

Email Responses *

*email responses that have also been submitted via surveymonkey are not included in this document.

Response 1

*I am mailing to express my concern at the changes which are being looked at for school and transport. My daughter starts at The Downs school this September, if transport needs to be paid for as we are nearer to Trinity this will cause us a huge issue I am not sure how we will afford transport each year as my son also starts in 2 years time!!
What happens if I can not pay to get my children to school ??
I am sure I am not the only parent who will be in this position, how do we get our children to school when we are having to work also??*

Response 2

I have just been made aware of the potential changes to free bus places for children to secondary school.

I understand that even though our children will be in catchment for The Downs School, Compton they may not be entitled to a free bus pass because the closest school is Trinity. I have concerns about this and strongly believe that the free travel to school should be made available to all catchment places.

I currently have two daughters, one in Yr5 and one in Yr4. Therefore, they could both be affected.

Please keep me informed of what is happening here and include my opinion in discussions going forward. I have also completed the survey money. If I need to do anything else please let me know.

Response 3

I am writing in regards to the ridiculous proposal of changes to my children's educational future. How on earth does giving free transport to the nearest school even if it is not the catchment school make sense. Can you honestly see us using such a monumentally ludicrous idea, let's send our children to the wrong school because it's free. I don't think so, the alternative is to be charged for something that is their human right. A FREE Education. I would hope that the local authority sees sense over this and makes a complete u turn on this proposterous plan. Try cutting back on your internal spending instead of penalising the people who vote you into your jobs.

Response 4

I read of the proposed changes to the transportation policy with some concern. It has raised a huge amount of anxiety in amongst parents. I would ask two questions:

a) has an environmental study been undertaken considering the impact of the 800 or so additional parental journeys per day that this policy will introduce. At the Downs School, for example, there is little or no parking available for parents.

b) is this policy move a precursor of redrawing of the catchment boundaries in areas where this policy will be active? Is this an 'under the radar' attempt to incentivise parents to move these catchment boundaries themselves?

Response 5

I am a parent of a child who has an existing free taxi from Ashmore Green Road (who I understand will not be affected because she can keep her place until year 11). However, my problem is to do with my younger child, currently at primary school but who will move to Trinity in two years' time (Sept 2017). Under the new rules, he would not be entitled to a place on the taxi, yet my daughter would. That is incredibly hard to manage in itself. But I feel that the proposal is unfair because where we live possibly puts us in a slightly different category from the main bulk of those affected by the policy because a) we live on a dangerous road – no pavements or streetlights, b) our nearest school is Kennet but our catchment is Trinity and that was the school we were told we had to have a place for ie. even though it is much further from our house, c) there are actually lots of other children in the same position on Ashmore Green Road.

I understand that where a parent has voluntarily chosen a school which is not their nearest or is out of catchment, savings need to be made, but since we are in the impossible position of being made to go to our catchment which also happens to not be our nearest school, it seems unfair. I would hope that perhaps our taxi arrangement for this particular road could continue as an exception based on the fact that we have not elected to go to other schools further away from our local one, but have been forced to go to the further one due to catchment rules. Or perhaps a slightly larger minibus could pick up all the children on our road (which is about a mile long) and then there is the cost of one vehicle, not two? The current service is such a life saver for us, and as parents locally, we have often praised the council for helping our children to be safe, so we would be incredibly grateful if the current arrangements for our road could continue in some form.

I would be grateful if my concerns could be passed on.

Response 6

I would like to write with my objection to the proposed changes to home/school transportation.

I strongly object to this change it is not fair to tell a child they are within the catchment of the school, give them a place to start at that school but then discriminate against them because they live a bit further away than other children.

Either leave it as it is or charge everyone to make it fair.

I cannot take my child to school as I have a job and work very hard as a parent so why penalise me all this extra money ??

Please lodge my strong objection about this change

Response 7

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to your proposal to remove free school travel to those not travelling to their nearest school.

As a resident of Compton, living close to The Downs School site, I am gravely concerned regarding the potential impact of the proposed changes to the Home to School travel policy. Although I believe there are many detrimental issues to the families and children affected, personally, I am extremely troubled about the likely increase in car travel along the narrow country roads leading to Compton and the inevitable increase in congestion that is going to arise around the school site.

What is more, parking around the school site is at a premium. At collection times the inconvenience caused to local residents as additional parents look for parking spaces, whilst they wait to collect their children, will be immeasurable. This will not doubt erode the positive relationship that residents currently have with the school and its student population.

*I understand that West Berkshire Council has a Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy for Schools (SMoTS) and a Local Transportation Plan. I would like to ask how these proposed changes will work towards the Council's vision of "**Delivering effective transport solutions for all by increasing choice and minimising congestion**" that it has pledged in these documents.*

In conclusion, I would strongly encourage the Council to reject the proposed changes.

Response 8

I would like to object in the strongest possible manner to the proposed Home to school transport policy outlined on your website. With a son already at the Downs and my daughter to attend the school in a few years I find it hard to understand why you think a change in the policy is indeed fair.

Both my children either attended or attend Curridge Primary School which is a feeder school and in the catchment area for The Downs which is an excellent school. We know other schools in Newbury are geographically closer, Trinity 3.6 miles where as The Downs is 6.4 miles from our home. The proposal to only fund trips that would take into account the nearest school and not the one in the catchment area is wholly unacceptable and unfair. As you mention in your proposal this would affect c 400 students out of 11500. It just so happens that two of those 400 are my children.

If this proposal were agreed the impact it would cause to the practicalities of getting our children to school would be enormous. Both my wife and I work so we rely on the bus as we can then leave at the same time as our son in order for us to get to work on time. If this were to change it would be conceivable that one of us may have to give up work of indeed find another option to get him to school and also my daughter in a few years time.

I guess this is a cost saving measure, but if it only includes 400 children out of 11500 are there not other policies that would have a greater cost saving impact?

Curridge Village is a close community and central to it are Curridge Primary School and the relationship it's people have with The Downs, any change in policy inevitably would force some children to go to a school that is closer, fracturing the community, one that its residents have taken pride in building up over the years.

I would urge you to reconsider this proposal.

Due to the importance of this issue I have cc'd my MP.

Response 9

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

I am concerned about the policy of removing free school transport from catchment schools and replacing it with "nearest". This could create the very odd and unfair situation in Lambourn where children who live 7 miles from JOG will receive free school transport but those who live 8 miles away will not, despite this being the catchment school. Whilst I am told no children at present will be affected this could happen in the future should KAs in Wantage not be able to accommodate all children who apply from the Lambourn Valley.

Response 10

I strongly disagree with proposed changes to secondary school transport . My postcode is RG189SL and currently the majority of children at this postcode go to The downs school. If the changes come in to affect and transport is only provided to your catchment school that would mean potentially 400 plus parents dropping their children to the downs which couldn't cope with that number of vehicles in the morning . Or alternatively those children going into their catchment school which is the Kennet and if my understanding is correct a coach would have to be provided to take them there anyway which by road is a longer distance and longer time .

People who have more then one or two children will not pay over £1000 per year to get their children to and from school they will drive creating mayhem on the roads during their times.

I hope my views are taken into consideration .

Response 11

I do have some concerns about this policy.

Is this "open house" for parents to choose their nearest school rather than the catchment school?

If so – what is the point in defining catchment schools in future?

Also this could mean that siblings who would have gone to the school attended by their elder sibling will now attend a different school.

Response 12

I understand that you are currently reviewing the transportation that you provide to secondary schools in West Berkshire and that there may no longer be free transport provided to pupils where their catchment school is not the closest.

I live in Winterbourne and as such my two children are in the catchment for the Downs School, which is not our closest secondary school. We will therefore be directly affected and penalised by your proposed changes to which I strongly object.

I can see no justification why we should be targeted unfairly in this way, it is not our responsibility to draw the catchment boundaries and as there is a high risk of not getting your child into a non-catchment school we are stuck between a rock and a hard place! We either take on the risk of applying for a non-catchment school in the hope of free transport, or we apply to our catchment school (which is what the school system encourages us to do) and have to either pay for transport or potentially not get a place on the bus at all. Neither option is satisfactory and I wonder which you would advise is the lesser of the two evils that you are proposing we will need to suffer?!

As a mother of two I will need to rely on the transport service to enable me to get my two children to two different schools on time, school drop off will otherwise be impossible precisely because we live further away from our catchment secondary school. It seems to me that you are targeting the wrong pupils here, it is those living furthest away who have the greatest need of the buses.

In addition, the government seems to be encouraging mothers in particular to go back to work having had children, And as such I would have thought that it should be a top priority of West Berks council to support working families, and one of the ways of doing this is to help to get children to and from school. If parents are required to replace the current bus service this will not only have a major impact on road safety and traffic around the schools, but it will also have a massive impact on parents' ability to have careers. I am a solicitor and I know how hard it is to fit child care around a demanding career and I do not relish the prospect of this becoming harder due to your proposed changes.

I therefore strongly urge you to reconsider these misguided proposals.

Response 13

I strongly disagree with this proposal

The parking at The Downs school is pretty bad now, if this happens it will increase traffic in and around the school grounds there are a few reasons why this is not good, It will make it dangerous for pupils crossing the car park There are double yellow lines on the road outside the school and a lot of cars already park where there are no double yellow lines, because the road is not straight visibility is not good, there will be an awful lot of extra cars parking along that stretch of road making it dangerous not only for pedestrians but for passing traffic, it will be an absolute nightmare.

This is a ridiculous proposal you will be putting children's life's at risk.

Response 14

In response to your proposed changes to School Transport Policy for year 1 - 11 pupils.

As a resident in Chieveley with our catchment school as The Downs, I believe your suggested changes to the current policy is not only ill thought out but also one which will disproportionately affect rural families where the catchment school is not necessarily the closest school.

By charging for transportation, affected families (particularly those with more than one child - I have 3 children) will certainly have significant reason to drive children to school - causing additional congestion issues at school sites, negative impacts to local residents and potential

danger to students. This will also increase traffic to and from school sites (on country roads) with the obvious associated environmental impacts.

This change will also add financial pressure to rural families - even when attending their catchment school - catchments which have been decided by the council presumably to encourage a spread of attendance depending on location.

You say your change would affect '400 students out of a total school population of 11500' so surely making this change is of little benefit to the council, but will be of great detriment (financial, environmental, convenience, safety, local residents) and unfair on those who are attending catchment schools which doesn't happen to be their nearest school. We pay our council tax in the same way as others, why should we not receive the same services when all we are doing is attending our catchment school?

For these reasons, I hope that you will reconsider your proposed policy changes and continue to provide free, guaranteed transportation to catchment schools.

Response 15

Whilst I fully understand the need of WBC to make considerable savings, this proposal is ill-thought out in respect of the effect it will have upon rural communities such as the ward I represent.

In the case of Chieveley, the nearest school for part of my ward is Trinity, whereas the catchment school is The Downs.

Has consideration been given as to how pupils will be accommodated at the nearest school (Trinity) which is currently over-subscribed. Further, what consideration has been given to The Downs school losing pupils to Trinity and how will this gap be filled? If the answer is by pupils from outside West Berkshire, this in itself raises a further issue, that of West Berkshire educating children from another authority, and the associated cost of this.

I would like to see the comparative costings of transporting a child from a fixed point in Chieveley to Trinity vs The Downs. If, as I suspect, the difference between the distances in question is minimal, then little saving would be made. Furthermore, there is not currently, a school bus service to Trinity from Chieveley ward, so if this proposal is adopted, it will mean additional school busses picking up and dropping off pupils in the affected villages. This in itself will cause additional congestion and inconvenience to residents in the narrow village streets, from where not only state school busses operate, but also those of independent schools.

Has consideration also been given to the effect this proposal will have on the wider Downland road network? Parents will, I expect, still want their child to attend the catchment school, and in the absence of school transport, will undertake their own arrangements. Parking at The Downs is already under pressure, and the village of Compton will be unable to cope with the extra traffic generated by parents driving children to school, as the timetabling of the public bus service will not get children to and from school. So, whilst solving one problem, further and potentially greater problems are being created.

Finally, this proposal will split the community within my ward, something which I find unacceptable. Under the current regime, the majority of children moving into secondary education do so with their classmates (I accept that some children will go to other schools of choice), this proposal would mean this would no longer happen. I doubt very much that the implications of this and the effect it will have upon close-knit communities has even been

considered. In my view, this should be a primary consideration during the decision making process,

I think it fair to say, that this issue has cause great concern and anguish within my Ward, and I have had more phone calls and emails on the topic than any other issue, apart from a proposal to build and Incinerator at J13 of the M4, during all the time I have served as ward member.

I trust you will seriously consider my concerns and either abandon this proposal or adapt the policy to ensure a sensible resolution.

Response 16

We are in the catchment area for The Downs School, upon which basis we are entitled to the bus provision which Year 7 onwards children currently enjoy.

I would compound this negative initiative (admittedly a Lib Dem policy which they appear proud of) currently being considered with the recent introduction of free school meals for children up to and including Year 3 – my child started Year 4 two months (in September '14), so I now incur a cost of some £300 per year (for when he has school lunches) which I would not have incurred if my son was younger – I am no better able to afford to pay this than parents with younger children.

So, the notion of introducing a scheme which potentially could penalise us just in time for when my son would start @ Secondary school really does grate against me, as it seems we have the worry of paying where no predecessors have had to.

My son (an only child) already goes to Cubs in Compton and has attended events @ the school and is looking forward to going there because of some of the new friends he has made there. Whilst this is not really an arguement for my case againsy your proposal, it is another obstacle which our predecessors have not had to encounter.

We have also chosen to live in north Newbury i.e. Curridge since 1997 and we strongly wish to keep our son in the school of our choice and catchment, and do not want to be victimto your cost-cutting initiatives.

I hope this is a loud message to you.

Response 17

I would like to express my great concern over the proposed changes to the home to school transport policy.

I have children at Chieveley Primary, it's a way off yet for them as they are currently in year 3 and 1, however if this does take affect it will cause us and many others big problems.

It seems to be very ill thought out and I would like to know what contingency plans are being put in place for the following points;

- This will result in small villages and communities being split in half with one half of children going on the bus and the other half not. Surely this will affect children's wellbeing if they are not able to go on the bus with their friends just because they live a few hundred metres down the road from them?*
- The roads to the Downs School are small and chaotic – namely the A34. There are already countless accidents on that road and by removing bus transport you are*

forcing a massive increase of car traffic onto that road and to the subsequent B road to the school itself.

- This will in turn result in late arrivals for some children and in some cases probably absenteeism – if the A34 is shut, parents will just not bother taking their children in!*
- Having to pay for the bus, even if there is a place available which is not guaranteed, will put further financial strain on families.*
- This will not support the government drive to get parents back to work if they have to personally take and collect their child from school each day.*
- It seems crazy to just not provide transport to your catchment school!!! Surely its simpler just to make the rule that the free transport is provided to the catchment school and no others?? In my case, the school bus to Downs is currently 100 metres from our home. Yet my children would not be entitled to travel on it!*
- Access and parking at the Downs school is already compromised – how will this be addressed?*
- Reducing bus transport and increasing cars on the road is hardly encouraging “green” living!*

I sincerely hope these points will be considered and this proposal does not take effect as I am sure I am not the only one with grave concerns.

Response 18

I have been notified that there are to be changes to the school transport policies. Currently living in Chieveley my daughters catchment school is The Downs School and she is provided with a free bus pass to get to school. I have been told that with the new policy would mean that this isn't our nearest school. Does this mean that I will now have to pay for her travel and may not actually get a place? Further more does this mean when my other children reach secondary school age I have to send them to my nearest school rather than my catchment school?

As I have 4 children 2 of which have additional needs this is of some concern to me. Especially as my 13 year old is a type 1 diabetic and may have her travel and current support on her journey compromised!

I look forward to your response.

Response 19

On behalf of the Curridge Residents' Association, I would like to comment on the proposed Changes to Home to School Transport Policy Consultation.

As a rural community, these proposed changes would have a significant impact on our residents and potentially impact on future development of the village (and numerous others in the district with non closest catchment schools).

Without free transport provided to catchment schools, and no guarantee of fare-paying transport as an alternative, we believe that this change unfairly affects people within rural communities and rural schools.

We do not wish for the young people of our community to become divided by choice of secondary school, upon leaving our very successful and close knit primary school, solely due to the additional financial and logistical concerns that this policy would bring to bear upon their families. Nor would we wish for these concerns to cause families to choose to leave the village in order to move into different secondary school catchment areas, or to prevent new families moving into the area for the same reasons. We are extremely

concerned that this policy could create a number of 'black listed' areas across West Berkshire for families with children of secondary school age, and this could have a knock on effect on the future of rural primary schools such as our own, which will in turn increase pressure on the schools in the major centres that already at or close to the limit of their capacities.

If a new transport policy must be adopted in West Berkshire then we kindly request that is undertaken only with a review of the secondary education catchment areas to align with 'closest school' for rural communities.

Also, this proposal has not been widely communicated to residents, particularly those with pre-school children. There has been no direct communication about this proposal from the council, meaning that many residents who may be impacted are unaware of the changes.

As a Residents' Association, we ask that you bear our thoughts in mind during the consultation, and we are ensuring that information regarding potential changes are communicated to residents.

Response 20

Please find below my concerns re removing free school bus transport for The Downs School for secondary school children in Chieveley.

- *Rural families will be disproportionately affected by the removal of subsidised bus travel to catchment schools which are not their closest.*
- *Those living the greatest distances from their catchment schools will be negatively impacted.*
- *Families affected by the proposed changes may choose, or be forced to drive as places on school buses are not guaranteed. This will lead to congestion at school sites, impact heavily on the environment, and potentially put lives at risk.*

- *Removal of subsidised school transportation could lead to an increase in lateness and absenteeism.*
- *Travelling by school bus can have a positive effect on a child's emotional, developmental and social wellbeing.*
- *Families in some villages will be divided as to whether their children receive free transportation or not, possibly reducing social and community cohesion.*
- *Removal of free school transportation will add financial pressure to rural families.*

Response 21

On behalf of the Governing Body of Hermitage Primary School, I wish to register our concern and disappointment over the proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy 2016/17.

As you may or may not be aware, this proposal splits Hermitage village in two. The north end of the village will continue to receive free transport, but the middle and southern end of the village will fall into the category of having to pay for the school bus, or use other means should families wish to send their children to their catchment school.

It is worth pointing out that a number of children who will fall into the “fare-paying” post codes will be walking to the bus stop in the village which is located in the “free transport” post code. How can you justify children at the same bus stop being split between payers and non-payers?

This policy discriminates against the rural aspect of The Downs Federation of Primary Schools, as a rural secondary school such as The Downs will have a wider catchment area due to the rural nature of the villages and sparsity of the population. Clearly, a secondary school in the town will have a much smaller catchment area due to the density of the population, so naturally some rural villages will be closer to other schools in mileage terms.

At present, there is no School Bus provided by West Berkshire Council from Hermitage to Trinity or Kennet School, both of which are closer to some parts of the village, so should families decide to go to their nearest school, rather than catchment school, will additional buses be provided to cater for this? If so, the financial implications seem ludicrous.

The Council should also consider the implications of parents choosing to transport their children themselves to The Downs rather than pay for the bus, particularly for larger families. Not only will this have a huge impact on the already busy rural roads and the congestion at The Downs, but will have huge financial implications on lower income or single vehicle families, not all of whom are in receipt of, or eligible for, Pupil Premium funding.

The Governing Body of Hermitage Primary School therefore strongly objects to the changes proposed and urge the Council to reconsider and continue to provide free transport to catchment schools.

Response 22

I have heard of the planned changes to school bus transportation system and cannot help but to think that the plans are short sighted for us in rural areas. Apart from the generic concerns included below, surely the easier solution would be to offer families the option to pay the difference or take the nearer school option.

- *Rural families will be disproportionately affected by the removal of subsidised bus travel to catchment schools which are not their closest.*
- *Those living the greatest distances from their catchment schools will be negatively impacted.*
- *Families affected by the proposed changes may choose, or be forced to drive as places on school buses are not guaranteed. This will lead to congestion at school sites, impact heavily on the environment, and potentially put lives at risk.*
- *Removal of subsidised school transportation could lead to an increase in lateness and absenteeism.*
- *Travelling by school bus can have a positive effect on a child’s emotional, developmental and social wellbeing.*
- *Families in some villages will be divided as to whether their children receive free transportation or not, possibly reducing social and community cohesion*
- *Removal of free school transportation will add financial pressure to rural families.*

Response 23

I am a parent of two children at Hermitage Primary school and under the proposed changes will be affected directly. We live in the southern end of the village and as I hope you are already aware, this proposal splits Hermitage village in two. The north end of the village will continue to receive free transport, but the middle and southern end of the village will fall into the category of having to pay for the school bus, or use other means should families wish to send their children to their catchment school. My postcode puts my catchment school at the 3rd furthest from our house. This is your chosen catchment school for us – not ours. Given the oversubscription to schools in the area the chances of us getting into a non catchment school are virtually nil, yet you would cover the transport to it, without even contributing to the cost of our own catchment school which is just 1 mile more away from us. At present, there is no School Bus provided by West Berkshire Council from Hermitage to Trinity or Kennet School, both of which are closer to some parts of the village, so should families decide to go to their nearest school, rather than catchment school, will additional buses be provided to cater for this? If so, the financial implications seem ludicrous.

My children are one of a number of children who will fall into the “fare-paying” post codes will be walking to the bus stop in the village which is located in the “free transport” post code. How can you justify children at the same bus stop being split between payers and non-payers?

your proposed policy appears to discriminate against the rural aspect of The Downs Federation of Primary Schools, as a rural secondary school such as The Downs will have a wider catchment area due to the rural nature of the villages and sparsity of the population. Clearly, a secondary school in the town will have a much smaller catchment area due to the density of the population, so naturally some rural villages will be closer to other schools in mileage terms.

The Council should also consider the implications of parents choosing to transport their children themselves to The Downs rather than pay for the bus. Compton does not have the road infrastructure to deal with this volume of cars.

Response 24

I wish to register my concern and disappointment over the proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy 2016/17.

As you may or may not be aware, this proposal splits Hermitage village in two. The north end of the village will continue to receive free transport, but the middle and southern end of the village will fall into the category of having to pay for the school bus, or use other means should families wish to send their children to their catchment school.

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The Council should also consider the implications of parents choosing to transport their children themselves to The Downs rather than pay for the bus, particularly for larger families. Not only will this have a huge impact on the already busy rural roads and the congestion at The Downs, but will have huge financial implications on lower income or single vehicle families, not all of whom are in receipt of, or eligible for, Pupil Premium funding.

I therefore strongly object to the changes proposed and urge the Council to reconsider and continue to provide free transport to catchment schools.

Response 25

I wish to register my concern and disappointment over the proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy 2016/17.

As you may or may not be aware, this proposal splits Hermitage village in two. The north end of the village will continue to receive free transport, but the middle and southern end of the village will fall into the category of having to pay for the school bus, or use other means should families wish to send their children to their catchment school.

It is worth pointing out that a number of children who will fall into the "fare-paying" post codes will be walking to the bus stop in the village which is located in the "free transport" post code. How can you justify children at the same bus stop being split between payers and non-payers?

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The Council should also consider the implications of parents choosing to transport their children themselves to The Downs rather than pay for the bus, particularly for larger families. Not only will this have a huge impact on the already busy rural roads and the congestion at The Downs, but will have huge financial implications on lower income or single vehicle families, not all of whom are in receipt of, or eligible for, Pupil Premium funding.

I therefore strongly object to the changes proposed and urge the Council to reconsider and continue to provide free transport to catchment schools.

Response 26

I am writing to register our concern and disappointment over the proposal to remove the discretionary criteria to provide transport for secondary students to their catchment school.

Our daughter is currently finishing Year 8 at The Downs School. Our son has two more years at Hermitage Primary School, a school which is part of the Downs Federation of Schools, which feed into the Downs School. Based on previous years' admissions to other secondary schools in Newbury, he is more likely to gain a place at The Downs School (our catchment school), and we hope this will be the case. In addition, much work is undertaken between the teaching bodies of the Downs Federation of Schools and The Downs School to ensure a smooth transition from primary to secondary education, and this is important for children's success and confidence in later years. These are some of the primary reasons for our move to West Berkshire in 2008.

It seems very unfair - ridiculous even - that he will be directly affected by the proposed changes. We will be a family with entitlement to one bus pass for one child, and additionally have to make our own provision for our son to attend school. Our children are our future and need to be able to easily get to and from school especially when both parents work.

You say that transport will be provided for children who have started their secondary education but how can buses pass through the village without picking up the younger students who are being discriminated against by virtue of their age and their postcode?

I strongly agree with the letter sent to you by the Governors of Hermitage Primary School. I agree that this proposal splits Hermitage village in two. The north end of the village will continue to receive free transport, but the middle and southern end of the village (where we are) will fall into the category of having to pay for the school bus, or use other means, should families wish to send their children to their catchment school.

The letter from the Governors of Hermitage Primary School also points out that a number of children who will fall into the "fare-paying" post codes will be walking to the bus stop in the village which is located in the "free transport" post code. How can you justify children at the same bus stop being split between payers and non-payers?

The Governors point out that this policy discriminates against the rural aspect of The Downs Federation of Primary Schools, as a rural secondary school such as The Downs will have a wider catchment area due to the rural nature of the villages and sparsity of the population. Clearly, a secondary school in the town will have a much smaller catchment area due to the density of the population, so naturally some rural villages will be closer to other schools in mileage terms.

At present, there is no School Bus provided by West Berkshire Council from Hermitage to Trinity or Kennet School, both of which are closer to some parts of the village, so should families decide to go to their nearest school, rather than catchment school, will additional buses be provided to cater for this? If so, the financial implications seem ludicrous.

The Council should also consider the implications of parents choosing to transport their children themselves to The Downs School rather than pay for the bus, particularly for larger families. Not only will this have a huge impact on the already busy rural roads and the congestion at The Downs School, but will have huge financial implications on lower income or single vehicle families, not all of whom are in receipt of, or eligible for, Pupil Premium funding.

I therefore strongly object to the changes proposed, and urge the Council to reconsider and continue to provide free transport to catchment schools

Response 27

I wish to register my concern and objection over the proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy 2016/17 and concur with the email sent from Hermitage School Governing

Response 28

As I am sure you are aware, this proposal will split Hermitage village in two. The north end of the village will continue to receive free transport, however the middle and southern end of the village will fall into the category of having to pay for the school bus, or use other means should families wish to send their children to their catchment school.

I would like to point out that a number of children who will fall into the "fare-paying" post codes will be walking to the bus stop which is actually in the village and is located in the "free transport" post code. How can you justify children at the same bus stop being split between payers and non-payers?

I am concerned that this policy discriminates against the rural aspect of The Downs Federation of Primary Schools, as a rural secondary school such as The Downs will have a wider catchment area due to the rural nature of the villages and sparsity of the population. Clearly a secondary school in the town will have a much smaller catchment area due to the density of the population, so naturally some rural villages will be closer to other schools in mileage terms.

At present, there is no School Bus provided by West Berkshire Council from Hermitage to Trinity or Kennet School, both of which are closer to some parts of the village, so should families decide to go to their nearest school rather than catchment school, will additional buses be provided to cater for this? If so, the financial implications seem ludicrous.

The Council should also consider the implications of parents choosing to transport their children themselves to The Downs rather than pay for the bus; particularly for larger families. There will be a huge impact on the volume of traffic around Hermitage Primary School at pick up time which is already a big concern. In addition, not only will this have a huge impact on the already busy rural roads and the congestion at The Downs, but will have huge financial implications on lower income or single vehicle families. These families are possibly not all in receipt of, or eligible for Pupil Premium funding.

Response 29

Please find below my reasons for objecting to the proposed transport policy. I am a parent living in Curridge with 2 children that will be affected.

I understand the need to save money there are there lots of reasons to object to the council proposal.

Changing the transport policy and not changing the school catchment areas makes no sense at all and isn't rational.

Just because we are the furthest away from our catchment school we are being singled out and penalised. Its not fair or equitable.

Curridge, Chieveley and Hermitage students make up over half of the students affected. So I hope that we have a big say in this consultation.

There is a strong feeling in the community against these policy changes and you will receive a petition with over 160 signatures from those affected in the Curridge area.

It will affect individual families

Why should we have to pay to go to our local authority nominated catchment school just because we live the wrong side of a line that has been drawn?

Can all of us afford £225 per child? Significant amount of money, especially if we have 2 or more children. There is no guarantee that the fee will stay the same year on year and once we have chosen the Downs School for our children and if we choose to pay, aren't we at the mercy of any price rises, as there is no guarantee that the price will stay the same.

For us with children already at the Downs, we have an even harder choice, pay, transport children ourselves or send our children to Trinity school. This has the potential to split families, especially those families that are least able to pay.

It will affect our villages and our parish

In each village, our children are all at primary school together, and currently the significant majority all go to the Downs together. These proposals mean there will probably be more children that go to Trinity school. This has the potential to split village communities. The implications of this might be significant. Do we really want to run this risk?

In Chieveley the line for school transport is drawn somewhere in the middle of the village. So on one bus to the Downs, and at the bus stop, there will be children that get free transport next to neighbours who have had to pay. This can't be fair and just to the residents in a single village surely.

It will affect the secondary schools

This policy change will affect about a quarter of the Downs intake. 45 out of 180 students each year. Is this a way of reducing the oversubscription of places at the Downs school. If more parents choose to drive their children to school, how will the school given how busy the school car park is already at drop off and pick up time.

For Trinity school, do they have additional spaces for these extra students from our area? Up to 25% of their annual intake. I am not aware of any increase in capacity at Trinity school.

With the amount of new build happening in Newbury now and in the future, this will only increase the pressure on school places in town. So it doesn't make sense to further increase pressure on town school places and move students away from the Downs.

Also I don't believe that the secondary schools knew about these proposals when they were made public. Given it might significantly affect them, how can that be right.

It will affect the primary/secondary school links

Primary schools make links with their catchment secondary schools, and this is strongly encouraged. These links are important for students in their education, especially in specific subjects like maths and numeracy, science etc, and to ease their transition to the next stage in their education. The impact of these proposals means that both the primary will have to make links with more than one secondary school, and Trinity school will have to make links with more primary schools.

How can having more links be better for either the primary or the secondary schools? It will just make the links they have less effective. This is not good for either to the detrimental benefit of the students.

I question how much money will it really save?

If all of us in our parish choose to send our children to Trinity school, then for the next few years the council will have to put on buses to both Downs (for existing students) and extra routes to Trinity. Surely this would actually cost the council more. From Curridge, there is only a 2 mile difference between both schools, the time taken to get there won't be much different, so how can a Trinity bus be much cheaper?

Until the council knows which schools we choose, and then which transport option we take, which will be well after March next year, their understanding of how much money they might save will be at least 6 months after this transport policy is agreed.

So how can the council say how much money it will save, if any.

At the moment, most of our children get on 1 bus. In the future there will be a Downs bus, with paid and unpaid places, new Trinity routes/buses. Army children will come and go and each year the numbers will change. How can this be an efficient way of managing school transport? Have the council factored in the increased costs of managing this policy?

Apparently, other councils that have done this have not saved the amount of money they thought they would. Perhaps the council could investigate the actual savings in Essex to get their actual experience.

It will impact on the area as a whole

If we can't or choose not to pay, but still want our child to go catchment school, then we will drive. The country roads to the Downs school either via Hermitage and the B4009 or via Beedon, A34 and East Ilsley are narrow, twisty with no cats eyes, white lines, edges and lots of pot holes. The traffic through these villages will increase and I feel they are an accident waiting to happen.

And also, looking at the effect on emissions, from the national express carbon emission calculator, a month of transport on the bus compared to in car would save the equivalent of boiling 1000 kettles, or powering a house for 80 hours. So there is a big environmental impact if there are more cars on the roads.

So, this proposal will

- affect the finances of individual families,*
- could split each village and our parish,*
- will affect our secondary schools,*
- will affect our local area*
- and could increase pollution*

and may cost the council more money in the short term

There is a very strong feeling in our community about this, it is not a fair or equal policy and does not make sense.

I look forward to your response

Response 30

Further to your recent consultation on the proposed changes to the Home to School Transport policy, I would like to register my indignation at this ridiculous scheme.

I am single parent, renting in Oare in Hermitage, which will in fact currently receive transport. We are looking to buy in Hermitage and are already restricted by the lack of available housing stock. This further restricts our choices as to where we might be able to consider buying.

How can you consider restricting the free transport for the catchment school, this makes no sense at all! If it is not accessible, why is it the catchment school??

This makes no sense in any places other than the centre of town in Newbury.

I would strongly urge that you reconsider as placing the burden to transport children in the event of any lack of fare paying places combined with the cost of doing so, is just ludicrous and a waste of money. How do you propose to transport children to the other schools instead???

Response 31

I am a parent who would be affected by the suggested change to the Home to School Transport Policy.

I live in hermitage where this policy would have the effect of splitting the village. The effect the proposed changes would have is that my eldest child would receive free transport, but my other 2 children would fall into the category of having to pay for the school bus, or use other means should a place on the not be available (the proposal states that paid places will not be guaranteed). What is the policy for allocating a 'fare-paying' seat on the bus?

Our post code falls into a "fare-paying" zone, yet all my children will be walking to the bus stop in the village which is located in the "free transport" post code and boarding the bus non fare-paying pupils. This does not seem at all right and sets a divisive tone in a village where all the families are encouraged to send their children to the catchment school.

Having contacted your offices I now understand that lack of alignment between the transport policy and the catchment policy has created a loophole where the current transport service can be legally be withdrawn. While I understand that the council is looking to save money it seems to me that the only justification for this is the fact that it only effects minority of the school population, therefore it is alright. In this way, this policy discriminates against the rural aspect of secondary schools such as The Downs where there will always be a wider catchment area due to the rural nature of the villages and sparsity of the population.

The Council should also consider the implications of parents like us choosing to (or having to) transport our children to The Downs rather than pay for the bus, as we may be financially better off. Not only will this have a huge impact on the already busy rural roads and the congestion at The Downs, but is counter intuitive to environmental policies.

I therefore would like to register my strongest objection to this policy.

Response 32

I would like to make the following comments about the Home School Transport Proposal

- Rural families will be disproportionately affected by the removal of subsidised bus travel to catchment schools which are not their closest.*
- Those living the greatest distances from their catchment schools will be negatively impacted.*
- Families affected by the proposed changes may choose, or be forced to drive as places on school buses are not guaranteed. This will lead to congestion at school sites, impact heavily on the environment, and potentially put lives at risk.*
- Removal of subsidised school transportation could lead to an increase in lateness and absenteeism.*

- Travelling by school bus can have a positive effect on a child's emotional, developmental and social wellbeing.
- Families in some villages will be divided as to whether their children receive free transportation or not, possibly reducing social and community cohesion.
- Removal of free school transportation will add financial pressure to rural families.

Response 33

I wish to register our concern and disappointment over the proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy 2016/17.

As you may or may not be aware, this proposal splits Hermitage village in two. The north end of the village will continue to receive free transport, but the middle and southern end of the village will fall into the category of having to pay for the school bus, or use other means should families wish to send their children to their catchment school.

I believe Kiln Close may fall under the category of free transport to Trinity School, which isn't my catchment school. Both of us work full time, we absolutely need to be able to rely upon a school bus 100% being available to take our children to the Downs school, when the time comes.

It is worth pointing out that a number of children who will fall into the "fare-paying" post codes will be walking to the bus stop in the village which is located in the "free transport" post code. How can you justify children at the same bus stop being split between payers and non-payers? My children will indeed be walking to that same bus stop on the village high street.

This policy discriminates against the rural aspect of The Downs Federation of Primary Schools, as a rural secondary school such as The Downs will have a wider catchment area due to the rural nature of the villages and sparsity of the population. Clearly, a secondary school in the town will have a much smaller catchment area due to the density of the population, so naturally some rural villages will be closer to other schools in mileage terms.

At present, there is no School Bus provided by West Berkshire Council from Hermitage to Trinity or Kennet School, both of which are closer to some parts of the village, so should families decide to go to their nearest school, rather than catchment school, will additional buses be provided to cater for this? If so, the financial implications seem ludicrous. Further, I moved to Hermitage for a limited number of reasons but proximity to the M4 to get to work, and being in The Downs catchment area, were the top two reasons for buying in Hermitage.

I would not wish to be financially penalised by having to pay a school bus fare (if there is even space to get a place on the fee-paying bus which I understand isn't even guaranteed), for simply choosing to send my children to the catchment school of choice. There is already a premium on house prices for those in good school catchment prices, we all know location drives up house prices, but some of us scrape the money together each month in order to remain in those catchments of choice.

The Council should also consider the implications of parents choosing to transport their children themselves to The Downs rather than pay for the bus, particularly for larger families. Not only will this have a huge impact on the already busy rural roads and the congestion at The Downs, but will have huge financial implications on lower income or single vehicle families, not all of whom are in receipt of, or eligible for, Pupil Premium funding.

We strongly object to the changes proposed and urge the Council to reconsider and continue to provide free transport to catchment schools.

Response 34

I am writing to you in response to the proposed Changes to Home to School Transport Policy as I have the following objections:

This change unfairly affects people within rural communities and rural schools who tend to live further from schools.

It will split communities as it will divide Chieveley (Downend will be Downs, other end Trinity if people apply on bus catchment) and Hermitage (roughly north of the Fox will be the Downs, south of the Fox will be Trinity if people apply on bus catchment) and so could become divisive.

This change might have an adverse affect on the Downs school pupil numbers, again another blow for the rural community.

Is there any plan in place to increase the number of places available at Trinity school should all parents affected want their children to attend this school?

There is no guarantee that even if parents did want to pay for a bus, there would be one provided or there would be a space.

There is also no guarantee what the ongoing cost of this bus would be.

This means that if parents wanted their children to go their catchment school, the council can provide no commitment about what the method of transport to this school would be.

The impact of parents having to transport their children to the school would mean increased traffic flow on small rural roads, many of which are not even B roads, and are narrow and twisty. This has the potential to increase road maintenance on these roads, increase emissions and pollution, increase congestion at the Downs School at both ends of the school day, which is very congested already. It will be bad for the environment. The risk of accidents on the roads will only increase with increased traffic.

Given the Government focus on encouraging people to work, there would also be a big impact on working hours as parents may choose to transport their children instead of paying the bus fee.

If we chose to go to the more local out of catchment school, there is no guarantee that we would get a place, as there is no plans to increase the number of places this school has.

As there are only about 2 miles difference, from Curridge road/Long Lane junction to either Downs School or Trinity School, is there a significant reduction in transport costs compared to the increased management and administration time of implementing this policy.

This proposal has not been widely communicated. There has been no direct communication about this proposal from the council directly to potentially affected parents.

It has been left to schools, via a single email, to notify parents. For some schools, who may only have one or two parents affected, this might not have been done at all.

Response 35

I am writing with reference to the Home to school transport changes. We live in Curridge with our catchment school being The Downs. However under the proposed plans our nearest school is Trinity and therefore we will only be entitled a free transport service to this school. The catchment school and transport school will be different for many families, we are expected to apply for our catchment school but will not be given transport service to this school. This seems like a sneaky way of changing the catchment. If we choose to apply for a place at our nearest school as transport will be essential but this is not catchment there will be no guarantee that we will receive a place and therefore risk be offered a place at a school that is neither catches nor nearest. This will make it impossible for working parents. There will be little difference in cost from transporting the child to the catchment and nearest school as a bus service will still be required. We live in a rural area that means that both catchment and nearest school will be impossible for the children to walk to school as it is too dangerous. We already have one child at the Downs and in 2017 we will have another child needing to go to secondary school and as a family we would like our children to attend the same school.

There will also be congestion at the Downs with parent transporting their children to school. This will put children's lives at risk as there will be more cars and more potential for an accident. The local community in Compton will also be affected by these changes as it will bring more traffic to their area.

I feel this proposal is creating more work for West Berks and stress for families and with a system that works perfectly well this is a underhand way of cutting expenses for West Berks council. I would very much like your team to reconsider these changes as it will make the transition from primary to secondary school very difficult for many families.

Response 36

I would like to raise objection to the proposed changes to the WBC school transport policy.

My main objection is in regards the nearest school being calculated from the child's residence rather than the allocated pick up point (allocated by WBC). This leads to the ridiculous situation of a child having to walk nearly half a mile or more from a "fare paying" post code to a pick up point that is in a "non fare paying" postcode to stand next to a child who has walked only a few yards to get collected for free! Absolutely ludicrous.

Furthermore there appears to be contradictions in the proposed changes and what is in your FAQs. In particular the guarantee of getting a fare paying place..One says no guarantee and the other say there is...With that in mind your proposed changes cannot be passed due to the inaccuracies of the documentation, if they were to be passed they could be contested as misleading in any appeal against not getting a fare paying place...you may find you will have to provide a bus for a single child if the numbers do not fit the seats on a bus...! Furthermore there has been confusion over the cost of the fares, I have seen two figures....?

Response 37

I am writing to you to express my disappointment with regards to the proposed change of policy for school transport in West Berkshire. I agree whole-heartedly with the points raised below from the Governors of Hermitage Primary School and urge you to reconsider based on the impact to the rural community.

Response 38

I am wholeheartedly opposed to the proposed item in the Home to School Transport Policy for 2016-17 regarding the removal of the discretionary criteria to provide transport for secondary students to their catchment school. It is morally wrong that parents are required to pay for transport for their child/children to attend a school within the catchment of the parents' choice (as in they have chosen to live in a particular area for their child/children to attend a certain school).

The authority is very strict about catchment boundaries in the secondary school allocation process, therefore it is highly unfair to then put families at a disadvantage and request payment for transportation for each of their children. As Headteacher of one of the rural, village schools affected, I am greatly concerned as to the impact on our current parents of pupils in Year 5 and under, in addition to prospective parents who may choose not to send their children to Curridge School because transport to the secondary catchment school, the Downs School, is not free.

On a final note, we are very proud of our Green Flag status, a whole-school initiative which shows our commitment to the environment. If parents choose to drive their children to the Downs School rather than pay for them to take the school bus, it would mean 15 cars travelling daily along country lanes to a site which is currently restricted in space.

I would be grateful if you could kindly consider my concerns.

Response 39

I am against the proposal contained within the Home to School Transport Policy for 2016-17 regarding the removal of the discretionary criteria to provide transport for secondary students to their catchment school.

Parents should not have to pay for transport for their child/children to attend a school within their catchment area and be forced to send their child/children to a school not of their choice.

I am concerned as to the impact on the parents and pupils of Curridge Primary School and all prospective parents who may decide not to send their children to Curridge School because transport to the secondary catchment school, the Downs School, is not free.

On a final note, we are very proud of our Green Flag status, a whole-school initiative which shows our commitment to the environment. If parents choose to drive their children to the Downs School rather than pay for them to take the school bus, it would mean 15 cars travelling daily along country lanes to a site which is currently restricted in space.

I would be grateful if you could kindly consider my concerns.

Response 40

I am against the proposal contained within the Home to School Transport Policy for 2016-17 regarding the removal of the discretionary criteria to provide transport for secondary students to their catchment school.

Parents should not have to pay for transport for their child/children to attend a school within their catchment area and be forced to send their child/children to a school not of their choice.

I am concerned as to the impact on the parents and pupils of Curridge Primary School and all prospective parents who may decide not to send their children to Curridge School because transport to the secondary catchment school, the Downs School, is not free.

On a final note, we are very proud of our Green Flag status, a whole-school initiative which shows our commitment to the environment. If parents choose to drive their children to the Downs School rather than pay for them to take the school bus, it would mean 15 cars travelling daily along country lanes to a site which is currently restricted in space.

I would be grateful if you could kindly consider my concerns.

Response 41

I am against the proposal contained within the Home to School Transport Policy for 2016-17 regarding the removal of the discretionary criteria to provide transport for secondary students to their catchment school.

Parents should not have to pay for transport for their child/children to attend a school within their catchment area and be forced to send their child/children to a school not of their choice.

I am concerned as to the impact on the parents and pupils of Curridge Primary School and all prospective parents who may decide not to send their children to Curridge School because transport to the secondary catchment school, the Downs School, is not free.

On a final note, we are very proud of our Green Flag status, a whole-school initiative which shows our commitment to the environment. If parents choose to drive their children to the Downs School rather than pay for them to take the school bus, it would mean 15 cars travelling daily along country lanes to a site which is currently restricted in space.

I would be grateful if you could kindly consider my concerns.

Response 42

Please do not change your school transport policy for secondary school children. Parents should not have to pay for transport for their child/children to attend a school within their catchment area and be forced to send their child/children to a school not of their choice.

This is not helping the environment as more parents will feel that they will have to transport their children to school. It is also penalising the village people of The Downs area which covers a larger area and the majority of the children do not live within walking distance and therefore have to have transport to get to school. This is penalising people who live in villages.

I would be grateful if you could kindly consider my concerns.