

REGULATORY COMMITTEE

4th FEBRUARY 2004

**REQUEST FOR FREE TRANSPORT TO
LAVINGTON SCHOOL FOR PUPILS FROM PATNEY**

Purpose of Report

1. To present the request, from several parents of secondary school pupils living in Patney, that the designated school for free transport entitlement be changed from Devizes School to Lavington School.

Background

2. Entitlement to free school transport is determined by two criteria: first the Civil Parish in which the pupil lives and the school 'designated' to it, and secondly the distance he/she lives from the school. Additionally, some pupils may live under-distance from their designated school but if the walking route is unsafe the authority provides free transport in that instance too.
3. The County Council's School Transport Policy was based on the principle of providing admission to a local school for pupils aged 5-16 years, with free transport for pupils who qualified through the 'distance' or unsafe walking route criteria.
4. Some non-Local Education Authority (LEA) controlled schools have changed their admissions policies in recent years to admit pupils from various other Civil Parishes. However, the LEA is not obliged to change its transport policy to incur transport costs or implications rising from this.
5. Thus, through parental choice, a pupil can attend any school which offers admission but the LEA is only obliged to consider free transport if the 'preferred' school is closer to the pupil's home than the designated school. This is not the case in the request presented here.
6. For pupils living in Patney (along with the neighbouring parishes of Marden and Chirton), the designated primary school is Chirton CE Primary. At the age of 11 pupils from Patney (and Marden and Chirton) are designated under the LEA's Transport Policy to Devizes School.
7. In recent years, Lavington School has become a locally managed school and chooses to admit pupils from Patney (and Marden and Chirton). However, free transport to this school is only currently available for pupils from Marden and Chirton, and this is owing to the fact that the distance to Lavington School is less than it is to Devizes School.

Main Considerations of the Council

8. A group of parents in Patney have requested that the designated school under the LEA's Transport Policy be changed to Lavington School instead of Devizes School. The parents have co-ordinated their request through Michael Ancram MP who supports the request.
9. A map showing the Civil Parishes which would be designated to Lavington School and Devizes School under the parents' proposal is attached at **Appendix 1**.
10. The points which the parents from Patney wish to put forward in support of their case are detailed in **Appendix 2**. The authority's response is given following each point and is shown in *italics*.
11. A consultation exercise has been carried out in order to give various interested parties the opportunity to comment. The four responses received are attached at **Appendix 3** (a) to (d). Devizes School finds the proposal unacceptable, Patney Parish Council and Lavington School support the proposal, while Chirton Parish Council has no objection to the proposal.
12. There are currently four secondary school pupils living in Patney who have chosen to attend Lavington School, two in Year 7 and two in Year 8. There are no pupils in Patney currently attending Devizes School for whom free transport is provided by the LEA. If Members were to agree to the parent's request, any pupils from Patney who wished to attend Devizes School would still qualify for free transport because Devizes School would be closer to Patney than the newly designated school at Lavington.

Environmental Impact of the Recommendation

13. None.

Risk Assessment

14. If this proposal is accepted it would represent a departure from the County Council's School Transport Policy. Such a decision could be viewed as a precedent set by the County Council which could generate further appeals of a similar nature from across the County. If such appeals were received they would have to be considered on a case by case basis and it is not possible to estimate the cost implications for the County Council agreeing to such appeals.

Financial Implications

15. It is estimated that this proposal would cost the County Council in the region of £250 per pupil per academic year.

Options Considered

16. (i) To retain Devizes School as the designated secondary school for pupils living in the Civil Parish of Patney.
- (ii) To change the designated secondary school from Devizes School to Lavington School for pupils living in the Civil Parish of Patney.

Reasons for Recommendation

17. This appeal is presented for Members' consideration at the request of parents in Patney who wish to have the designated secondary school for transport entitlement changed to Lavington School instead of Devizes School. This would provide free transport for their children, whereas at present a daily fare is paid by the parents for the bus journey.

Recommendation

18. That Members either:-
- (i) Endorse the County Council's School Transport Policy and retain Devizes School as the designated school for secondary school pupils living in the Civil Parish of Patney;
- or
- (ii) Agree to amend the County Council's School Transport Policy and change to Lavington School as the designated school for secondary school pupils living in the Civil Parish of Patney.

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

None

