

Baugh, Ben

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 09 January 2014 21:44
To: Baugh, Ben
Subject: QUESTIONS FOR THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RE SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY CHANGES

Dear Mr Baugh,

For the attention of the "General Overview and Scrutiny Committee"

RE: CHANGES TO HEREFORDSHIRE SCHOOLS AND POST 16 TRANSPORT POLICY

I am writing in response to the decision made by Herefordshire Council regarding the school transport policy.

I would like the following questions to be raised at next week's meeting:

1. (a)

What evidence is there of a detailed cost benefit analysis which shows actual figures that the council have based their decision on. The council's report states that "the actual financial savings are hard to predict precisely". How can a major decision which will have such a MAJOR IMPACT on the residents of Herefordshire not show an analysis of the savings?

(b) In many schools on the county's border there will be a need to put on extra buses to transport children in YR 10/11 to their existing school and additional buses to transport the remaining children to their nearest school in a different county.

How much will this save if extra buses are to be used? Have the bus companies been consulted on the proposed changes and IF they have been consulted where are the financial facts showing any possible savings or indeed extra costs involved in extra buses?

Will the bus companies have the resources to transport all the pupils to their correct school all on time? Have they proved to the council that this is actually achievable?

The difference in transporting pupils to their nearest school instead of their catchment school is in many cases less than 1 or 2 miles difference and in some instances 0.2miles. Surely there is no real saving compared with having to provide 2 buses for several border villages.

IS THE TOTAL ANTICIPATED NET FINANCIAL EFFORT ACHIEVABLE, REALISTIC AND PROPORTIONATE?

2. Have the members of the council been given the full facts about the significant and negative effect of the changes highlighted in the public consultations, and have the results of the consultation been given due consideration in the decision making process.

(a) The cost of losing approximately 200-300 secondary aged children into Gloucestershire or Worcestershire could run into nearly a million pounds each year. Can Herefordshire afford to lose this? Has the significant loss of funding to those schools affected by these changes actually been explained by the Director for People Services to the members of the council? This could lead to schools (rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted) having to close due to the loss of pupils as parents are unable to pay the bus fares and move their children to schools in the next County.

(b) What account has been taken of educational disadvantage to Herefordshire children in these calculations?

(c). There is considerable research evidence that children who move secondary school after they have started do less well. What account has been taken of this?

(d). The Ledbury Cluster of schools have worked extremely hard to create an effective transition programme with younger students enjoying many visits and activities in JMHS, close liaison between heads, governors, teachers and support staff to help with continuity of education, which is crucial to a good start at high school. The proposed transport changes will lead to the abandonment of traditional catchment areas and makes this work much harder. Is this what the Council wishes to achieve? Furthermore, has account been taken of young people making less progress and being unhappier as a result of this? Will Herefordshire become a poorer performing county because of these changes?

(e) This policy would force middle income parents who live in Herefordshire to choose a school out of the county. Herefordshire Council have spent considerable sums of money on creating a Children and Young People's Partnership whose vision - the 'Yes, We can' plan - sets out their aims for children living in Herefordshire and promotes collaboration with different organisations to make things better for children. We would question whether the 'Yes We Can' team have been consulted for their views on the proposed changes to school transport? And if not, why not? Money spent on signs "HEREfordshire Here we can" should be renamed 'Yes You Can if you can afford it.

3. The government's policy is to give parents choice in choosing a good school for their children. This policy has taken this away for most parents unless they earn a high income and can afford to pay for the bus pass. How can this be equitable and fair for those parents living in rural villages?

I feel that the council have not based their decision on the all the facts and have not fully explored the implications of the changes proposed. The council should reexamine all the evidence from all the affected organisations and look at alternative ways of making the necessary savings.

I look forward to receiving your responses.

