



9<sup>th</sup> January 2014

Dear Councillors,

## **Post 16 SEN Transport Charge**

As Headteacher of Barrs Court Special School I would like to offer my support to the 'call-in' in order to scrutinise the Cabinet decision to support the Transport proposals made on the 19<sup>th</sup> December 2013. I attended the meeting and found the debate held by councillors prior to the decision offered clear insight into the key issues, risks and implications of such a decision which have not been thoroughly addressed in the process to date. It came as a great disappointment that the Cabinet supported the proposals despite the questions and arguments raised.

### **Consultation:**

The process of consultation has not been robust and the report does not reflect the feedback provided. Parents have commented that they cannot see any reference to their comments reflected in the paper. They also reported to the LA that, during the consultation period, the web-site would not work and they could not send their feedback through the system set up.

### **Question 1:**

**Why does the consultation analysis not fully represent the views and comments fed back by the very parents this will impact upon?**

### **Proposals:**

It was claimed that the £720 travel charge to be levied on parents and carers of young people with the most complex needs for whom outstanding provision is provided through two central special schools, Barrs Court in Hereford and Westfield in Leominster, could be found through the use of grants and additional payments received either directly by the families or facilitated through their placement schools. The purpose of such grants is to help the vast majority of those families in meeting basic living costs and ensuring that the needs of their disabled young person are met. To then state that such grants can be used does not take into account the impact of such a financial reduction and no work has been undertaken to assess the facts and possible repercussions relating to this. In many cases the parents of the students attending BCSS – 59 of the 106 students identified in the paper – are unable to work due to the demands of caring for their young person. The complexity of care and medical requirements often limit their working opportunities in what is already a very challenging employment market. One parent has already stated that they will require additional funding from the social care services to ensure safe escorting and transport to BCSS as

they have other children and only one parent is able to sustain low paid employment. Another has pointed out that the long-term implications and costs for such families 'will be immense and hard to find even paid monthly' and the year on year costs add up.

The Cabinet did charge the LA officers to ensure support in finding funds to help with transport costs – and also confirmed that there would always be some families for which such costs would be met. I have tried to contact the LA officer who presented the paper to get more information on this and to arrange for meetings with the parents affected – but as yet have received no response.

**Question2.1:**

**Is there evidence of a robust analysis of the impact of this decision and the potential for costs to be shifted to other council services?**

**Question 2.2:**

**Has the cost of administering the complex system set in place to collect payments been identified and deducted from the potential savings outlined – and how will non-payment be enforced?**

**Question2.3:**

**How will the LA implement support for the identification of grants and what will the criteria be for those families that the council will continue to support and how will this eligibility then be equitable for the remainder?**

The council has invested in the development of outstanding provision to support the most vulnerable within our community and yet has now approved a measure that will have significant negative impact upon those families. The council is also piloting Post19 provision for the most severely disabled adults aged 19-25 enabling them to remain within their local community – and these young adults are transported through the same services as provided for the Post 16 students attending Barrs Court.

**Question 3:**

**The impact of this decision is disproportionate on the parents and carers of our most vulnerable young people. There are only minimal 'potential savings' outlined with no guarantee yet the financial impact on our most vulnerable identified as being of priority in the 'Yes We Can' plan is significant. Has there been a robust modelling of this and the repercussions – ie the cost of parents opting for their local school or more likely residential provision as they cannot afford to send their young person to the special school provision identified by the LA in their statement of need as the best provision to meet their needs?**

In reality these families do not have the same options available to them as other families so to base this decision on an equality footing does not stand up to scrutiny. They cannot send their young person to their local school and in the vast majority of cases they cannot make use of varied transport options or take advantage of the cheapest due to their complex needs and inability to travel safely with such providers.

**Process:**

At the Cabinet meeting on the 19<sup>th</sup> December 2013 the debate focused on the two key areas of proposals in the document presented: the transport to mainstream providers and the Post16 SEN costs. Despite there being two distinct elements to the proposals there was not separation of the two issues when voting took place.

**Question 4:**

**Why was there no opportunity to vote on the two key proposals separately? There should have been one vote on the mainstream proposal and one on the Post16 SEN proposal to ensure clarity and detailed consideration of the impact of each.**

We recognise the difficult financial landscape that we are operating within and the challenge the council faces in meeting financial targets – but the targeting of these families as a means to this end will cause tremendous hardship to those concerned and there is no robust evidence to state this will achieve the potential vague savings suggested.

Yours sincerely,

Kathy Roberts.  
Head teacher.  
BCSS.