



# Spare Seat Scheme Charging Options

We run school buses for children who are [eligible for free school transport](#).

There may be a small number of seats on some routes that are spare. We sell these for young people who are not eligible for free school transport via our [Spare Seats scheme](#).

After we have allocated seats to all young people who are eligible for free school transport, the Spare Seats scheme offers paid-for seats on timetabled Council-run school buses.

The [current Spare Seats Scheme charge](#) depends on age, distance and whether boarding within or outside of Buckinghamshire. Customers have told us that this structure is complex and difficult to understand.

We are proposing to simplify school bus ticket charges for the Spare Seats scheme.

The proposed changes will even out the cost of travel over a child's whole school career by reducing the cost of post-16 travel for some Spare Seats passengers, making it easier for parents and carers to know upfront how much they will have to pay before applying for a seat.

## We want to know your preference between three proposed Spare Seat scheme charging options:

- **Option 1: Distance banding** (small difference between distance bands)
- **Option 2: Distance banding** (medium difference between distance bands)
- **Option 3: Flat fee** (regardless of distance)

### Under all proposed options:

- We are removing the price increase that may apply when Spare Seat customers reach sixth form age (post-16). No post-16 young person will see an age-related increase in the cost of their spare seat while they continue to travel on the same bus to the same school.

The parent/carer of an 11 year old child will be able to plan ahead knowing that they won't be subject to an age-related price increase once their child is post-16 if they continue to travel on the same bus to the same school.

- Our Spare Seats scheme charges will be easier to understand.
- Non-Buckinghamshire Council residents will pay a higher fee to customers who live within Buckinghamshire.

There are no other changes proposed to the Spare Seat Scheme offer, application process or prioritisation policy. Only the Spare Seat charges will change from the 2023 to 2024 academic year.

### Option 1: Distance banding (small difference between distance bands)

- For Buckinghamshire Council residents, the charge will depend on the distance travelled between our Council-run school bus bus-stop and school. There is a flat charge for non-residents.
- This proposal reduces the existing distance bands from 5 to 3. There is a £22 and £21 increase respectively between distance bands 2 and 3.
- The maximum increase that a Buckinghamshire resident customer will pay is capped at 9.9% (an extra £80 per year or £6.67 per month).
- There is a maximum reduction in price for Buckinghamshire students of sixth form age of £464 per year (34.4%).

The proposed option 1 distance bandings related charges for 2023 to 2024 are:

Customer	Distance	Proposed charge for 2023 to 2024
Buckinghamshire Council resident	0 to 3.99 miles	£843
	4 to 6.99 miles	£865
	7 miles or more	£886
Non-Buckinghamshire Council resident	Any distance	£1,200

### Option 2: Distance banding (medium difference between distance bands)

- For Buckinghamshire Council residents, the charge will depend on the distance travelled between our Council-run school bus bus-stop and school. There is a flat charge for non-residents.
- This proposal reduces the existing distance bands from 5 to 3. There is a £53 increase between each band.
- The charge for distance band 1 (0 to 3.99 miles) is lower than in Option 1.
- The maximum increase that a Buckinghamshire resident customer will pay is capped at 13.2% (an extra £106 per year or £8.83 per month).
- There is a maximum reduction in price for Buckinghamshire students of sixth form age of £438 per year (32.4%).

The proposed option 2 distance bandings and charges for 2023 to 2024 are:

Customer	Distance	Proposed charge for 2023 to 2024
Buckinghamshire Council resident	0 to 3.99 miles	£806
	4 to 6.99 miles	£859
	7 miles or more	£912
Non-Buckinghamshire Council resident	Any distance	£1,200

### Option 3: Flat rate

- The charge is set regardless of distance travelled, based on whether you are Buckinghamshire Council resident or not.
- There is a maximum reduction in price for Buckinghamshire students of sixth form age of £482 p.a. (35.7%).

The proposed flat rate charges for 2023 to 2024 are:

Customer	Proposed charge for 2023 to 2024
Buckinghamshire Council resident	£868
Non-Buckinghamshire Council resident	£1,200

All proposed charging proposals:

- Remove the price increase that may apply for Post-16 Spare Seats customers, making it easier to plan ahead
- Will make our Spare Seats Scheme charges easier to understand
- Charge non-residents a higher fee than customers who live within Buckinghamshire
- Have been modelled to:
  - Make no additional income for the Council
  - Achieve zero percentage increase on average across all Buckinghamshire school bus ticket (Spare Seats Scheme) customers. We based our calculations on 2022 to 2023 Spare Seats prices and 2022 to 2023 Spare Seat passenger profile
  - Show comparison of all options following a 3% uplift to 2022 to 2023 Spare Seat fees

As with current charges, payments can be made termly or yearly online, or by monthly Direct Debit over 8 months.

### Other options considered

We considered other options that were not taken forward:

#### Continue with the current scheme

- Parent/carer feedback has been that the current pay rates are very difficult to understand because different rates apply. Charges depend on age, distance and whether boarding within or outside of Buckinghamshire
- Current scheme has 13 different price points and it is not possible to know upfront what families will have to pay before applying
- Current scheme has a large fee increase for most pupils when they reach sixth-form age, even if they are continuing at the same school and travelling on the same bus

#### Higher fees for both distance banding and flat rate proposals

- We have considered higher charge amounts as the contract costs that we are paying for school buses are rising significantly
- However, even though our costs are continuing to increase, we are aware that there is a limit on how much extra parents/carers can afford in the current difficult financial climate
- For this reason, we have applied only a 3% increase to our 2022 to 2023 charges to enable easy comparison to proposed charges for 2023 to 2024 academic year

#### Closing the Spare Seats scheme

- Buses would run with a limited number of vacant seats. This does not align with Buckinghamshire Council's climate change ambitions
- Result in a loss of income which helps fund our services

## How would the proposed options affect Spare Seats customers?

### Example 1 – Theo, age 12 and travels 3 miles

Theo is 12 years old, lives in Lacey Green and travels 3 miles to school. Under the current Spare Seat fee structure his parents will be paying £806 for his seat in 2023-24.

Under the Council's proposed changes his parents would see the following change for the 2023 to 2024 academic year:

#### Option 1 – Distance banding (small difference between distance bands)

The new fee would be £843.

This is £37 or 4.6% (£3.08 per month) more than they would have paid under the current charging structure.

#### Option 2 – Distance banding (medium difference between distance bands)

The new fee would be £806, which is the same as they would have paid under the current charging structure.

#### Option 3 - Flat rate

The new fee would be £868.

This is £62 or 7.7% (£5.17 per month) more than they would have paid under the current charging structure.

### Example 2 – Imogen, age 14 and travels 4.5 miles

Imogen is 14 years old, lives in Aston Clinton and travels 4.5 miles to school. Under the current Spare Seat fee structure her parents will be paying £806 for her seat in 2023-24 (current pre-16 price is regardless of distance).

Under the Council's proposed changes her parents would see the following change for the 2023 to 2024 academic year:

#### Option 1 – Distance banding (small difference between distance bands)

The new fee would be £865.

This is £59 or 7.3% (£4.92 per month) more than they would have paid under the current charging structure.

#### Option 2 – Distance banding (medium difference between distance bands)

The new fee would be £859.

This is £53 or 6.6% (£4.42 per month) more than they would have paid under the current charging structure.

#### Option 3 - Flat rate

The new fee would be £868.

This is £62 or 7.7% (£5.17 per month) more than they would have paid under the current charging structure.

### Example 3 – Tariq, age 17 and travels 10 miles

Tariq is 17 years old, lives in Twyford and travels 10 miles to school. Under the current Spare Seat fee structure his parents will be paying £1,350 for his seat in 2023-24 (current post-16 price is distance-banded).

Under the Council's proposed changes his parents would see the following change for the 2023 to 2024 academic year:

#### Option 1 – Distance banding (small difference between distance bands)

The new fee would be £886.

This is £464 or 34.4% (£38.67 per month) less than they would have paid under the current charging structure.

#### Option 2 – Distance banding (medium difference between distance bands)

The new fee would be £912.

This is £438 or 32.4% (£36.50 per month) less than they would have paid under the current charging structure.

#### Option 3 - Flat rate

The new fee would be £868.

This is £482 or 35.7% (£40.17 per month) less than they would have paid under the current charging structure.