

Baugh, Ben

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: 10 January 2014 10:16
To: Baugh, Ben
Subject: Questions for the Scrutiny Committee

Good morning.

It is my understanding that the decision to remove funded school transport from the rural communities on the outskirts of Herefordshire has been brought into scrutiny, thank heavens!

I have a long list of issues and questions surrounding this decision, it is frankly preposterous, but will constrain myself to just a few key points.

Firstly it seems clear to me that the financial repercussions of this change have not been thought through. The Council's own report states that the actual financial savings are hard to forecast precisely. I would question why such a major decision based on the need to save money, will actually achieve the required result when the cost of additional buses is taken into account. Is it not very possible that it will, in-fact, create a financial loss across Herefordshire?

Has some kind of equality impact inquiry been carried out? It is not clear that the significant and negative effects of the changes highlighted in the consultations have been given proper weight and due consideration in the decision-making process. 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? This policy would force middle income parents, of which I am one, who live in Herefordshire to choose a school out of the county. A key part of the coalition government's philosophy on education is based on parents being able to choose a good school for their children. The decision to transport to nearest school is inequitable in that it only provides choice for the better off who can afford the bus fares. How do Councillors square this with the political views the parties they represent espouse about education? Is any account being taken of students with SEN at School Action or School Action Plus for whom moving school will create discontinuity of support and damage their progress and learning? This is equally true of pre and post-16 SEN students.

Why is it that Herefordshire are seemingly the only county to be making this choice? Would it not be prudent to consider alternatives taken by other local authorities? For example Gloucestershire operates a 'nearest or catchment' policy. Durham offers a 'nearest school in county' option. Have these options been considered and discounted?

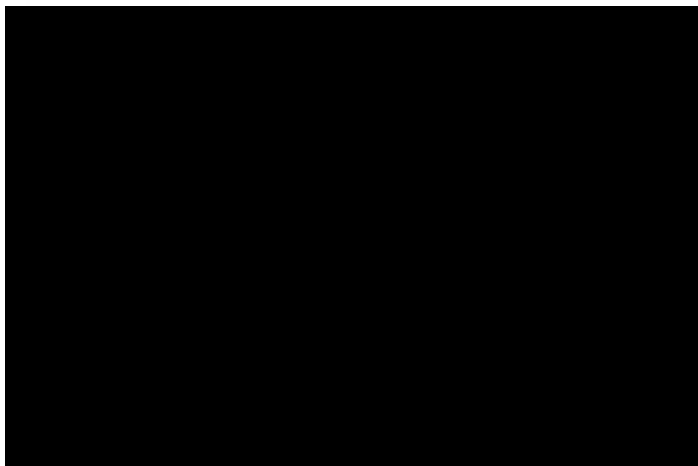
As a parent with 2 children at JMHS (both extremely happy and achieving well I might add) and a 3rd to attend in the future, I feel that my only option, as with many others in Cradley, would be to drive my children to school. Has the environmental impact been considered? Increased volume of traffic would cause greater congestion, increased road repairs and environmental damage. Has an impact assessment on equality of opportunity especially for vulnerable young people been conducted? Increased traffic into the JMHS site would create safety issues on the site. Has an impact assessment based on the Safer Routes to Schools programme been carried out to assess the impact of the proposed changes?

I would also like to add that I feel this decision smacks of hypocrisy. How can the council introduce fines for parents who wish to take their children out of school for a week to enjoy a family holiday

and yet on the other hand make it exponentially harder for us to get them to school in the first place?!

I understand and accept the need for the Council to make savings, we are all trying to cut costs, everyone I know is in the same boat, but the knock on effect of this change would be vast. The impact on children and families in Herefordshire would be detrimental, not to mention the added strain to rural communities already under pressure. I sincerely hope that this decision will be reconsidered.

Yours hopefully



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