

Questions for County Council Meeting 20 September 2018

Question to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, Mike Appleyard from Councillor Angela Macpherson:

Q1 A resident and parish councillor from Calvert Green has asked that I submit the following written points regarding the County Council's Home to School Transport policy and how it impacts on a number of Calvert Green residents. It is deemed as unfair and inaccurate and the purpose of this question is to ask that the policy is revisited to address the points raised and additionally that the service area is responsive to those residents who write to them as some emails have not received responses.

Calvert Green is not an urban area, it is a small village, poorly served by public transport and is around seven miles from all secondary schools, yet the same postcode rules are used where some houses in the street are given free transport and others aren't. This is very divisive within a small community.

The catchment school is Buckingham School, but free transport is only provided to Sir Thomas Freemantle School in Winslow which is virtually impossible to gain admission to - unless one has siblings there, a parent works there or the child has special needs. This highlights the situation where we are only obliged to provide free seats to the nearest school. So this parent and some others have paid significant sums of money for their children to travel to their catchment schools by school bus.

For several years, others parents have chosen Sir Thomas Fremantle as their first choice for admissions, knowing that they won't get a place and instead receiving a place at Buckingham school with a free bus pass. Some residents believe this is unfair and residents have made representations that Client Transport has been notified many times of this loophole, but has continued to ignore it.

Consequently, this year, one resident's case meant that they found that their eldest son had a school bus pass (at their own cost), but their youngest son was denied a bus pass to the same school, because the bus was full and only those with free bus passes are prioritised - even though most are not entitled to them.

In summary I would request that the service area relooks at our policy, our own distance planning tool which some residents believe is inaccurate and also at ensuring responses are provided to residents in a timely manner.

Response:

We are unaware of any cases which have not been responded to within the statutory timetable for responses, but if that is the case, we apologise.

In terms of entitlement to free transport within the Calvert area, Buckingham Upper School is the catchment school for all Calvert residents, but in line with the Council's Home to School Transport Policy, since 2014 transport has only been provided to the nearest school (which may not always be the same as the catchment school). Our local transport policy is in line with the national transport legislation.

In Calvert (similar to other rural villages), the 'nearest school' decisions differ depending on where in the village the home is located as the village is between three schools and these schools cannot always offer places to Calvert resident children. Where the nearest school has been expressed as a preference but the school is not able to offer a place then we would provide transport to the next nearest school with a place. This means each decision is unique to the child and their preferences at the point of allocation.

We advise parents to put their preferences in their priority order and we explain the national transport legislation. We also provide an online nearest school checker tool so parents can establish their nearest school for transport eligibility purposes which is based on national software.

We also provide information about 'paid for' transport which is a discretionary service selling spare seats where they exist on buses used to transport for eligible children. Such places are offered on a first come first served basis.

In summary we believe that our transport policy, which is reviewed regularly, is a fair policy and we have not yet found a fairer way to manage this issue.

Question to the Cabinet Member for Transportation, Mark Shaw from Julia Wassell

Q1 I understand that some road schemes selected by Members of the Council have been postponed until next year. In my own division the road scheme for 18/19 has been delayed until 19/20. Please can you give an explanation for this and what the consequences will be for subsequent years? There is disappointment about this and would like to know a breakdown by all divisions of how many are delayed?

Response:

The Capital Maintenance Programme is developed in a way that looks to deliver all planned schemes in the current financial year, there are however circumstances that prevent us from doing so, these could be budgetary, resource or programme clash issues. In the case of the scheme referred to by Julia Wassell there is an issue with the availability of resource for the type of treatment that was planned for the area.

Earlier in the year it became apparent that our supply chain partner, Eurovia Specialist Treatments, would not be able to start our programme of works at the time originally agreed, this being as a consequence of programme over runs elsewhere due, in part, to poor weather. Ordinarily this would not cause a problem, however the material choice for this location is governed by a national certification scheme, HAPAS, that prevents the material being laid beyond the end of September as the material is susceptible to weather issues when laying.

Twelve schemes have therefore been deferred for treatment until next year. The schemes have been chosen based on their relative condition and we remain confident that they will remain in a position whereby the selected treatment type, microasphalt, will still be suitable next year. Those roads that were deferred in Julia Wassell's Division have all be prepared for the main treatment, this means that all patching work has been completed.

The budget that will not be spent on these schemes this year will be allocated to the next schemes on the overall countywide programme, these schemes will involve more traditional hot surfacing type materials.

Schemes that have been deferred are:

- Woodside Ave, Flackwell Heath
- Woodfield, Lacey Green
- Greenlands, Lacey Green
- Roundlands & Eastlands, Lacey Green
- Westlands Roads & Meadow Rise, Lacey Green
- Tilling Crescent, Farm Close, Buckingham Close, Buckingham Drive & Winslow Gardens, High Wycombe

Question to the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Warren Whyte from Julia Wassell

Q1 It is reported in my local paper that you have been caused a 'headache' due to a £1.9 million deficit in Children's Services. Your explanation is given that the consultation on Early Help that was faulty last year and then discontinued has caused the shortfall. What steps are you taking to ensure that the current consultation and any future consultation both engage the public and are transparent to the public? Another explanation is given that there has been a 'change in demographics' recently. A full report would be welcome on that.

Response:

Early Help – consultation and savings

It is important that we get Early Help right. Following public meetings about the future use of both the children's centres and youth service buildings, the strength of feeling

from residents was such that the Council decided to stop and take stock of the proposed model so that it better reflected the issues that were raised at the time.

Ensuring the consultation engages the public and is transparent

To ensure we engage fully with the public, we have adopted a two part process: a pre-consultation and a further 10 week consultation.

The pre-consultation research has been completed. The outputs of this comprehensive approach can be seen through the published appendices to the Cabinet Member decision report which is due to be published on 20th September 2018.

The benefit of this approach is that it has enabled service users and other key stakeholders to shape the options we will consult upon.

We have published seven detailed reports which set out the case for change, research and analysis on current services and options for change to maximise transparency to the public about the Council's proposals. All information can be accessed at www.buckscc.gov.uk/earlyhelp

In addition to this, we have planned a 10 week consultation process that will start on 4th October and will end on 13th December 2018. We want as many people as possible to have their say through.

Public meetings will also be held during the consultation period and further details can be viewed here: www.buckscc.gov.uk/earlyhelp

Demand

Over the last five years the Council has seen a 53% increase in children in need; 160% increase in the number of children subject to a child protection plan; and a 14% increase in the number of looked after children.

We know that the increasing demand makes our current offer unsustainable but more importantly than that, we know our current offer is not reaching those who need it most and this is contributing to pressure on our statutory services.