# Councillor urges North Yorkshire Council to soften school transport cuts amid rural backlash



Green Party Councillor Arnold Warneken is calling on his colleagues at North Yorkshire Council to exercise compassion as they prepare to revisit a highly contentious change to the school transport policy. Scheduled for discussion this Wednesday, the meeting is set against a backdrop of public outcry and significant disruption caused by recent cuts that limit free school transport only to the nearest school, rather than the traditional catchment school. This alteration has left many families grappling with confusing, costly, and often unfair situations.

The backlash against the council's decision has been palpable, especially among rural families who face unique challenges. One local mother expressed her concern regarding those living close to council boundaries, noting that the new rules have failed to account for the increased congestion and potential environmental impacts, particularly in light of ongoing climate change discussions. “I am amazed that the impact it would have on everyone needing to drive their child into school and back is not being taken into account,” she said.

Councillor Warneken highlighted the consequences of what many believe was a superficial consultation process. “It’s become clear that although the council went through the motions of a consultation, they didn’t actually listen,” he stated. According to him, the resulting chaos for families was entirely predictable and could have been avoided. During the meeting, he plans to provide specific examples detailing how disrupted transport policies have negatively affected children’s education and imposed financial strains on their parents. He urged fellow councillors to consider not just the policy itself but its broader implications on fairness and family welfare across North Yorkshire.

A look at specific cases reveals the extent of the disruption caused. One family has two children, one eligible for free transport to their catchment school, while the other is not, due to the absurdity of classifying the closest school as a different institution. Another mother relocated to accommodate her family but subsequently found her eldest ineligible for free transport, despite continuing at the same school. Faced with a potential annual travel cost exceeding £2,500 for all three children, she now risks disrupting her children’s education and splitting them between two different schools.

The council, however, remains resolute in its decision, having defended its choice to cut approximately £4 million from school transport services. This policy change affects around 10,000 pupils and has been implemented in response to soaring expenditure, which has more than doubled since 2018 due to rising fuel costs. The council asserts that limiting free transport to the closest school is necessary to manage the £51 million annual transport budget efficiently.

Despite the financial arguments put forth by the council, numerous parents have raised serious safety concerns. Reports indicate that many children will be forced to travel along unsuitable roads to reach their nearest schools, particularly in rural areas where the winter months can present hazardous conditions. Some parents in regions like Swaledale have described the roads to their closest schools as 'dangerous'.

Moreover, the assertions from council leaders that these changes will not lead to school closures have done little to allay fears among families. While officials insist that no schools will be shuttered as a result of the new regulations, anxiety about the future of educational opportunities remains high in affected communities. The potential for significant additional costs for families continues to loom large; for instance, the chair of governors at Settle College has indicated that this policy could cost the institution upwards of £300,000 annually.

As discussions unfold at this week’s meeting, the call for a more compassionate approach to school transport policy echoes across the region. Councillor Warneken urges his Conservative colleagues to act with courage and listen genuinely to the concerns of the families they represent. By altering course to restore catchment provisions, the council could potentially ease the burdens placed on so many families throughout North Yorkshire.

### Reference Map

1. [[1]](https://www.harrogate-news.co.uk/2025/05/20/councillor-calls-for-compassion-ahead-of-school-bus-cuts-debate/) Core information about the councillor's call for compassion and public outcry.
2. [[2]](https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/education/council-defends-controversial-cuts-to-school-transport-across-rural-north-yorkshire-4869521) Council's defense of the budget cuts and impact on rural families.
3. [[3]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2kzwdd0n8o) Overview of petition and intensifying campaign against the policy.
4. [[4]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cv2gvxnnedpo) Safety concerns raised by parents regarding travel on unsuitable roads.
5. [[5]](https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/education/school-transport-changes-will-not-lead-to-school-closures-say-north-yorkshire-council-chiefs-4974735) Council assurances about school closures.
6. [[6]](https://www.harrogateadvertiser.co.uk/education/north-yorkshire-councils-home-to-school-transport-policy-change-branded-draconian-as-families-face-confusion-5104736) Parental confusion and distress caused by the draconian policy.
7. [[7]](https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/education/school-transport-changes-in-north-yorkshire-to-cost-parents-hundreds-of-pounds-a-year-says-governors-4715214) Financial implications for specific schools like Settle College.

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.harrogate-news.co.uk/2025/05/20/councillor-calls-for-compassion-ahead-of-school-bus-cuts-debate/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/education/council-defends-controversial-cuts-to-school-transport-across-rural-north-yorkshire-4869521> - North Yorkshire Council defends its decision to cut approximately £4 million from school transport services. The policy change restricts free transport to the nearest school, affecting around 10,000 pupils. Parents, especially in rural areas, express concerns about safety and increased costs. The council emphasizes the need to reduce the £51 million annual expenditure on school transport, which has more than doubled since 2018 due to rising fuel costs.
3. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cx2kzwdd0n8o> - A campaign to overturn North Yorkshire Council's decision to change school bus services in rural areas has intensified. Over a thousand people have signed a petition calling on the council to rethink its plan to restrict free transport for pupils in the Dales to only the nearest school to their home address. Parents whose children attend schools further afield would have to fund travel themselves, and families in Swaledale said roads to their closest schools could be 'dangerous' in the winter months.
4. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cv2gvxnnedpo> - Parents in rural North Yorkshire have raised safety concerns over a proposed change to free school transport. The council plans to limit free transport to the nearest school, potentially requiring children to travel on unsuitable roads in bad weather. The policy aims to save over £3 million but has faced criticism from families who fear it could put their children's safety at risk.
5. <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/education/school-transport-changes-will-not-lead-to-school-closures-say-north-yorkshire-council-chiefs-4974735> - North Yorkshire Council leaders assert that changes to the home-to-school transport policy will not lead to school closures. The new rules restrict free transport to a child's nearest school, aiming to reduce the £50 million annual expenditure on school transport. Despite widespread criticism, council chiefs state that no schools will close due to these changes.
6. <https://www.harrogateadvertiser.co.uk/education/north-yorkshire-councils-home-to-school-transport-policy-change-branded-draconian-as-families-face-confusion-5104736> - North Yorkshire's new home-to-school transport policy has been described as 'draconian' after councillors heard about the distress it was causing a family. The policy change means children will only get free transport to their nearest school rather than their catchment school. Parents have expressed confusion and anxiety over the new rules, leading to heated discussions among councillors.
7. <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/education/school-transport-changes-in-north-yorkshire-to-cost-parents-hundreds-of-pounds-a-year-says-governors-4715214> - The chair of governors at Settle College has criticized North Yorkshire Council's proposal to restrict free home-to-school transport to pupils attending their nearest school. The policy change is expected to cost Settle College up to £300,000 annually, even with concessions for low-income families. Affected families, including those in Bentham and Ingleborough, may face hundreds of pounds in travel costs.