

Baugh, Ben

From: [REDACTED] >
Sent: 10 January 2014 10:46
To: Baugh, Ben
Subject: Public questions for Scrutiny Committee on January 15th

Dear Mr Baugh,

As a member of the public and a Herefordshire tax payer, I have some questions for the Scrutiny Committee meeting next Wednesday (January 15th) with reference to the Cabinet decision on Changes to Herefordshire Schools and Post 16 Transport Policy. The online agenda states that all public questions should be forwarded to you by 5pm today. I would be grateful if you could confirm that you have received this email (and that you are the correct contact) since there is not long until that closure time?

I am extremely concerned about the lack of transparency relating to the justifications put forward in support of the proposed changes to schools transport policy. When I have previously raised my concerns with Councillor Millar last year, his 'explanation' was that:

"I disagree with the financial outcomes your letter anticipates ... I have assured myself that financial outcomes are reasonable ... I feel unable to further question the figures which it is my responsibility to present".

This is profoundly unsatisfactory and I would therefore like to submit the following questions relating to the Scrutiny Committee's 'call-in' – with particular reference to the cost modelling and associated assumptions underpinning the proposal:

Question 1: What is the average difference in cost between providing travel to a child's catchment school and providing travel to the same child's nearest school (excluding any projected revenues from the vacant seat payment scheme)?

Question 2: Does the average difference in cost between existing travel arrangements to a catchment school and new travel arrangements to the nearest school (Question 1) include the provision of new/extended commercial transport contracts where appropriate?

Question 3: Are the estimated savings of £250,000 a year for the nearest school only policy anticipated to be an ongoing year-on-year saving? (i.e. £250,000 every year.)

Question 4: If the proposal does assume a year-on-year saving (Question 3) then what is the basis for assuming that parents will not include transport costs in future school selection and select the nearest school where free transport is provided – hence eroding the projected year-on-year savings?

Question 5: If parents do include transport costs in future school choice decisions and hence favour 'nearest' over 'catchment' schools in order to obtain free transport, then how does this affect the savings resulting from the proposed travel changes?

Question 6: The report estimates a maximum potential saving of £680,000 per annum "if no child changed school and all transport was withdrawn for all those non-entitled pupils" and bases this on an average per child transport cost. Given that the majority of school transport contracts include overheads (driver, insurance, maintenance, depreciation, etc.) that are unrelated to the number of children (and that these overheads actually benefit from economies of scale) then how is a maximum saving based on an average per child calculation valid?

Question 7: What is the revised figure for the maximum potential saving that is actually achievable - rather than the figure in Question 6? (i.e. In general one would expect the majority of school buses routes to remain in service to transport unaffected children and, whilst it might be possible to close some routes it would presumably also be necessary to open new routes in other locations.)

Question 8: What is the current cost of providing school buses (excluding any revenue generated from the vacant seat payment scheme)?

Question 9: What cost reductions are forecast from being able to cancel or renegotiate current school bus contracts as a result of the proposed change (excluding any revenue generated from the vacant seat payment scheme)?

Question 10: What additional costs are likely to be incurred for providing new school buses where children change school as a result of the proposal (excluding any revenue generated from the vacant seat payment scheme)?

Question 11: The report describes the proposed increase in travel costs as:

“a 9% annual increase, which, although significant, is more reasonable in the current economic climate”.

What is the basis for judging an increase far in excess of inflation as “reasonable” especially in terms of the “current economic climate” where many people are experiencing year-on-year pay freezes or pay rises well below inflation?

Question 12: Is there a significant *saving* from introducing this proposal (i.e. will the council spend significantly less on school transport) or is the financial benefit actually a reduction in the net transport expenditure due to the projected additional revenue from parents?

Regards,

[Redacted]

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