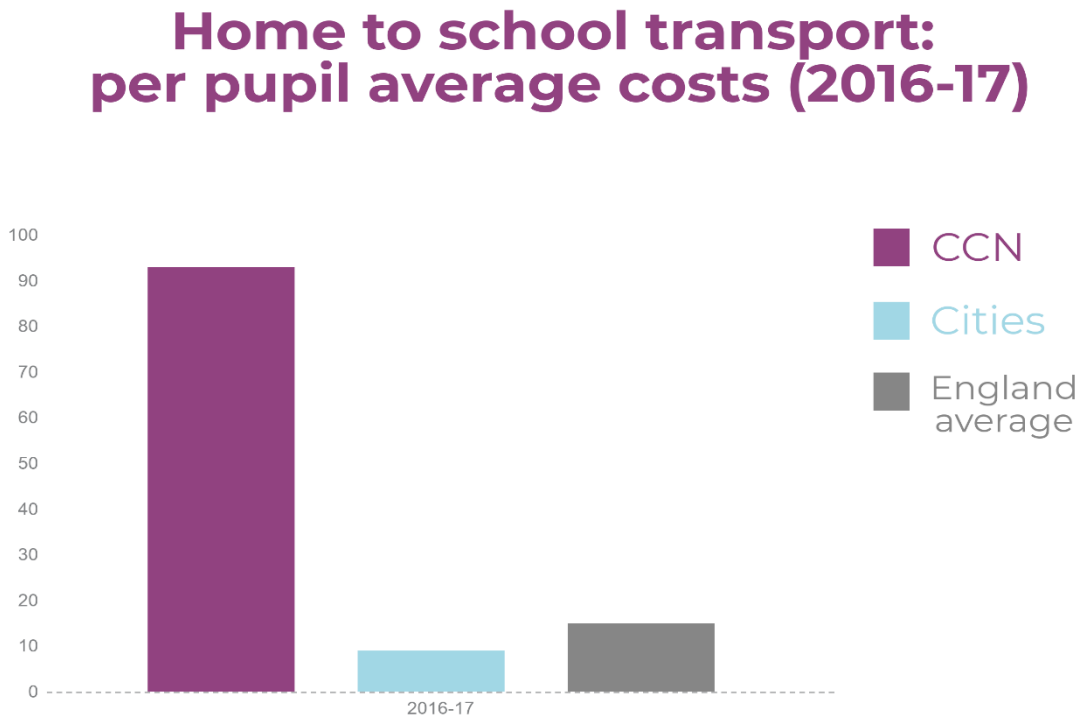
Home to school transport in county areas

In May, the County Councils Network (CCN) released new research on home to school transport; which illustrates that the costs of providing this service in rural areas is significantly higher than in urban areas.

This short CCN analysis provides an overview of our data and our response to the findings. The data brought together in this report is based on section 251 outturn data for mainstream, pre-16 home to school transport, broken down per-pupil by financial year. CCN also undertook further work on total expenditure on the service by financial year, and pupil numbers who used the service to illustrate the impact of funding shortfalls. Please contact ian.burbidge@local.gov.uk for more information.



Key policy findings:

- **The average per-pupil cost of delivering home to school transport in county areas is £93 per pupil, almost ten times the average in urban and city areas, where the average cost is £10 per pupil.** The council with the highest expenditure is North Yorkshire at £207 per pupil, followed by Shropshire at £184 and Northumberland at £175. This is due to the higher numbers of pupils who are eligible for free transport in rural areas compared to urban ones, exacerbated by housing growth. These are pupils under eight years old who live two miles from their school and pupils over eight years old who live three miles from their school, or if there is no safe walking route in rural areas. There are also higher costs to transport pupils in rural areas due to longer distances travelled and availability of routes.

- **In every region in England, county councils or county unitary authorities are the ones that are paying significantly more per pupil than the city and metropolitan boroughs.** The data shows some large regional variations in the costs of subsidised school transport, with home to school transport in North Yorkshire costing £207 per pupil, significantly more than neighbouring towns and cities such as Leeds (£15), Bradford (£30), and Wakefield (£23); Hampshire's per pupil average of £62 is far greater than neighbouring Portsmouth (£6), Southampton (£12), and Reading (£23).

- **By the end of the decade, counties will receive £161 of core funding per head compared to an England average of £266 and £459 in London, and their funding from government will almost half over that period.** School transport is largely funded by these government grants – but is insufficient for the higher number of pupils who are eligible for free home to school transport, as well as the higher costs in transporting pupils in rural settings. A report from the Campaign for Better Transport in 2016 estimates that 18% of pupils in county areas are eligible, under the statutory guidance, for free home to school transport.

- **Consequently, counties have had little choice but to reduce home to school transport services over the last few years, with some reducing services down to statutory minimum. A survey of counties carried out by CCN, and supplemented by government data, show that 29 out of 36 CCN member councils reduced yearly expenditure on home to school transport between 2013/14 and 2016/17.** In total, overall net expenditure on home to school transport for the 36 CCN councils reduced from £297m in 2013/14 to £280m in 2016/17. Only Wiltshire, Cornwall, Suffolk, Devon, Cumbria, East Riding, and Essex increased net expenditure during that period.

- **Data from 20 of those councils shows that thousands of pupils no longer received free home to school transport as councils tighten eligibility, or introduce charges, due to the severe funding shortfalls. In 2017, 22,352 less pupils were receiving the service compared to 2014.** Whilst the data shows a reduction in the number of schoolchildren benefitting from the service, it does show that many counties went above and beyond the statutory minimum for eligibility. Our councils warn they will have to continue to reduce services, however, unless a fairer funding solution is found.

- **There is clear evidence that special educational needs (SEN) home to school transport is a growing financial pressure for counties, with 29 out of 36 county authorities increasing their expenditure on SEN home to school transport between 2013 and 2017.** In 2013/14, the 36 CCN members collectively spent £240m on SEN home to school transport, whilst in 2016/17 this figure was £291m, despite data from 11 councils showing a slight drop in pupils between those two financial years - 16,966 pupils to 16,917.

- **Counties have less scope to reduce SEN home to school transport costs.** In total, 13.9% of the 4.6million county pupils have a Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education and Health Care Plan. Councils have to provide free home to school transport if a SEN pupil cannot walk to school because of their disability, regardless of where they live. The introduction of a 0-25 age range of eligibility, plus the added sparseness of post-19 education colleges in large rural areas, has exacerbated

funding pressures for CCN members, with many beginning to record overspends in SEN home to school transport

Methodology:

- The per head figures in this data are taken from section 251 outturn data published by the government, which shows mainstream, pre-16 pupils' home to school transport costs, on a per-head basis by financial year. This is calculated by taking a council's yearly spend divided by the total number of school-age pupils in that area. The SEN figures are calculated in the same way.

CCN media reaction and coverage

"There is clear evidence that there are significant extra costs in delivering school transport services in rural county areas, with rurality being a key issue exacerbated by a reduction in bus routes, and an increase in housing numbers. We pay a rural premium in delivering these transport services, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain subsidies. Regrettably, we have had little choice to cut back on free transport services for thousands of rural pupils, and tighten eligibility.

"This is why the historic underfunding of county authorities must be addressed in a fairer funding settlement. Providing free transport to our schools is a much-valued service, yet it is one we can scarcely afford beyond our statutory duties.

"We very much support the direction of travel laid out by government, but the rhetoric must be backed up with real, tangible change to the way councils are funded, with the recognition of the increased costs of delivering services in rural settings. We will continue to work with Ministers to ensure that the new formula funds councils based on what they genuinely need to provide vital local services such as school transport."

CCN has secured coverage of our home to school transport research in 17 different publications; from the national press, the education and local government trade press, and regional newspapers.

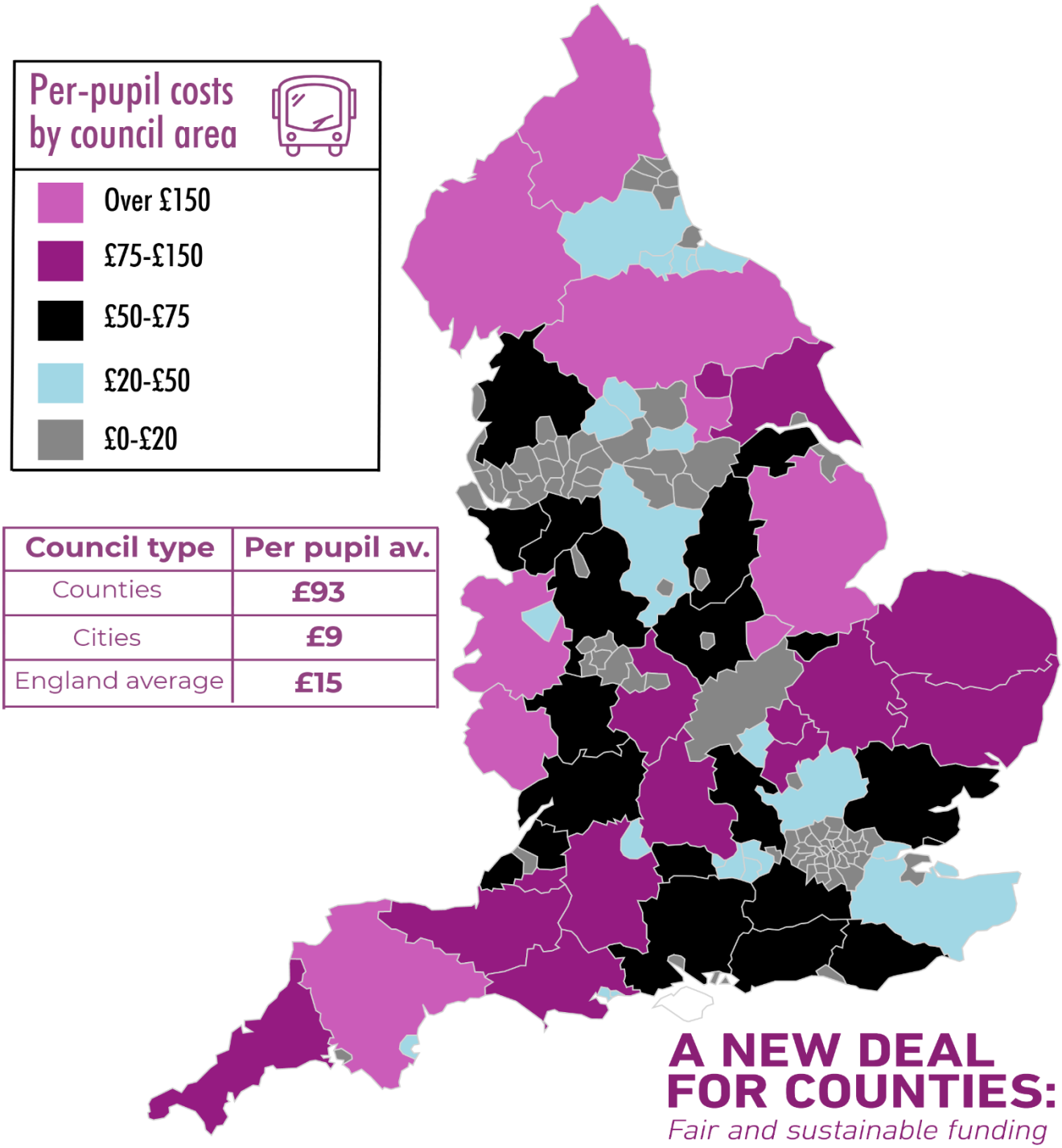
Coverage includes:

The Guardian BBC INDEPENDENT

RURAL v URBAN

CCN COUNTY COUNCILS NETWORK

THE COSTS OF DELIVERING HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT



Council type	Per pupil av.
Counties	**£93**
Cities	**£9**
England average	**£15**

A NEW DEAL FOR COUNTIES:

Fair and sustainable funding

CCN View

Much of the focus on county authority funding pressures is on adult's and children's social care. However, home to school transport is just one of those less publicised services that is facing a growing crisis.

Our research shows that over 20,000 less pupils were receiving free home to school transport in 20 county areas in 2017 compared to just three years prior. This is because counties, faced with underfunding of services, and an estimated £2.54bn funding black hole by 2021, have had little choice to reduce services down to the statutory minimum, and introduce new charges.

At the same time, there is clear evidence of extreme funding pressures within special educational needs home to school transport – with 29 out of 36 councils increasing their net yearly expenditure from 2014 to 2017. With no mileage radius in SEN home to school transport, the increased costs of delivering this service in rural areas hits CCN member councils harder than urban authorities.

Some councils have innovated to transform services – by changing existing school bus routes to take on more pupils – but a lack of funding remains. Consequently, counties are warning they will have to reduce services further unless a sustainable funding solution is found.

The forthcoming Spending Review is an opportunity for all councils to unite and make the case for a bigger slice of the national funding pie. However, alongside this, it is crucial that the government's on-going fair funding review ensures a larger quantum of resources is distributed fairly across councils.

The reality is that many of these high-valued services will be reduced to the bare minimum in statutory duty unless councils get a sustainable funding settlement and the historic underfunding of counties is addressed.

CCN member councils' funding will reduce by 43% between 2018-2020, faster than any other local authority type. By the end of the decade, counties will receive £160 of core government funding per head, compared to £460 per head for London authorities, £327 per head for metropolitan boroughs, and £230 per head for non-CCN unitaries.

Whilst funding is clearly an issue, there are also other factors that exacerbate the problem. Due to a lack of funding for bus route subsidies, many buses and or routes have been cut, which ultimately reduced the amount of services available for school transport.

In some two-tier areas, ill-thought out housing has exacerbated the issue, with homes and development created without consideration of the nearest school, or estates built without a school. In rural areas these developments could be located in disparate locations, meaning the county council has to put the bill as the families living there are beyond the two or three mile radius of the closest school.

CCN will continue to build a strong evidence base on the need for a more sustainable funding settlement for all councils. Home to school transport is just one example of where councils are having to make unpopular cut backs. But it also serves to demonstrate that more resources, distributed the same old way, will fail to recognise the increased costs of delivering services in rural settings and it is leading to growing areas of 'unmet' needs.

In the case of home to school transport it is clear there is a 'rural premium' on delivering this kind of service. The government's fair funding review is welcome, and CCN supports the current direction of travel as laid out in March's technical consultation, but government must acknowledge the higher costs of delivering services in rural areas, as part of the final formula, to be introduced in 2020, and fund local authorities adequately based on these additional costs.

Regional breakdowns – per pupil costs for mainstream home to school transport 2016-17

North East

Northumberland - £175

Durham - £45

Stockton-On-Tees - £31

Redcar & Cleveland - £29

Middlesbrough - £23

Hartlepool - £15

South Tyneside - £9

North Tyneside - £5

Gateshead - £2

Sunderland - £1

Newcastle - £1

North West

Cumbria - £160

Cheshire East – £70

Cheshire West and Chester - £54

Lancashire - £51

Stockport - £19

Warrington - £16

Manchester - £15

Liverpool - £14

St Helens - £13

Blackburn with Darwen- £12

Halton - £11

Rochdale - £7

Knowlsey - £7

Wirral - £7

East Midlands

Lincolnshire - £148

North Lincolnshire - £61

Leicestershire - £53

Nottinghamshire - £52

Derbyshire - £41

North East Lincolnshire - £13

Leicester £2

Nottingham - £1

Derby £0

West Midlands

Shropshire - £184

Herefordshire - £178

Warwickshire - £89

Worcestershire - £61

Staffordshire - £52

Wolverhampton - £17

Solihull - £16

Coventry - £12

Dudley - £6

Stoke - £4

Birmingham - £1

Sefton - £4

Bolton - £4

Tameside - £4

Trafford - £3

Salford - £2

Wigan - £2

Blackpool - £1

Bury - £0

Oldham – £0

Yorkshire

North Yorkshire - £204

East Riding of Yorkshire - £103

York - £92

North Lincolnshire - £61

Calderdale - £36

Bradford £30

Wakefield - £23

Rotherham - £18

Leeds - £15

Barnsley - £14

Doncaster - £13

North East Lincolnshire - £13

Sheffield - £12

Kirklees - £10

Hull - £7

East of England

Suffolk - £142

Norfolk - 132

Cambridgeshire - £114

Bedford - £100

Central Bedfordshire - £96

Essex - £63

Southend - £50

Hertfordshire - £36

Peterborough - £34

Thurrock - £30

Luton - £15

South East

Oxfordshire - £93

Buckinghamshire - £70

Hampshire - £62

West Sussex - £58

Surrey - £58

West Berkshire - £55

East Sussex - £52

Wokingham - £41

Kent - £35

Windsor and Maidenhead - £31

Milton Keynes - £26

Bracknell Forest - £24

Reading – £23

Southampton - £12

Slough - £11

Brighton and Hove - £7

Portsmouth - £6

South West

Devon - £152

Cornwall - £136

Dorset - £133

Somerset - £122

Wiltshire - £105

Bath and North-East Somerset - £88

Gloucestershire - £68

North Somerset - £62

South Gloucestershire - £55

Torbay - £41

Poole - £23

Bournemouth - £22

Swindon - £21

Bristol - £11

Plymouth - £0