

## Questions for General Overview and Scrutiny Committee – 17 January

### Agenda item 7: Update on Home to School Transport Provision

Question	
1	<p>I understand that the School transport policy is to be reviewed later this month. My daughter is a year 7 pupil at John Kyrle High School, this is our catchment School yet if I want her to go on School transport I am expected to pay for it! I have 2 older children who both attended JKHS and used the school transport provided.</p> <p>At present I drive my youngest daughter to and from school everyday, I do however worry about the impact of all the extra cars doing the same trip is having on the environment, when the government is telling us to cut pollution!</p> <p>How is it that hard working, tax paying couples such as ourselves are having to pay again for our child to attend our Catchment School when we have already paid for this in our taxes??</p> <p>I would urge Herefordshire council to re-think this ridiculous policy, I am told that the reason we are expected to pay is because the Secondary School in Coleford is closer when measuring the walking distance, I would ask that someone from Herefordshire council walks this route, you will find that having to put on walking boots and climb up over Yat Rock is not suitable for an 11 year old girl to do twice daily on her own!</p>
Answer	<p>We understand the tension that exists between the national policy on school admissions which promotes parental choice/preference and the national policy on school transport which in effect requires councils to provide transport to the nearest school only and leaves anything above that to council discretion. In the very challenging financial climate that currently exists Herefordshire Council has to take steps to ensure that the reduced resources available to it are directed to meet priorities in the most equitable way possible. The policy was therefore changed to provide transport to nearest school. This scrutiny item enables General Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review the impact of the policy, the purpose of the item is not to revise the policy itself.</p> <p>Distance calculations, used to determine transport entitlement from home to school, measure the shortest route via public roads and made up footpaths, so that there is a consistent methodology. No child is expected to walk further than three miles (two miles if aged under 8) to their nearest school.</p>
2	<p>School Transport annual review time brings me to send you this email requesting a change in your policy. Since my 11 year old started secondary school in Sept I have spent £560 on school transport. This compared to the £0 being paid by his friend at the opposite end of the same village. I'm a true Herefordian born and bred and would like my children to be the same but find your policy testament to the fact he is being pushed out of the county as we are forced to pay more and more to belong to this county and be schooled here.</p> <p>I'm well aware times are hard and have no problem paying for transport but feel an across the board approach to be of more benefit to your funding, perhaps a £50 termly charge to all secondary pupils requiring Transport? I'm also well aware that your policy has caused an increase in the volume of traffic outside his secondary school with more parents and less transport therefore endangering the safety of the pupils. Wise decisions? I think not!</p>

	Please consider all options
Answer	The councils agreed charging principles support full cost recovery where possible. The council has to provide transport to the nearest school according to set criteria and has to provide the resources to do this. The current average cost per pupil per annum for school transport is £850 therefore the current parental contribution of £750 still represents a subsidy of circa £100 per pupil per annum. The council continues to encourage parents to collaborate together to provide or source group transport so that traffic volumes are reduced as much as possible.
3	<p>I would like to ask two questions for discussion:</p> <p>1. At present families are sending children to the Herefordshire catchment high school (John Masefield) from Colwall because they have siblings at the school and it has been our catchment school so children have been prepared and encourage to attend John Masefield. As new families, who do not have siblings at the school, and as Colwall Primary School realise that children should be prepared and perhaps encouraged to attend The Chase, will it not become very expensive for the council to transport children from Colwall to Malvern. The council may also lose money as a result of Herefordshire pupils moving out of county. Will the council then reverse this policy?</p> <p>2. Does the council think it is fair that families who happen to live on the border and who pay Herefordshire rates should not be treated the same as families from other parts of the county?</p> <p>I look forward to hearing from you</p>
Answer	<p>Q1. The cost of school transport, like all transport, is essentially a function of the distance travelled. Given that the distance from Colwall to Malvern is shorter than the distance from Colwall to Ledbury then in time costs will be saved on a like for like basis.</p> <p>Even under the previous policy, some parents opted to send their children to schools in other local authorities. Two years after the change in transport policy Herefordshire is still a net importer of pupils. 50 Herefordshire pupils went out of county and 126 pupils came in from out of county, a net import of 76 pupils in 2016/2017. Compared to 37 pupils going out of county and 73 coming in from out of county a net import of 36 pupils in 2014/2015 before the policy change. Therefore £225K funding went “out of county” and £575K came “from out of county” representing a net gain of circa £350K per annum in 2016/2017.</p> <p>Q2. Children and families are treated in the same way by considering where the nearest school is. This means that schools outside Herefordshire that provide an English curriculum are considered. The issues about cross border education were considered at the time of the change to the policy and adjustments were made to take into account ensuring access to an English curriculum for those families near the Welsh border.</p>
Q4	<p>It appears that we're not getting value for money when we have to pay huge council tax bills to Herefordshire council yet we don't get funding from them for our children's school buses. How come school buses in Worcestershire benefit from Hereford Council?</p> <p>Years ago our four children went to a Malvern school &amp; we accepted that transport was our responsibility, but surely children going to school in Ledbury ,</p>

	the catchment area for Colwall, should be 'provided for' by Herefordshire council.
Answer	Herefordshire has always provided transport to schools outside of Herefordshire just as surrounding local authorities do for children within their areas that attend their local school that happens to be in Herefordshire. This is the result of national policy and the underlying premise of providing transport to the nearest school if the criteria on distance or safe routes are met.
Q5	<p>I write on behalf of the Colwall Parish Council... and Parishioners... concerning the proposed changes to the Herefordshire Council School Transport Policy.</p> <p>Whilst I am sure that much diligent research and consideration has gone into the preparation of the proposal it does feel as though some of the conclusions drawn lack a degree of common sense or, at least, do not appear sensible or reasonable to the average person... be they Parishioner or Councillor.</p> <p>We understand that costs must be managed and that lines must be drawn somewhere but we are faced with the prospect of –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Children who have forged excellent friendships whilst at Colwall Primary School being sent to different secondary schools dependent upon which end of the village they happen to live... with a possible detrimental effect upon their emotional well-being and transition to senior education and learning</li> <li>• Parents will be forced to send siblings to different schools... where an older child is already at John Masefield in Ledbury and a younger child 'comes of age' and is sent to Malvern... with all the attendant difficulties of working with 2 schools, policies and procedures. Possible differing holiday and inset dates would also cause difficulty for working parents.</li> <li>• Alternatively, the parent would need to find a substantial amount of money annually to fund transport in order to keep their children together at one or other of the schools... or move closer to the school</li> <li>• Colwall Primary School has a close relationship with John Masefield and work together to manage the smooth transition of pupils to their secondary education. I have no doubt that this relationship will continue but added pressure will be placed upon the school to maintain closer relationships with Malvern school(s)</li> </ul> <p>Further questions arise from the discussion -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• With regard to the 'drawing of lines'. How can it be logical that a family can live within the catchment area for Colwall Primary School which is, itself, within the catchment area for John Masefield... yet the child is not 'entitled' to attend JM as a matter of course?</li> <li>• I do not fully understand the funding issues but, presumably, Herefordshire will/would need to make some contribution to Worcestershire for the cost of educating Colwall children in that county. Are we to believe that the savings on school transport will justify the loss of education funding in Herefordshire?</li> </ul> <p>It is my understanding, from conversations with the parent's group in Colwall, that something like 15 – 20 families will be affected immediately by the changes. That is just in Colwall, not the surrounding villages. As time goes by that number will increase assuming, of course, that families still see the benefit of living in the Herefordshire villages. It is, though, perfectly possible that we will see a reduction in the number of families moving into the villages and/or outward migration of</p>

	<p>existing families as it is easier and less expensive to live closer to the Malvern schools.</p> <p>Even if that change did not occur it is inevitable that people will feel a greater affinity with the Worcestershire side of the hills... possibly changing their shopping and entertainment habits as a result... resulting in lost revenue to local Herefordshire businesses. Is that what the council wish to happen?</p> <p>In time, the students who have received their senior education in Worcestershire are likely to magnify that behavioural change... seeking work and homes 'over there' with a detrimental effect upon the villages and Herefordshire in general.</p> <p>So, whilst the Parish Council have a degree of sympathy and understanding of the complexity of such decisions, we are struggling to understand the justification for the proposals based upon practical and financial considerations, the impact upon residents and the communities affected.</p> <p>We would urge further consideration of the issue preferably with an outcome that is closer to the approach before the current proposals.</p>
Answer	<p>The transport policy is not being changed and there are no proposals to do so. It was implemented in September 2015, following the decisions in 2013 and March 2014, informed by a review by general overview and scrutiny committee. This item is to monitor the implementation of the policy.</p> <p>As stated in Q3 above Herefordshire is a net importer of pupils. Central government funding for schools is based on the number of children on roll at individual schools at a given point in the school year and does not take any account of where each child lives in relation to their particular school.</p> <p>We recognise that some families find themselves transporting their children to different primary and secondary schools. This has always been the case and parents can express a preference to go to schools other than their nearest. Some parents also make arrangements to go to different public and private schools. It is a complex picture and one in which Parish Councils can get involved if they wish to see what they can enable or provide to support transport solutions for their local residents.</p>
Question 6	<p>Please could you answer me, why a child who lives in the villages outside of the main market towns and Hereford city are supposed to get to a school, if you limit the places available to them? Are you going to limit them to those who are attending their catchment area or one that the council have designated them? Or are you saying that even those who go to one of the mentioned schools will have to pay too?</p>
Answer	<p>Transport provision has no bearing on admissions or the number of places available. Parents have the right to state a preference for any school. Transport will then be provided in line with the policy to the nearest school beyond the statutory walking distances or if safe routes to do exist.</p>
Question 7	<p>It has been brought to my attention that the proposed MTFs plans intend to reduce ECC funding and that part of the reduction will impact Public &amp; community Transport, and in particular School transport.</p> <p>Please can you clarify exactly what changes have or are intended to be made regarding assisted places on school buses for pupils living 3 miles + from school. We as a family currently benefit from an assisted place.</p>

Answer	<p>No changes are proposed to provision of school transport. The MTFs savings will be made by reviewing public transport services and increased integration from contracts. Assistance with transport costs is available on certain conditions in relation to the age of the child, Working Tax Credit status, or if eligible for free school meals.</p>
Q8	<p>If the planned curtailment of school bus services from Colwall to John Masefield School Ledbury goes ahead, in tandem with the diversion of school transport into Worcestershire instead, the county council will have:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• side-lined the dedicated work of our catchment school for the area, JM High School</li> <li>• reneged on responsibility for those Herefordshire kids living in Colwall and their secondary education</li> </ul> <p>I look forward to seeing the relevant department's argument.</p> <p>From Colwall's perspective, it's an indefensibly bizarre strategy.</p>
Answer	<p>There are no plans to withdraw bus services from Colwall to John Masefield. If a child is using the transport as a result of parental choice under the current policy there is a charge for transport.</p>
Q9	<p>The lack of subsidy of school transport forces parents to drive their children to school. This creates a huge amount of congestion, evident to all other road users and creates dangerous situations at school entrances and in the immediate vicinity of the entrance. There aren't adequate parking places, endangering pupils who are trying to walk into school and across car parks. Local traffic, not going to the school is hampered, local residents have cars parked outside their houses. The potential for minor and more serious accidents is massive. It is not always convenient to car share, school buses are not full. Why not meet parents half way and offer 50% subsidy?</p>
Answer	<p>Term time traffic across the county is significantly busier than during school holidays. Factors that add to traffic volumes include parents transporting their children who live under the statutory walking distance from their school by car and parents transporting their children to their preferred school which is not their nearest.</p> <p>Until such time as central government revises home to school transport legislation it will not be possible for local authorities, particularly during times of austerity, to provide alternative solutions. We do encourage parents and schools to look at what local solutions can be put in place by themselves to reduce transport volumes. For example some schools and colleges run their own buses to particular areas to reduce the need for individual child journeys.</p>
Q10	<p>I am very concerned to hear that the school bus service to Colwall village is significantly reduced, in particular the strain both financially and educationally that this is likely to place on Colwall Primary and further down the line to John Masefield schools as it will drive pupils away from these facilities If the county's intention is to reduce its commitment to Schooling In the periphery of the county it should make this more explicit.</p>

Answer	There are no plans to withdraw bus services from Colwall to John Masefield, although if attending John Masefield is due to parental choice then under the current policy there is a charge for transport.
Q11	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How many students living in the John Masefield High School catchment area chose not to transfer to JMHS in Year 7 for the academic year 2016/17?</li> <li>2. Of these students, how many would have been entitled to free school transport before the new regulations came into place?</li> <li>3. What is the Council spending on providing transport for students who live in the JMHS catchment area but are being transported to their closest school?</li> </ol>
Answer	<p>Q1. 28 in total: St Mary's RC 12, Bishops 4, John Kyrle 1, Queen Elizabeth 2, Dysons 3 and The Chase 6.</p> <p>Of these pupils seven are entitled to free transport to their preferred school: St Mary's RC 3, Queen Elizabeth 1, Dysons 2 and The Chase 1.</p> <p>Q2. The same seven pupils</p> <p>Q3. Circa £15K in total. This figure is taken into account within the overall figures of £76,000 savings per annum for vacant seats and the contract savings of £85,000</p>
Q12	<p>I feel that it is a great shame that most children in Colwall village are now only entitled to transport to schools in neighbouring Worcestershire, rather than our catchment school in Ledbury due to the change in transport policy.</p> <p>Historically, the village school has had a wonderful relationship with their catchment secondary school and many activities and events based at John Masefield take place during the children's time at Colwall Primary School making their transition to high school so much easier. To be suddenly forced into considering a more unfamiliar, out-of-county school just because travel costs are covered is such a shame. The staff at John Masefield are very keen to hold on to their intake from the surrounding village schools and this transport policy decision is having a direct, detrimental effect on what would be a natural progression from Colwall to John Masefield.</p> <p>The decision now means that families whose children still wish to attend John Masefield High School in Ledbury are paying several hundred pounds a year for the bus. I can absolutely confirm that, with a husband recently made redundant, this cost is putting a financial strain on our family. We are having to pay £9.00 per week (£351.00 per year) just to get our son to school and we are very worried about the future when we will have two children to pay for (if we decide to send our second son to the same school).</p> <p>The public bus service through the village has become much busier with children, as the school transport service has been reduced. This has led to 'standing room only' as some buses are filled to capacity with schoolchildren, which has an impact on other bus users travelling to and from Ledbury. Every morning my son walks to an earlier stop so that he can get a seat because he says the bus is full by the time it gets to his stop.</p>

	I urge the council to keep our kids in Herefordshire by reconsidering this badly-thought-out ruling and reintroducing transport funding from Colwall Primary School to John Masefield.
Answer	<b>We are aware that the bus service operating to Ledbury has become busier, an additional service 676 has been introduced to assist with capacity problems. The council will continue to monitor loadings on the relevant journeys and if excessive will discuss with contractors the size of vehicle utilised.</b>
Q 13	<p>1) In the Agenda, line 6h reports 'Transport implications arising from change in policy. There are no reported consequences upon the school travel network, including buses, taxis and cars, across the county as a result of the change in policy.' This is inaccurate. It was raised in a written question to last year's committee (14/01/2016 Q30) that the policy would likely increase car use. With the answer being that 'The council has not carried out a detailed assessment of car use'. In my own case, without any access to alternative public transport (including no access to a vacant seat option), this policy has directly resulted in 65 additional Car journeys (884 miles) from Lyne Down to Ledbury during the first term of this academic year. Given the number of families affected by this policy the resultant number of additional car journeys must run into the '000s. It may be that the greatest affect is in the rural areas where alternatives and limited but without an assessment this is impossible to tell. <b>With this additional car use does the committee not consider the blanket application of the School Transport Policy to be against the Local Transport Policy (LTP SC3) to provide sustainable methods of transport in Herefordshire?</b></p> <p>2) The minutes from the committee of 14/01/2016 mention 'There was discussion of the adverse effect of the policy on rural and border areas of the county. It was stressed that the policy was consistent for the whole authority, but that there were some scenarios, such as border areas which were impacted more by the policy than others, and that these were areas which would need to be improved on in the policy going forward.' Being from a border area and with my son attending his catchment school, but not the nearest, this policy starts to divide a map of rural Herefordshire with a ruler rather than geographical or cultural boundaries. It may be that the policy is suitable for Hereford city. <b>Can I ask how the policy has been improved to mitigate the adverse effects on these areas?</b></p>
Answer	<b>The council has received some anecdotal reporting of increased transport journeys. Some parents can choose to share transport arrangements themselves and if this is possible the council encourages them to do so as this will positively impact on transport and congestion. Other aspects of this question have been covered in the response to question 1.</b>
Q14	<p>1) In its calculation of financial savings, has the council included the loss of income to Herefordshire schools from pupils opting to leave the county? If yes, what is the estimated loss? If no, why not?</p> <p>2) Under this new policy, how many Herefordshire children in English border areas have lost assisted travel to their catchment school in the 2016-17 academic year?</p>

	<p>3) What would the estimated cost be of changing this policy to allow children on the county border assisted travel to their catchment high school?</p> <p>4) At last year's scrutiny meeting, it was stated the projected savings from this policy change would be greater than originally forecast. Is this still the case? If yes, what will the council use this additional saving to fund? If not, why are projected savings not being achieved?</p> <p>5) How much did Herefordshire Council spend on transport to Dyson Perrins School in Malvern in the following academic years; 2014-2015? 2015-2016? 2016-2017? (projected)</p> <p>6) Are there any cases where Herefordshire Council has spent more than £4,000 to transport a single child to a school out of county in the last academic year? If yes, how many cases?</p> <p>7) The council's original plans suggested parish councils get involved with school transport solutions. To date, how many parish councils are involved?</p>
Answer	<p>Q1. The county continues to be a net importer of pupils. In 2016/2017 there was a net import of 76 pupils - equivalent to an additional income of circa £350K for Herefordshire schools.</p> <p>Q2. Unable to calculate because parental applications do not identify reasons for a particular preference – these are not relevant to the admission application process. It is therefore impossible to determine who has applied for a place at a particular school on the basis that it is their nearest.</p> <p>Q3. N/A – see answer to question 2 above</p> <p>Q4. Yes it is still forecast to be the case. Additional savings will be taken into account by the council budget setting process.</p> <p>Q5. 2014- 2015 No cost, 2015-2016 £8360. 2016-17 £11400</p> <p>Q6. 2 Riders</p> <p>Q7. No Parish Councils are directly involved in school transport solutions although there is no reason why they should not be. As part of future dialogue with Parish Councils regarding bus services assistance with provision of public Transport, Community Transport, Home to School will be included.</p>
Q15	<p>As a resident of Colwall, ex-teacher, grandparent of two children at present attending primary school in Colwall, I would like to register my dismay at the proposed cutting of school transport services from Colwall to Ledbury...which I understand is the main secondary school for children from the village. It seems a lessening of parental choice if the options are either to have to pay a large amount of money to send a child to John Masefield School or to accept that the Chase School is the less expensive option. It must also have a detrimental effect on the funding for John Masefield School. It seems a pity to drain one of Herefordshire's secondary schools when Worcestershire has so many more.</p>



	Thank you for your time to read this...I hope that Herefordshire council will reconsider any plans to cut services for school transport.
Answer	These points are noted and have been covered in previous answers. The policy has resulted in transport being provided to the nearest school beyond certain distances or if the walking route is deemed hazardous.
Q16	Further to my comments for the last meeting, I would like to reiterate that families on Colwall continue to be disadvantaged financially and socially by the changes to the transport policy. There continues to be a lot of strong feeling for a group of Colwall parents that it should be their choice to continue to send children and siblings to their catchment High school as opposed to an out-of-County nearest school, and that they are being unduly penalised by the transport costs. In the longer term; as families become more aware of the implications for children in High School; I am concerned that some parents may consider primary schools out of the village as a direct result of this - wishing to build on the links now being made from Primary school feeders such as Cradley school in Herefordshire and Northleigh in Worcestershire, thereby impacting on possible new intake at reception school level for Colwall Primary and impacting on numbers on role. Reports mention 'few numbers of children'; but as members are well aware every child place has huge financial income implication especially for small rural schools. I would like to ask that in villages which are split due to distance that there be some exception clauses that put pupil and parent wishes first and promote keeping Hereford children within County and that this will be considered at the review,
Answer	This point was considered as part of the original cabinet decision and it is evident that some parents are now paying for transport as a result of their preference under the current policy, whereas under the previous policy they were not. Details of this are contained in the main report.