

Baugh, Ben

From: [REDACTED] >
Sent: 10 January 2014 14:09
To: Baugh, Ben
Subject: School Transport - Scrutiny Meeting

As many of the young families within our parish will be affected by the proposed changes, the Titley Group Parish Council would like to make the following comments:

To disregard catchment areas and use nearest school as the criteria for free transport shows a fundamental lack of understanding of how our rural communities work. In the instance of Staunton-on-Arrow whose primary catchment school is Pembridge, much of the parish is closer to Pembridge but a significant part is closer to Shobdon. Community events organised through the village hall, church, WI or any other local group, involve the WHOLE of the parish. Friendships and bonds made between families are reinforced by inclusion at the same school creating a stronger community. We should be trying to encourage this sense of community in our young people rather than fragmenting it as this proposal would do.

With regard to saving money and providing the statutory minimum transport requirements. We feel Hereford councils approach to this is altogether wrong. A proper review of how the council provides its entire school bus service is long overdue. This 'knee jerk' reaction to make possible short term savings will have much longer term implications to how families choose schools. Contrary to the councils own environmental policies the proposal will result in less children travelling to school on the bus and more cars on the roads. Problems of congestion already exist at school drop on/off times at both our primary and secondary schools.

In our experience the vacant seat policy simply does not work, as the cost to families, particularly with more than one child, is far too high (for example paying ~£2000/year to send three children a 4 mile return trip to school when fuel cost in a car would only be ~£500). This policy has strangled the effectiveness of the bus service as many families within 3 miles, but still too far to walk to school, could again not consider the bus as an economic option. Indeed how can the council justify the relative cost of a scheduled bus service (for example a return trip from Kington to Hereford costing approximately 12.5p/mile) to the cost of sending a child to school using the vacant seat policy (for example a four mile return trip costing 50p/mile).

In conclusion we feel this is a very poorly conceived proposal. Some of the potential ramifications of which would lead us to consider if Herefordshire council really has the best interests of its community at heart. Encouraging a more efficient use of the school buses by making them affordable to all who could use them and ensuring truly competitive tendering for the routes should be proposed first. Removing pupils from our school buses, which this proposal would surely do, should be the last thing the council considers.

Titley Group Parish Council