

Submission to the General Overview and Scrutiny Committee

In relation to the call-in of the cabinet decision on changes to Herefordshire Schools and Post-16 Transport Policy


Meeting to be held on Wednesday 15 January 2014

Dear Members

Please find below the questions that I wish to raise in relation to the call-in of the Cabinet decision on changes to the Herefordshire Schools and Post 16 Transport Policy.

My questions are restricted to the grounds for the call in.

Yours sincerely


Assistant Headteacher (Herefordshire)

1. The council has agreed that to achieve its priorities (Supplement to the Agenda, point 10, page 66, it **must** ensure 'that the services that we do provide are cost effective'.

It is not clear that there is sufficient and compelling evidence to indicate that it will be cheaper to transport students to the nearest school for the following reasons:

The savings set out in paragraphs 10.8 and 10.9 seem to be based on the assumption that at least 40% of children affected and currently entitled to free transport will elect to attend a school of their choice (which is not their nearest school) and therefore will lose their entitlement to free school transport. If 100% of the children entitled to free school transport elect to attend their nearest school, there will be no consequent cost saving. As the documentation repeats, it is impossible to predict the choices that parents will make. However, with the widely accepted increased cost of living the reality is that many will not be in a position to pay significant transport costs. This is supported in the Mainstream Education Transport Consultation documentation (Appendix 2) where it states that responses received from those objecting identify the main issues against the proposals which include:

- The proposed of cost paying for a seat - £660 per annum – much too expensive
- Families with more than one child using this system will have to pay a significant amount each year i.e. £1220 or £1980 or £2640'
- These costs are based on current figures; the members have voted an increase to £770 per annum from September 2014. 1 child - £770, 2 - £1540, 3 - £2,310, 4 - £4080.

Secondly, it is not at all clear that there will be cost savings, and indeed, there is very likely to be an increase in council costs due to the requirement to provide two school buses where currently one is required.

Lastly, It has been suggested in the documentation that the result of this policy may be that schools may have to close. If a school became unviable, the students currently attending it and who do not rely on free school transport (i.e. local students) would then have to be transported to an alternative school thereby increasing the overall cost to the council, notwithstanding all of the implicit social and educational impact.

How does the Council's recent decision on changes to Herefordshire School transport policy comply with its stated aim that it must ensure 'that the services that we do provide are cost effective'?

2. In so far as consultation has taken place, the council appears to have paid no regard to the views of the individuals, schools and organisations that have raised objections. The only supporting comment in the Mainstream Education Transport Consultation documentation (Appendix 2) is 'those in favour of the proposals cited matching responsibility with choice and the current financial climate as the reasons for their support'.

Could the Council provide evidence of its consultation process? It is stated that Council Officers *asked interested and affected parties to respond through their web site.* How were the following interested and affected parties consulted:

Parents and Carers

Headteachers

Governors,

School based staff

The 'Yes We Can' Team

The Shadow Board (whose very remit is to give children and young people a voice about the issues that affect them).

Parents and Carers of Year 6 children making decisions about secondary school choices

Current contracted bus contractors and local bus service providers

Elected Members of Herefordshire Council