

AT A MEETING of the Children and Young People Select Committee of
HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL held at the castle, Winchester on Friday, 25th
May, 2018

Chairman
p Councillor Roz Chadd

Vice-Chairman
p Councillor Ray Bolton

p Councillor Jackie Branson
p Councillor Ann Briggs
p Councillor Zilliah Brooks
p Councillor Fran Carpenter
a Councillor Steve Forster
p Councillor Marge Harvey
p Councillor Wayne Irish

p Councillor Gavin James
p Councillor Kirsty Locke
p Councillor Neville Penman
p Councillor Jackie Porter
a Councillor Robert Taylor
p Councillor Malcolm Wade
p Councillor Michael Westbrook

Substitute Members:

p Councillor Graham Burgess
p Councillor Pal Hayre

Co-opted Members:

a Ian Brewerton, Secondary School Parent Governor Representative
a Gareth Davies, Primary School Parent Governor Representative
p Jane Longman, Special School Parent Governor Representative
p Robert Sanders, Church of England School Representative
VACANT Roman Catholic Schools Representative

In attendance at the invitation of the Chairman:

p Councillor Keith Mans
p Councillor Stephen Reid
p Councillor Adrian Collett
p Councillor Jonathan Glen
p Councillor Judith Grajewski

58. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillors Forster and Taylor. Councillors Burgess and Hayre were in attendance as the Conservative Substitute Members. Apologies were also received from Gareth Davies, Primary School Parent Governor representative and Ian Brewerton, Secondary School Parent Governor representative.

59. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

All Members who believe they have a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest in any matter to be considered at the meeting must declare that interest and, having regards to Part 3 Paragraph 1.5 of the County Council's Members' Code of Conduct, leave the meeting while the matter is discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with Paragraph 1.6 of the Code. Furthermore all Members with a Personal Interest in a matter being considered at the meeting should consider, having regards to Part 5, Paragraph 4 of the Code, whether such interest should be declared, and having regard to Part 5, Paragraph 5 of the Code, consider whether it is appropriate to leave the meeting while the matter is discussed, save for exercising any right to speak in accordance with the Code.

Jane Longman, the Parent Governor representative for Special Schools declared a personal interest in Item 6 as her son has special educational needs and is eligible for home to school transport.

60. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Minutes of the meeting held on 9 May 2018 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

61. DEPUTATIONS

The Committee received one deputation on Item 6 'Proposed Changes to the Home to School Transport Policy Statement – Consideration of Request to Exercise Call-in Powers'.

Laura Dobson, Sarah Horton and Reha Malika Fossati made a deputation on behalf of the families of Ancells Farm. The Committee heard the concerns of the deputees which included the distance children would have to walk to school, increased volume of traffic as a result of the proposed new policy and gridlocked traffic around the school gates at drop off and pick up times. Members of the Committee were provided with photographs and other information which illustrated traffic volume along the walk to school route, distance of the route and also highlighted a recent protest walk by Ancells Farm families along the route. Concerns were also raised around the new policy of only providing home to school transport for children once they had reached compulsory school age, and the potential disadvantage to summer born children.

Following the deputations, the Chairman agreed that the local Councillor, Cllr Adrian Collett could also address the Committee. Cllr Collett set out the history behind the provision of home to school transport for children living in Ancells Farm to Committee Members. He also highlighted the recent protest walk as referenced by the deputees and informed Members of the Committee that the walk took 62 minutes with families having to cross 12 roads along the route. The volume of traffic along the walk to school route, especially at the entrance of Fleet railway station was also referenced. Attention was also drawn to the effect on families from the withdrawal of the historic bus provision, with the impact on working parents/carers and parents/carers who don't drive highlighted.

Cllr Collett also emphasised possible future long term affects on Ancells Farm as a community, as families may decide not to buy a house there in the future with the withdrawal of the home to school transport service as currently stands and urged that the decision was reconsidered.

62. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman welcomed Vice-Chairman Cllr Ray Bolton back to the Committee after his recent illness.

63. CONSIDERATION OF REQUEST TO EXERCISE CALL-IN POWERS

The Committee received a report (Item 6 in the Minute Book) from the Head of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer following a request by a quorum of Members of the Children and Young People to exercise call-in powers in respect of a decision by the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services

The Head of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer introduced the report and confirmed the purpose of the meeting, and Members were referred to the reasons for the call-in contained in Annex D. Members were informed that discussions did not have to purely focus on the call-in request and other matters in the Executive Lead Members report could be discussed if clarification was needed. The decisions taken by the Executive Lead Member at his Decision Day on the 9 May were set out at Annex A which had been subject to pre-scrutiny and supported by the Children and Young People Select Committee. Attention was also drawn to additional decisions d) and e) which were made by the Executive Lead Member at his Decision Day. The process of the call-in as set out in the Constitution at Annex E was explained as well as the role of the Scrutiny Committee as set out in Section 5 of the report.

Paragraph 4.3 of the report was explained to Members, which highlighted the savings options proposals approved by the County Council in respect to Home to School Transport Remodelling. These savings had been agreed by the Executive Lead Member on 20 September 2017, prior to consideration by the County Council on the 2 November 2017.

The Monitoring Officer explained that the decision of the Executive Lead Member was in line with the budget decision of the County Council on 2 November 2017 and concerned implementation of that budget decision. Therefore the option open to the Select Committee was to consider whether or not to ask the Executive Lead Member to reconsider his decisions, and if the decision was to ask the Executive Lead Member to reconsider his decisions, then the Select Committee must provide reasons as to why this is the case.

The Chairman invited the Director of Children's Services to speak and it was heard that the decisions made by the Executive Lead Member were within the County Council's Transformation to 2019 financial envelope.

The Chairman also invited the Executive Lead Member to speak and he drew attention to the difficult financial times that the County Council was experiencing and the difficult decisions that needed to be made to balance the books. He also highlighted that he had specifically added an additional decision d) following the discussions and concerns he had heard at the pre-scrutiny Select Committee meeting held on the 9 May. Cllr Mans also referred to the response he made to a question put to him at the recent full Council meeting in which he committed to parents having access to paid for seats where available.

Cllr Porter spoke to the call-in request and set out Members named on the call-in request's concerns as set out at Annex D. Cllr Porter highlighted that it was felt that the changes agreed by the Executive Lead Member did not match the policy. Following on from the points raised in the deputation, Cllr Porter reiterated the distance that families would have to walk from Ancells Farm to Fleet Infant and Velmead Junior Schools, as well as the safety concerns along this route, particularly around the entrance to Fleet Railway Station. Concerns relating to inequalities for summer born children were raised as the new policy would only provide home to school transport for those eligible children in Year R who were of compulsory school age. Other issues including capacity on community transport, potential loss of money for schools, and eligibility for transport for children on reaching their eighth birthday were also addressed. Concerns relating to equality, opportunity and clarity were also highlighted, as well as the importance of ensuring that parents were clear on policies before enrolling their children at school.

In response to questions, Members heard:

- That, as set out in the additional decision d) made by the Executive Lead Member, work would be undertaken with schools and Town and District Councils to examine the greater provision of school based minibuses and community transport.
- That Government guidance would be followed in relation to implementing the new policies and all eligible children would be guaranteed transport.
- That there were national guidelines for assessing walking routes to school which refer to paved routes and crossings, and if a child was accompanied by a parent/carer, then the route would be assessed as safe.
- That the opportunity to purchase spare seats on home to school transport would be available for non-eligible children, but the last purchased seat would have to be released with adequate notice period if a child moved to the area and was eligible for home to school transport.
- That no guarantee could be made for spare seats and this was in line with current policy as well as the proposed new policy.
- That transport from Ancells Farm to Fleet Infant and Velmead Junior School would become subject to the usual statutory distances and eight year olds would not have transport provided to Velmead Junior School.
- That some Town Councils may not be in a financial position to assist schools in providing community transport.
- That discussions with colleagues in Highways department to explore the possibilities of safer crossings on walk to school routes would be undertaken.

The Chairman moved to debate. A variety of arguments were heard, including:

- Some Members were concerned that the removal of the discretionary areas of the current policy would make it increasingly difficult for some parents to continue in employment.
- That it should be the responsibility of the parents to ensure that children are taken to school and that the agreement for Ancells Farm was an historic discretionary policy which was put in place when there was little pressure on the County Council financially.
- Concerns were raised about the increased traffic volume and parents may be reluctant to pay for available spare seats thus leading to empty seats on buses.
- That there were concerns that the change in policy would have a huge impact on some families and it was hoped that solutions would be put in place to mitigate this impact.
- That there were concerns that these changes would impact only a few schools, but these schools would be heavily affected, and it was hoped that a review of issues such as traffic congestion and school crossings near these schools would be examined before September 2019.
- That parents may choose to delay their children starting school specifically summer born children.
- That Officers should be congratulated on the work they have done during difficult financial times for the County Council.
- That there were positive opportunities to work with schools and other organisations to provide alternative transport arrangements within the schools.

At the end of the debate, the Chairman invited Cllr Porter to speak to the Committee. Cllr Porter reiterated that there was not enough clarity for parents within the new policy, and greater clarity was needed in regards to purchasable seats on buses for non-eligible children. Cllr Porter also raised concerns regarding the traffic impact and standard of footpaths on walk to school routes, as well as highlighting the role of the appeals process.

The Chairman also again invited the Executive Lead Member to speak and he informed the Committee that the County Council website would include information for parents regarding Home to School Transport which would provide clarification on key points and frequently asked questions.

In line with the option open to the Select Committee, the Chairman proposed that a vote should be taken on the recommendation in the report that the Members of the Select Committee determine whether or not they consider that the Executive Lead Member for Children's Services should re-consider his decisions as set out in the Decision Record attached at Annex A.

The recommendation was voted upon as follows:

- 11 Members of the Select Committee voted in favour of not requesting the Executive Lead Member to reconsider his decisions.
- 7 Members of the Select Committee voted in favour of requesting the Executive Lead Member to reconsider his decisions.

Chairman,