

Change to transport proposals,

As a school and on behalf of the community of North Herefordshire we would like the following questions considered regarding the transport proposal changes:

1. In the supporting statements that were attached to the tabled proposals there was a factual error we believe in the claim that neighbouring authorities (Worcs/Shropshire) had gone to a similar system. This is not true. Did the cabinet know this as this would be part of the leverage we are sure in suggesting this is a “fair” proposal?
2. If the nearest school (across the borders maybe) is in special measures is that a reasonable choice?
3. Did the cabinet know that Worcestershire changed their proposals?
4. Although a different “pot” of money, school funding could be reduced by just under £1m by loss of pupils to out of Herefordshire schools. The capacity to offer education and the quality of that education would be impacted on greatly. Given the pressure to improve standards for children in Herefordshire has the council recognised its responsibility within this and the consequences that would be irreversible?
5. As the Teaching School for our region if not viable and closed where will the root of school improvement and support be centred? If an alternative school is to be suggested then it would be outside of Herefordshire as no other meets the criteria at present.
6. The calculations of savings changed from £250k to £180k when considering (eventually) that Wales is not an option for our children. We would like answers/comment on the idea that having looked at the calculations further we believe that they are flawed and the proposals will certainly cost more money in two ways:
  - a. For the first two years there would need to be additional transport available to accommodate the Key Stage 4 protection and to apply the rules to “make” the nearest school plan work. Our estimate is an additional £300k minimum.
  - b. There is no reference to the capacity of other perhaps closer but outside of Hereford schools and an assumption that there would be places for our children. In fact 50% of the alternative, over border schools are full and would not be able to accept and therefore transport would have to be provided to another school, possibly even the catchment school that may have been affected. Again possible cost of £450k.
  - c. Is there capacity as far as the bus companies are concerned?
  - d. If buses have to be more “efficient” do the time schedule allow for that or do we accept that children (from the age of 4?) can travel 2 hours per day?
7. There has been very little recognition of the local knowledge that is more accurate about parental choice, catchment behaviour, and the reality that some families who would be desperate to keep the link with their catchment school just simply could not afford to do so. This removal of right and condition of choice by financial means is not only a moral but parental (and child) rights issue. A comment would be well received.
8. There are examples where if taken to extreme and children do not have routes or funds to get to some schools both Primary and Secondary, then, those schools become unviable. Is the Council and LA prepared for this and what plans does it have to provide places as the commissioning agent for those children? There would be two cost elements to consider also, one of redundancy costs which would be in hundreds of thousands and the additional

transport costs to get children to another school with the possibility of lengthy travel times and journeys.

9. Has the safety of children been recognised? The safer routes to school, isolation, rural transport poverty and danger to lives has not been considered fully as it does not appear in the papers as a discrete risk assessment. No one would wish for the level of danger to life to be increased in what is already a dangerous road system. Have the police and road agencies been consulted for views? The view of our local police in North Herefordshire is that more cars due to fewer coaches would be a very bad idea. Will the cabinet take responsibility for this if a disaster occurs? Will this be reviewed?
10. We believe that as a very rural area which are all proud the cabinet is guilty of the rural prejudice that it claims we suffer from central government. Is this a new stance and one that means we will base choice on the ability to pay? In "Herefordshire you can" tag line may need extending to in "Herefordshire you can but only if you can afford to".
11. Regarding post 16 and SEN there is simple question of is the council happy making our most vulnerable children and young people even more vulnerable by putting additional pressures on the families who care for them?

We recognise that some decisions are difficult. We also see that there are alternatives and there are just some things that are too important to risk. No one for the council either members, or officers has been brave enough to face some of the communities that could be affected. Councillors have not fielded the questions from distraught parents with crying children who gave uncertainty over their educational future and choices. Why haven't the cabinet been brave enough to speak to the public and communities? The consultation was limited and in fact flawed. Having attended a meeting where options were discussed, as Headteacher I was told by the Director Of Children's Services (title at time) that "doing nothing was not an option" which when I asked why then was it in the consultation document as a consideration, I was told that it wasn't there and even if it was it wasn't possible. Is this acceptable protocol, professional, fair?

We thank you for your time and consideration of this very important issue.

Mr A Shaw, Headteacher Wigmore Schools