care costs.

There might be further impacts for society if more families face financial hardship following changes.

The tone of feedback makes clear how much strain and pressure parents and carers of young people with SEND are under. Respondents talk about the daily pressures of their situation, which some believe are amplified by the cumulative impact of having to fight for the support and opportunities that their children need to live a decent life.

Alternative options and potential mitigations are suggested by respondents. For those whose primary concern is the practical challenges of how they can provide home to school transport themselves, the preference is to move to a model where the council continues to deliver the service with parents and carers contributing additional financial support. Others suggest that the expenses model needs to be tiered to better reflect the additional complexities and costs of transporting young people with particularly acute needs. Respondents – especially those currently considering options for schools for the September 2025 intake – would appreciate clarity as soon as possible, so that they can make decisions and plan ahead.

Should the expenses-based model progress, a couple of respondents asked if it was possible for the council to instigate opportunities to enable parents to join up to arrange transport jointly. This could potentially reduce costs for parents and maintain opportunities for social interaction for young people.

Given the financial pressures the council faces – and the rapidly increasing costs of providing this discretionary support - this will undoubtedly be a very complex decision.

The council is grateful to everyone who has provided feedback, which will be reviewed alongside broader data and evidence, to help inform the council's decision about its future approach to supporting families with young people with SEND.

Background

Some young people face greater challenges accessing education or training and so, on a discretionary basis, the council has historically offered transport support to families of young people who are over the statutory school age who have additional needs, for example young people with an EHCP or learning difficulty/disability.

Demand for this support has significantly increased over recent years, but funding has not kept pace. And so, at a time when the council's budgets are under significant pressure, we need to review the costs of providing this discretionary support to allow us to effectively deliver the support which we are legally required to provide.

Therefore, as part of the consultation for the council's budget for 2023/24, it was proposed to review all remaining non-statutory home to school transport provision. This proposal was supported through a consultation and councillors agreed to investigate measures to deliver savings.

In seeking to reduce costs, the council first reviewed how services are currently being provided to look for efficiencies. This focused on three main areas:

- Reviewing the full list of journeys to see if we could reduce our overall costs by grouping individual journeys into fewer vehicles (and drivers) where young people are travelling in similar directions.
- Looking at all the journeys for which we are providing a guided escort to support the individual on their journeys to check these are all still required.
- Considering the relative costs of journeys being made within council-owned vehicles driven by council employees against what those same journeys cost in the private sector (for example using a private taxi firm).

Whilst some opportunities to reduce costs were identified, this exercise showed that in general, the council is already providing services in the most cost-effective way.

As the necessary savings could not be delivered through efficiencies, the council needed to also look at cutting back non statutory services and support. Different options were investigated, and a preferred approach was identified.

This involved switching the focus to a model where more families are supported through the council's expenses-based model. This would mean:

- The expenses-based model (which is already a choice for families) becomes the preferred option for those young people entitled to travel assistance.
- Families take over responsibility for arranging how young people will get to school/college. They are supported with expenses paid at 45 pence per mile for two round trips per day. (This is the Mileage Allowance Payment rate for cars and vans as specified by HMRC).
- Families with exceptional or extenuating circumstances would be able to make a case for additional travel assistance.

- An appeals process would continue to be available for families concerned about the decision following their application.

A public consultation sought views on different approaches and asked people about the potential impact should the council proceed with its preferred option.

The consultation

The consultation launched on 16 September 2024 and closed at 9.00am on 2 December 2024.

A dedicated online website was created to provide people with information about the proposals. Detailed background information was shared to allow people to provide informed feedback. Having led people through this detail, they were asked about their relative support for one of three options:

1. Removing all post-16 home to school travel support which we are not legally required to offer,
2. Switch the focus so more families are supported through the Council's expenses-based model,
3. Make no changes, savings would have to be found elsewhere.

An easy-read version of the background information and survey was produced and promoted alongside the survey.

There is a clearly defined group of people who would be most impacted by any changes. If the suggested approach was implemented, changes would be introduced for young people entering post-16 education in September 2025 (families of young people already in post-16 education would continue receiving the same support they do currently, as long as they continue on the same course). The details of the proposals and the opportunities to provide feedback were actively promoted to affected families to ensure those potentially impacted knew about prospective changes and could share their views on them.

Parents and carers of young people in years 10 and 11 were sent a letter informing them about the proposed change and encouraging them to share their views via the consultation. Schools and teachers are also key stakeholders, and they were informed about the proposals, invited to share details with parents and give their own feedback. The South Glos Parent Carers Forum, a group of local parents and carers of children with SEND, were also encouraged to promote the consultation to their members. This was done using social media.

Respondents

97 individual responses were received.

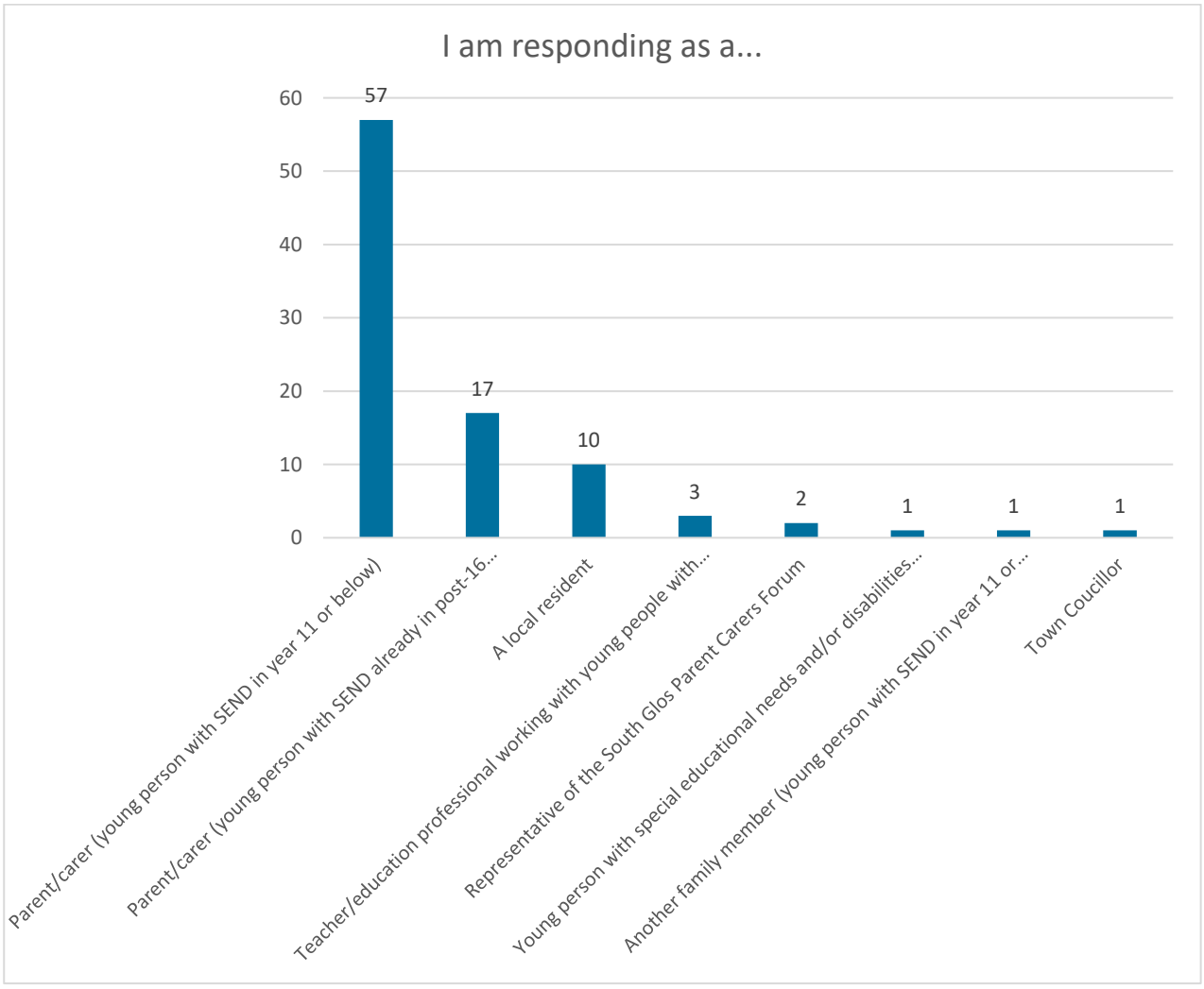
Given the audience who would be impacted by this change - and the proactive promotion to this group - it is unsurprising that most respondents to the survey are parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities. 57 were parents/carers of young people currently in year 11 or below who would be directly impacted by any changes and a further 17 were parents/carers of those already in post-16 education, who would not be affected. Whilst the supporting information advised that this

second group of families would not be impacted by changes, some of the respondents of older young people did not realise this and have responded as if they would be directly affected.

All responses were received anonymously. However, it is apparent from reading the open text feedback from some contributions that many families submitted multiple responses from different family members. No attempt has been made to group common responses; each submission has been considered as stand-alone feedback.

The number of responses is perhaps lower than might be expected. A letter was sent to all families (over 200) with a young person with SEND currently in years 10 and 11. Given the defined nature of those who would be most impacted by the changes (parents and carers of young people aged 16 and under with SEND), the age profile of respondents is quite narrow (three quarters of all respondents are aged between 40 and 59). There is also a heavy skew towards women (77.5% versus 22.5% men) and every respondent who told us their ethnicity was white, all but three of whom are White British. A relatively high proportion of respondents report that they have a disability themselves, which may be a consideration in assessing the equalities impacts of the proposals.

With only 97 responses and such a narrow range of respondent demographics, it is not possible to conduct comparative analysis of feedback by different demographic groups.



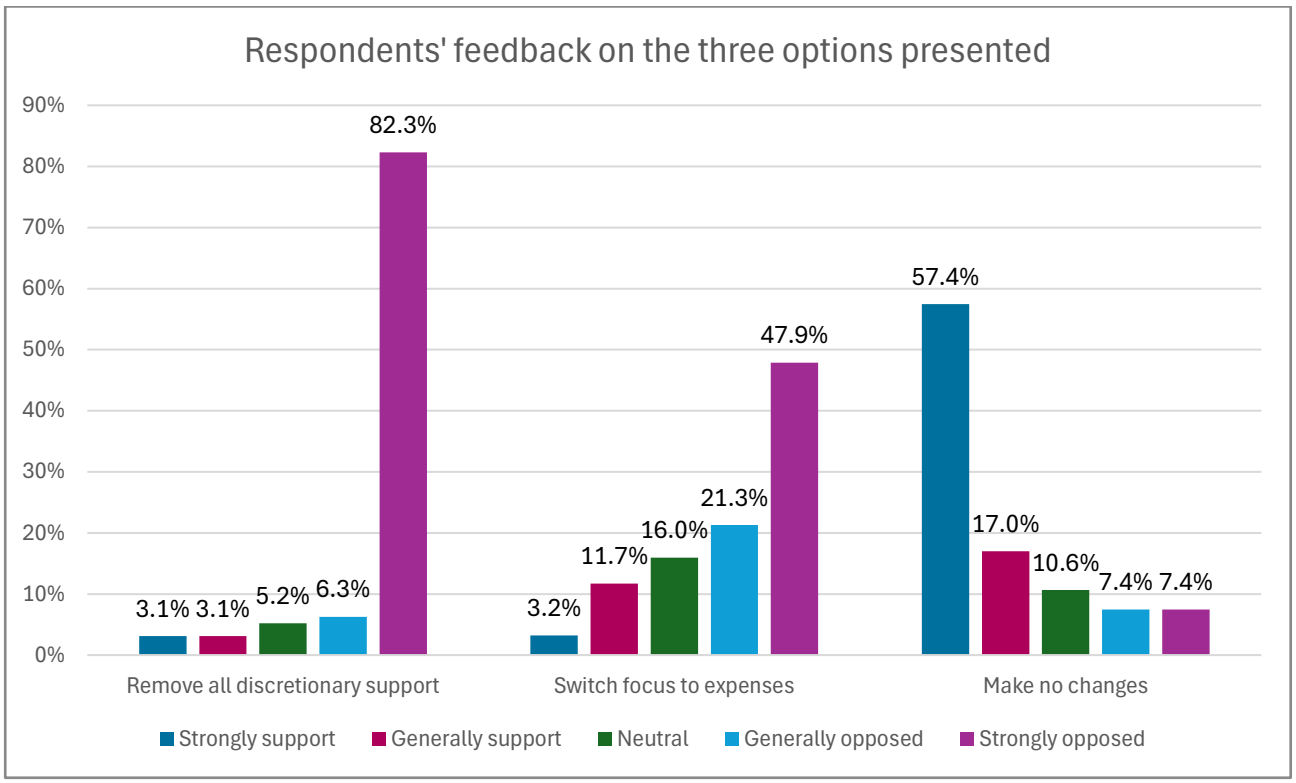
Views on the proposals

Three potential options are offered through the consultation:

1. Removing all post-16 home to school travel support which we are not legally required to offer,
2. Switch the focus so more families are supported through the Council's expenses-based model,
3. Make no changes, savings would have to be found elsewhere.

The second approach is presented as the preferred option.

For each of the approaches, respondents were asked the extent to which they support (or oppose) that option. The different approaches represent different levels of support and feedback diverges accordingly.



The least popular option is to remove all post-16 non-statutory support – more than three quarters of respondents (82.3%) are ‘strongly opposed’ to this proposition. All but one of the people who were in favour of this model is a local resident (and not directly impacted). Only one of these people provides a response for why they think discretionary support should be removed – a perception of unfairness that families with children with SEND get support, whilst other families do not. A teacher supports the removal of discretionary, council-provided transport support on the grounds that families should be paying for this from their Personal Independence Payments.

The council’s preferred option is also unpopular, but to a much lesser extent. Just over two-thirds (69.2%) of those who respond express opposition to the change. Of those who express strongest opposition to the proposal, almost all are parents of young people with special educational needs. In almost all cases, this opposition is based on their concerns about how difficult it would be for their family to manage the practicalities of arranging and

providing transport for young people. One of the primary purposes of this consultation is to understand the complexities of individual families' situations and whether, and how, such an approach could work for different people. The practical challenges are discussed in a later section of this report.

11 of the 45 respondents who strongly opposed the switch of focus to an expenses-based model have children who are already in post-16 education and so would not be impacted by any changes. However, the commentary of most of these respondents suggests that many have not understood this in responding to the consultation – where possible, individuals have been informed about this misunderstanding.

21.3% of respondents said they were 'generally opposed' to the proposal and a further 16% are neutral. The feedback of this group is interesting. Whilst most of those who express the most negative feedback are concerned about the direct impact on their families, in many cases, those who have said they are 'generally opposed' or 'neutral' are much less likely to be personally impacted. They are more worried about the principle of reducing funding for school transport for young people with SEND and the potential impact for others.

As with the option to remove discretionary support, the small number of South Gloucestershire residents (who would not be directly impacted by any change) who have responded to the consultation are more likely to support the proposal to switch to an expenses-based model. Residents and others who are not parents of young people with SEND account for most of the 14.9% of people who have advocated for this change.

Most people (74.4%) who have provided feedback have expressed their support for maintaining the current approach to home to school transport.

Some respondents suggest alternative ways of making support for home to school transport affordable or identify opportunities to mitigate the harm caused by any changes. However, 57.4% of respondents strongly support and a further 17% generally support not changing the current approach, preferring the council look elsewhere for savings.

The group who are opposed to the 'do nothing' option are largely residents.

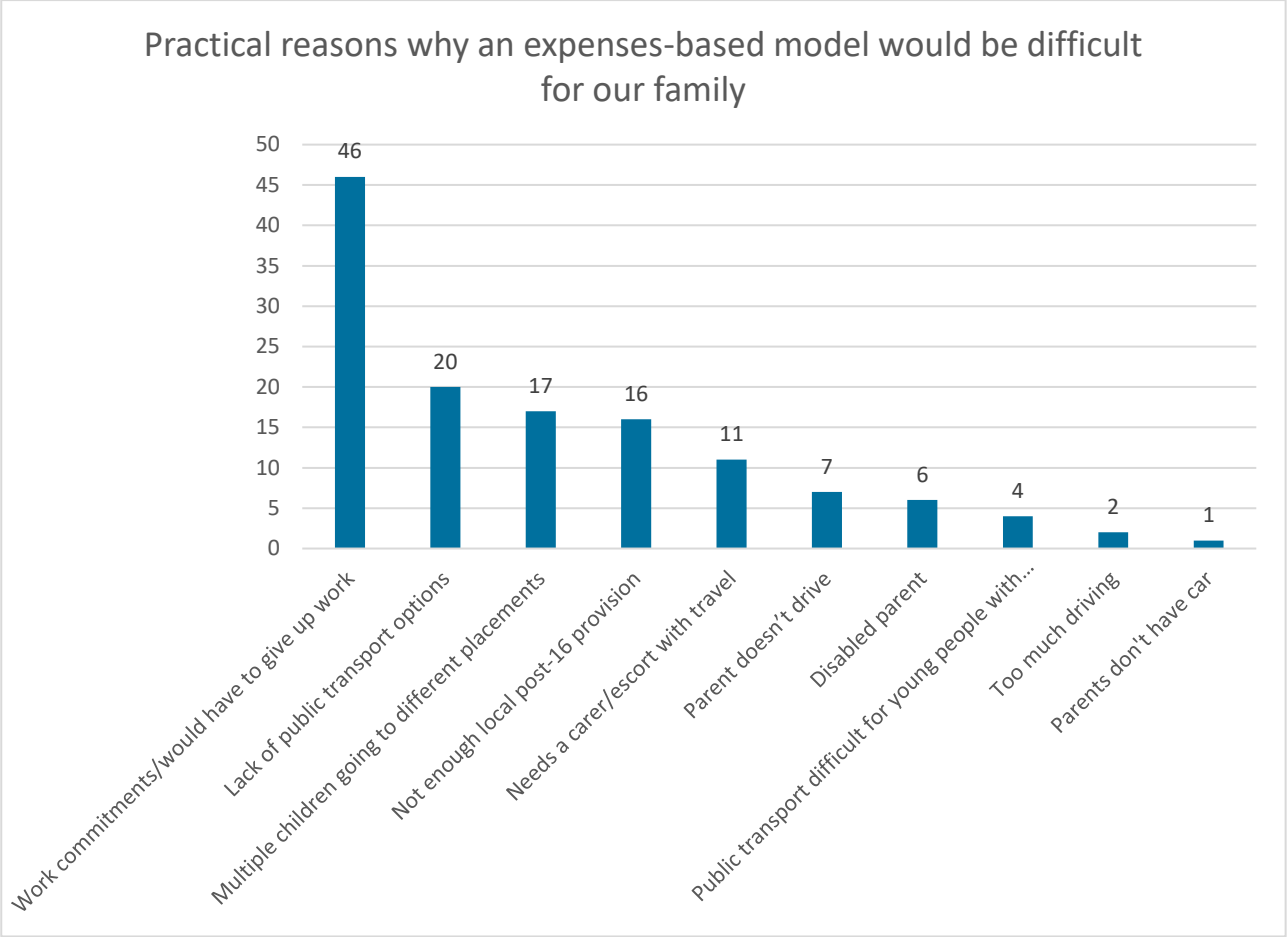
The impacts of proceeding with the council's preferred approach

As outlined in the previous section of the report, the people who are most concerned about any changes are generally those whose personal circumstances would make these changes especially difficult to manage. Many people completing the survey provide impassioned rationale explaining these difficulties.

Whatever approach is adopted going forward, families with exceptional or extenuating circumstances would be able to make a case for additional travel assistance. The council explained through the consultation that this support would be available, but respondents may not have recognised this. It is likely that many respondents' personal situations may be considered extenuating, meaning that the council would continue to offer transport provision for their child.

Anonymised individual responses have been shared with councillors and the council staff responsible for administering this support to help inform and guide the council's approach to supporting families with extenuating circumstances.

Reasons why families would find it difficult



The most common concern people have about the proposals is how their family might manage their work if they also must take and pick up their child from their education or training provider. This impacts different families in different ways, but for most groups, the issue is that their child attends (or plans to attend) a setting which is far away from home (this distance point is addressed later in the report).

For many, taking responsibility for getting their child to and from school would entail two or three hours of extra driving each day. This limits work options. And some people believe they would need to give up work entirely. Respondents are concerned both about losing income and facing financial difficulties and about knock-on impacts for mental health and wellbeing.

A handful of respondents talk about their situation as single parents and being the sole 'breadwinner' for their family. Others highlight that in pushing responsibility for home to school transport onto parents, this is introducing a barrier to work. This could lead to fewer people working and more claiming benefits (and potentially accessing wider support services), resulting in a negative net impact on the public purse. One person predicted that the costs to parents would escalate further with more parents competing for taxi services.

Several people talk about the positive contribution work makes to their lives, acting as a helpful outlet for parents who need a wider life outside being a carer.

"I wouldn't be able to work. (I already have limited choices of jobs due to the flexibility and hours I need to work to be able to care for my son). This would have a financial impact on the family and would also affect my mental health as working helps me to have my own self identify and confidence and provides distraction from my stressful caring duties."

"I am a single carer and as such I need to work full time just to make ends meet. I would not be able to travel to and from (proposed post-16 setting) twice daily and maintain a full-time job."

Large areas of South Gloucestershire are rural with few public transport options. And many respondents believe there are few local options for specialist post-16 education, which are not always accessible by public transport. This means that without council provision, families who could not transport their child themselves, would be reliant on private taxis. People point out that this would place a significant financial burden on families as the cost of taxis exceeds the mileage rate proposed as part of the scheme.

"Where we live in Chipping Sodbury, public transport is very difficult. As there are no close suitable educational settings, my child currently gets a taxi to and from his school that is 23 miles away."

"If we had to pay for a taxi, mileage allowance would not cover this. Our outgoings would increase massively and put financial pressure on us."

17 people told us that they have more than one child, with different children attending different schools or specialist settings. This group highlight the challenges with getting more than one child to school in a model which is reliant on parents providing transport.

"I am a single parent with another younger child. I work full-time and it would be impossible for me to get my son to and from a post 16 education setting - particularly as suitable places are several miles away."

"I have two children with additional needs in different specialist settings on opposite sides of Bristol which are both in rural locations with no public transport options. It's impossible for me to be in two places at once."

The council provides escorts on some journeys to support young people with particularly complex needs. 11 respondents mentioned having these arrangements for their children and were concerned that it would be difficult - and expensive - to replicate this support outside of the council's current delivery model.

"Our daughter has no independent care skills so one of us or a carer would have to travel in the taxi with her if we looked at this as an option - again severely impacting on our careers."

Seven people mentioned that a parent or carer within their family didn't drive, and one said they didn't have a car. Six people mentioned having disabilities themselves, which they felt would also prove a challenge (respondent data shows that 29 of the people who completed the survey have a disability, so this issue may be more important than stated here).

Respondents believe that these factors make it difficult to get young people to school in a model where the council was no longer taking on responsibility for providing home to school transport.

Other reasons why people are opposed to proposed changes

Most of the reasons people gave for not supporting the changes related to their family's individual circumstances and the difficulties they would face in transporting young people to school. Others felt that there were broader arguments which count against the proposals.

Five people pointed out that if each parent were arranging their own transport it would lead to more vehicles on the roads, adding to congestion and environmental damage. Four said that switching to taking their child into school offered the young people less independence than travelling on a minibus with other young people. Others mentioned that young people would have less opportunity for social interaction if parents or carers were transporting them, whilst two respondents felt that parents could not provide like for like support afforded by escorted travel.

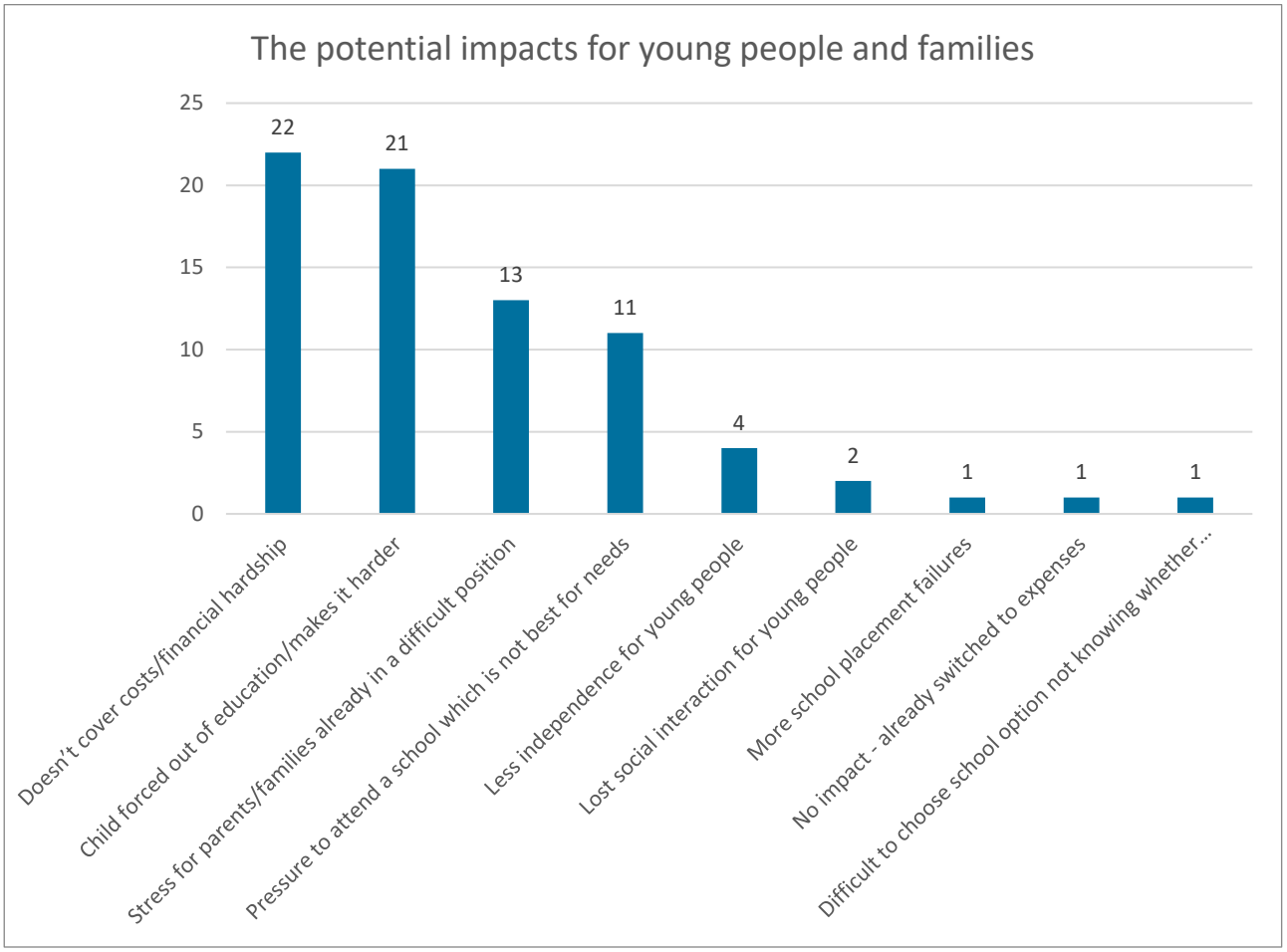
"What about the council's green agenda? Rather than having minibuses transporting young people, if this proposal goes ahead, you will have more cars on the roads with parents just transporting their children to the setting."

Finally, a couple of people worried about the risks of sending their child in a taxi on their own each day, potentially with a different driver each day, who they didn't know if was DBS-checked.

Reason	Number of respondents

Would lead to more vehicles on the road (acting against a council priority)	5
Having parents take children into school each day offers young people less independence	4
Less safe sending a vulnerable child in a taxi on their own rather than with council-approved, DBS-checked staff	2
Parents can't provide a like for like service	2

The impact on families



This report has already mentioned the concern parents and carers have about the financial difficulties they might face if this change is implemented. 22 people felt that the HMRC agreed expenses rate of 45 pence per mile would not cover the costs involved for parents arranging home to school transport themselves. Some of this group thought this would drive them into financial hardship.

The key issue here is that many young people travel long distances to attend a school or placement which meets their needs. It is difficult for parents/carers to take children to and from school where this means many hours of travelling each day, so without appropriate public transport provision, they are reliant on expensive taxis.

"Having to take a regular 45 minutes out every afternoon is just not possible. This is the only school in the area which meets the needs of the EHCP. I am a working parent, there is no way we can survive as a family if I have to change my work, stop working or reduce my hours."

For some, this would mean they would need to change the school provision for their child post-16. 21 respondents said they would need to consider taking their child out of education and 11 thought they might need to change schools to prioritise a shorter travel distance rather than opting for the setting which best met the child's needs.

"It would mean my daughter might have to leave her current school which is the only school with a Hearing Resource Base."

"It's a 45-minute journey each way and if you're only paying for two journeys when I'd be doing four, it would leave me in absolute financial ruin. My son would no longer be able to attend."

"These changes would essentially prevent my nephew from attending the one school in the area where he is getting the support he needs for a successful education."

The challenges parents and carers of young people with SEND face are clear from the responses. 13 people specifically highlight potential impact on their mental health, but it is evident from the tone of all the responses from parents and carers just how much strain and pressure they are under. Respondents talk about the daily pressures, which are amplified by the cumulative impact of having to fight for the support and opportunities that their children need to live a decent life.

"Having a SEN child/young adult is hard enough on a family. The strain of having to fight for everything is really taking its toll after 16 years."

"This would have a devastating impact on my family, and frankly, I am at a loss as to how this would be workable for us."

Wider impacts

This consultation considers the options for how the council might reduce the escalating costs of providing home to school transport support. But at the same time, we recognise

the value education and training provides in opening opportunities for young people to enjoy happy and fulfilling lives. Therefore, in introducing changes, we must avoid anyone being excluded from education. Whatever decision is taken, families with exceptional or extenuating circumstances would be able to make a case for additional discretionary travel assistance.

Some respondents remain concerned that either their family or others may be put into this position of having to pull children out of the best placement for their children.

Others highlight the wider impacts on individuals and families if parents are required to manage transport themselves or if increased costs push them into financial hardship. Some respondents have played out this scenario over the long term and considered potential societal impacts. These include:

Young people can't continue school/training

- Potential of young people cut short,
- Young people become less independent and require more social care support.

Parents/carers forced to reduce or give up work to transport young people to and from school.

- Reduced tax revenue and higher benefits claims,
- Increased mental health and wellbeing concerns.

Families pushed into financial hardship

- Higher benefits claims,
- Increased health concerns.

"If he had to end his post 16 provision, he would require full time social care which would likely cost more than the transport would have done so that would actually be an added expense to the council."

"This will result in more school placement failures at a time of transition resulting in overall higher costs for the council."

Alternative options and potential mitigations

Seven people reiterated their support for the 'do nothing' option. They felt that cuts should fall on other services/groups with support concentrated on the most vulnerable groups.

Recommendation	Number of respondents
Make cuts elsewhere, not for services supporting most vulnerable	7
Maintain council provision with parents contributing to the costs	5

Tiered expenses model with greater support for those with most complex needs	2
Stop sending children out of county for education	1
Support young people with SEND to use already commissioned transport	1
Parents should be paying with funding coming out of their Personal Independence Payment budget	1
Find a way to bring families together to explore joint options	1
Ensure the appeals process is transparent, fair and accessible	1
Provide information early to help planning	1

Five people thought that organising transport themselves was the biggest hurdle, and so the preferable option for them was for this arrangement to continue, with parents and carers contributing to the costs. Another person said this support should be funded through families' Personal Independence Payments.

A couple of respondents wanted the council to consider a more nuanced, tiered expenses model, which recognised the different costs different families might face. They thought that expenses could be a very good option for families living locally to schools, but it is a very different proposition for a young person travelling further afield who potentially needs an escort.

One person suggested the council stop sending young people out of county/long distances to go to school. This links to the broader feedback expressed by many more people that there aren't enough placements in local settings which provide the specialist support needed. Whilst significant increases to local capacity can't be delivered over the short term, if young people had better local options which met their needs, this would undoubtedly reduce transport costs.

In terms of potential mitigations, having early clarity about future arrangements is important – especially for those currently making a choice about provision for the September 2025 intake. Having one organisation organising transport provision for all brings benefits in terms of joining up similar journeys, leading to lower overall costs, fewer vehicles on the road and more social opportunities for young people. One person commented that having multiple parents independently seeking taxi provision could push up costs and asked if there was a way for the council to help link up families to allow them to organise similarly joined-up provision.

Finally, there was an ask that the appeals process could be made more transparent so that those who have potentially exceptional circumstances better understood the criteria used to make decisions.

Other comments and considerations

Several respondents highlighted the council's commitment to support the most vulnerable in society and pointed out the specific requirements for the council to provide appropriate

arrangements to help young people access education or training until the age of 18. This will be a key consideration in the decision about the future approach.

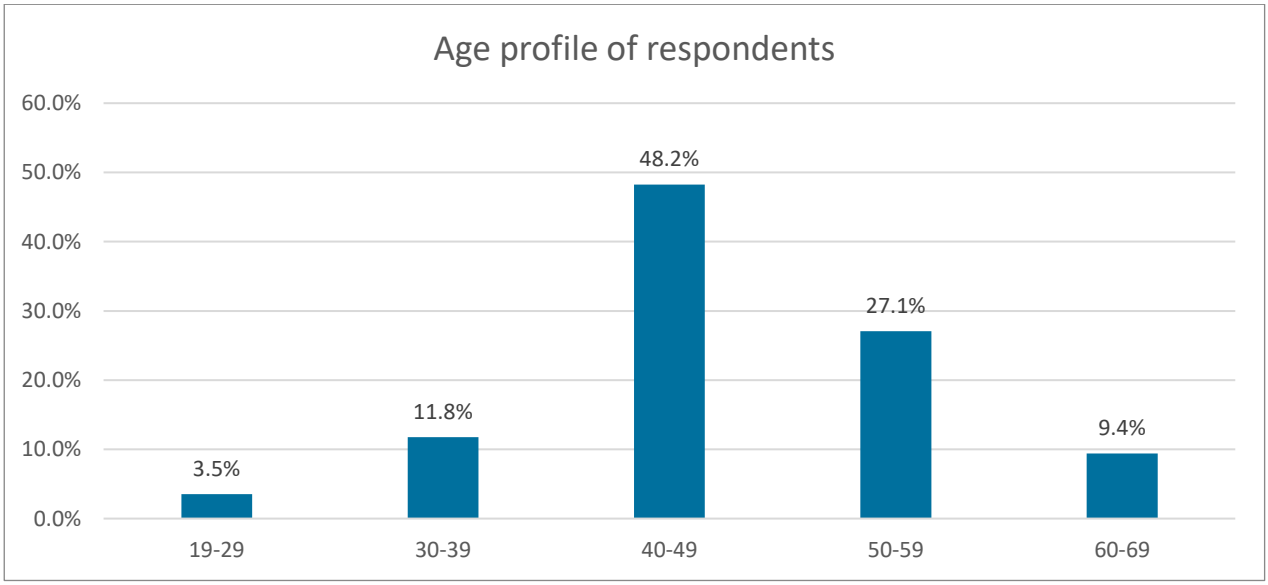
One person felt that some people may not have known about the consultation. The consultation was widely promoted to schools, via the South Gloucestershire Parents and Carers Forum and parents were contacted directly (every family with a young person with an Education Health & Care Plan (EHCP) in years 10 and 11 was sent a letter through the post). However, we were expecting more responses than were received.

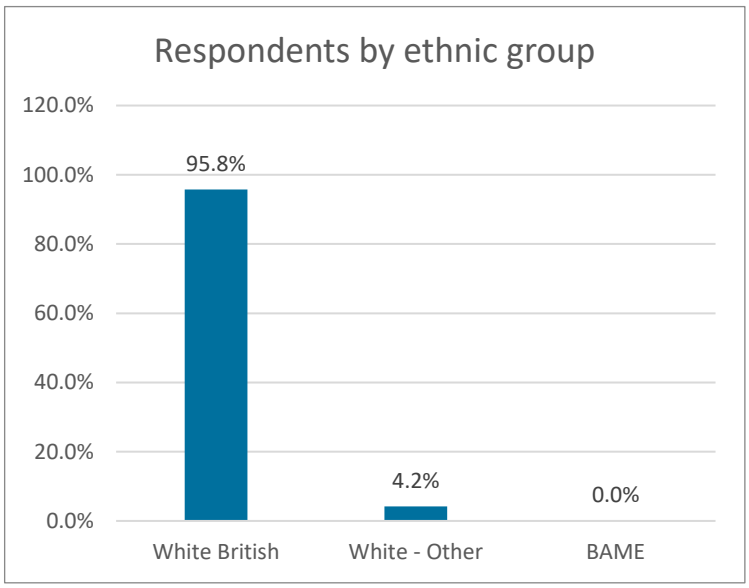
A couple of people asked for information to help them provide informed feedback. Comprehensive background information was shared on the consultation website, and where respondents provided contact details, they were directed to it. Updates were publicised on the consultation site pointing to information like the equality impact assessment which some respondents hadn't been able to find. There was a specific ask for more guidance about what extenuating circumstances would be considered in decisions about allocating additional support. It is difficult to be prescriptive about this as each family's situation will be different, however, the council notes the wish for a transparent appeals process.

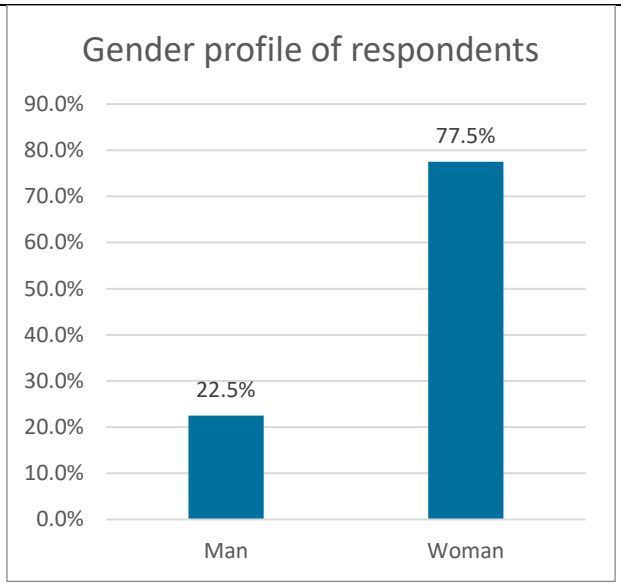
Appendix: Respondent profile

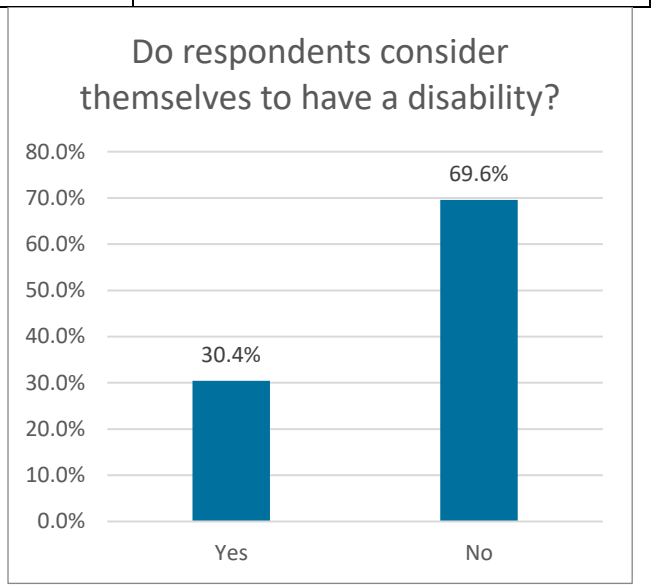
This consultation was completed by a relatively small number of people, with quite a narrow demographic profile. It is not representative of the wider population of South Gloucestershire but does reflect the profile of the people who would be most impacted by potential changes.

There are higher proportions of people aged 40-49 and 50-59, the likely age of parents and carers of teenagers. There is also a higher than representative proportion of respondents who have a disability.




Respondents by ethnic group
120.0%
100.0%
80.0%
60.0%
40.0%
20.0%
0.0%
95.8%
4.2%
0.0%
White British
White - Other
BAME


Gender profile of respondents
90.0%
80.0%
70.0%
60.0%
50.0%
40.0%
30.0%
20.0%
10.0%
0.0%
22.5%
77.5%
Man
Woman


Do respondents consider themselves to have a disability?
80.0%
70.0%
60.0%
50.0%
40.0%
30.0%
20.0%
10.0%
0.0%
30.4%
69.6%
Yes
No