

Staffordshire Temporary Vacant Seat Scheme Survey Analysis

Temporary Vacant Seat scheme

The temporary vacant seat scheme has been previously operated by Staffordshire County Council to enable families not eligible for free school transport to pay for spare seats on council services. Where available, spare seats could be applied for through Staffordshire County Council's application process for pupils not entitled to free transport.

The scheme was suspended during the coronavirus pandemic and a decision has been made to keep the suspension of the scheme while Staffordshire County Council considers the impact of the published guidance on the impact of Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) on Home to School Transport, and changes to Local Authority exemptions.

Having reviewed the situation, the Council has concluded that transport operators within the region do not have enough compliant vehicles and has concerns that what could be provided within the law would be an unfair, hybrid system. The Council has made the decision to not reinstate the temporary vacant seat scheme unless a legal and fair solution can be found.

Listening Exercise

Following the Council's recent announcement and as part of the process of identifying a potential solution, Staffordshire residents were invited to share their views and ideas through an online survey. The survey was open between 31st August 2021 and closed at midday on the 12th October 2021.



603
responses received in total



25%
Respondents had previously used the temporary vacant seat scheme



36% have a child/children in years 1-6
75% have a child/children in years 7-11
25% with a child/children in years 12/13

- **556 responses (92%) were from Staffordshire parents**, 4% from Staffordshire pupil/students and three responses were from councillors/MPs.
- **221 respondents (37%) with a child/children aged 16 or over**, said that they were **previously entitled to free transport to their high school**.

- Half of the respondents with a child who wasn't previously entitled to free transport previously (or that said they were unsure), said their child was **driven to school by a parent during the period of Sep 2020 to Jul 2021**. 28% respondents said their child/children had walked to school.

Attitudes towards the proposals

- All but one of the 596 respondents that provided a response were **opposed to the proposals not to reinstate the scheme**.
- **171 respondents (28%)** said the impact of the decision not to reinstate the scheme would lead to **their child/children not being able to attend school**.
- 13% had concerns over the safety impact of their child walking to school, whilst 11% were concerned about the financial impact of either finding alternative transport / before and after school care / having to reduce working hours. 10% had concerns about the impact on their own/their child's mental health.
- In terms of alternative plans respondents would put in place to ensure their child attends school, **25% respondents said they did not know / had no other options available to them**.
- 15% respondents said their child would be taken to school by car as an alternative option and 9% said they would have to rearrange/reduce their working hours. 8% said their child would not be able to attend school.

Suggested proposals

Respondents whether they had any suggestions or ideas that would enable the service to run in a way that is fair and without cost to the taxpayer. Key suggestions included:

Allow parents to pay / contribute towards a seat (212 responses)

Sell/use currently vacant seats on services (132 responses)

Taxpayers' money to fund the scheme (school transport is an essential service) (54 responses)

Other suggestions include running a public bus service to rural areas, raising funds/sponsorship, engagement with other Councils, applying for an exemption (59 responses)