# North Yorkshire Council faces backlash over school transport cuts amid safety and savings debate



Campaigners have accused North Yorkshire Council of prioritising its reputation over meaningful fiscal responsibility as it remains steadfast in implementing controversial changes to home-to-school transport. The proposed policy shift, which restricts free transport provision to the nearest school, is defended by council leaders as necessary for budget management amid rising costs, but opponents assert it is a poorly designed initiative that may not yield the anticipated savings.

At a crucial meeting set to convene soon, councilors are expected to vote on a motion aimed at reinstating the former catchment area system. This shift comes amidst growing unrest from parents who argue that the new policy could disrupt established community ties and force children into less safe travel conditions, particularly in rural areas where school routes are often questionable.

The School Transport Action Group (STAG), an advocacy group formed by concerned parents, claims the council’s estimates of potential savings—projected at up to £4.2 million annually—are based on flawed assumptions. STAG spokespersons have suggested that if all eligible students opted for free transport to their nearest school, costs could exceed those incurred under the previous catchment-based system. “This has now become more about saving face than saving money,” commented a STAG representative, highlighting a disconnect between public assurances from the council and private acknowledgments of the policy's inadequacies.

The council argues that reverting to the catchment system would reintroduce inequality, compromising a uniform system already deemed necessary to conform with many neighbouring authorities. Council leader Carl Les articulated his concern that the proposed changes imply a failure to acknowledge the financial realities most local councils face. He noted, “It is a very difficult decision to change the policy, made in the face of having to make savings across all budgets.” This sentiment reflects a wider trend among local authorities struggling to manage shrinking budgets while maintaining essential services.

Despite these assurances, the council's handling of the situation has been met with heavy scrutiny. Opponents, including Liberal Democrat and Green Party councillors, contend that the policy has been rushed through without sufficient public discourse or consideration for impacted families. Critics like Councillor John McCartney have condemned the lack of clarity from council leaders, describing the changes as 'draconian' and alienating to parents.

The palpable anger surrounding these changes was further exacerbated by reports of a meeting being derailed due to allegations of a cover-up concerning the lack of adequate information presented to council members. Brenda Price, chair of governors at local schools, raised concerns that the proposal would force children into hazardous travel situations, particularly during harsh weather conditions typical of the region.

As tensions mount ahead of the extraordinary council meeting, planned protests are expected, signalling widespread dissatisfaction among parents who are advocating for a system that they believe prioritises child safety and community cohesion. Importantly, while council officials have stressed that these transport changes will not lead to school closures, apprehension remains that the new policy could adversely affect pupil numbers and the overall viability of marginal schools.

The complexity of the situation has not escaped the notice of policymakers at higher levels; discussions have reached as far as the House of Lords, where Baroness Harris of Richmond raised the emotional toll these changes have taken on families, noting the potential for students to be driven out of county for education. Such considerations highlight the overarching challenge that local councils face: balancing fiscal prudence with the responsibility to safeguard the educational needs and wellbeing of their communities.

Given the growing pressure, it remains to be seen how council members will navigate the voting process while also addressing apprehensions from the public. Yet, as the voices of concerned parents and educational advocates grow louder, the call for a comprehensive review of the home-to-school transport policy remains urgent and compelling. The outcome of this extraordinary meeting could very well have lasting implications for how education is accessed across North Yorkshire.

### Reference Map

1. Core focus and background context relating to the situation with North Yorkshire Council.
2. Information on community concerns and reactions from parents and local leaders.
3. Description of changes being implemented and justification from the council.
4. Emotional responses from parents and further criticism of the council's handling.
5. Amplified advocacy efforts and safety concerns from parents.
6. Council's stance regarding implications for school viability.
7. Wider ramifications discussed in the House of Lords concerning family distress and educational access.

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

## Bibliography

1. <https://www.thisisthecoast.co.uk/news/local-news/north-yorkshire-council-accused-of-face-saving/> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/ckgyz9vx938o> - A meeting to discuss changes to home-to-school transport in North Yorkshire was halted after parents and councillors alleged a 'cover-up'. The council proposed limiting free transport to a child's nearest school, aiming to save up to £3 million annually. However, campaigners, including Brenda Price, chair of governors at Reeth and Gunnerside Schools, expressed concerns that the policy would disrupt communities and force children to attend multiple schools. Councillor Stuart Parsons proposed deferring the debate due to insufficient information.
3. <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/education/council-defends-controversial-cuts-to-school-transport-across-rural-north-yorkshire-4869521> - North Yorkshire Council defended its decision to cut approximately £4 million from school transport services. The council's new policy restricts free transport to the nearest school for most of the region's 10,000 eligible pupils. Parents, especially in rural areas, argued that this could force children to travel on unsuitable roads during bad weather. The council acknowledged the rising costs of school transport but emphasized the need for budget reductions.
4. <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 was described as 'draconian' after councillors heard about the distress it was causing a family. Parent Charlotte Poran from Kirk Hammerton recounted seven months of anxiety and confusion due to the policy change. Councillor John McCartney criticized the lack of public information about the change, accusing fellow councillors of removing parental choice. An extraordinary meeting of North Yorkshire Council was scheduled to discuss the policy change.
5. <https://www.bbc.com/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 signed a petition urging the council to reconsider its plan to restrict free transport for pupils in the Dales to only the nearest school. Parents expressed concerns that children would have to travel on dangerous roads during winter months. The council stated that school bus routes were risk-assessed, but parents remained apprehensive about the safety implications.
6. <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/education/school-transport-changes-will-not-lead-to-school-closures-say-north-yorkshire-council-chiefs-4974735> - North Yorkshire Council officials assured that changes to the home-to-school transport policy would not lead to school closures. Despite widespread criticism, council leaders emphasized the need to reduce the £50 million spent annually on transporting children. The new policy limits free transport to a child's nearest school, aiming to save up to £3 million. While some parents feared this would reduce pupil numbers and lead to job losses, council chiefs stated there was no evidence of schools becoming financially unsustainable.
7. <https://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/education/house-of-lords-told-of-heartache-and-distress-caused-by-school-transport-changes-4936172> - The House of Lords was informed of the 'heartache and distress' caused to thousands of families by changes to home-to-school transport in North Yorkshire. Baroness Harris of Richmond highlighted that the policy ignored the county's geography and failed to consider the disruption to families. She expressed concerns that families might be forced to send their children out of the county for education, leading to reduced pupil numbers and potential challenges in maintaining school quality.