

Update from Kent County Council on Education Questions

Questions from Cllr Brown to County Councillor Margaret Crabtree (14 July 2015)

1. Information re the cost of transporting 1,100 children to Tunbridge Wells per day. Could we circulate this publicly?
2. What is the need for a further school in Sevenoaks i.e. how many people vs how many places on offer
3. What is the gap in funding between money available vs need for money from CIL.
4. How much CIL is anticipated to be needed in relation to fort Halstead.
5. Every morning the roads are snarled up with parents taking kids to school. What can be done to ensure more kids take public transport? One particular hole is private schools - can we do anything to force them to lay on buses?

Email from County Councillor Margaret Crabtree to Councillor Brown (3 August 2015)

Dear Cameron

So far I have received the answers to questions 1 & 5 as follows:

“In answer to the questions raised by Cllr Brown, I hope the responses below will be of assistance.

It is not possible to answer question on with any degree of accuracy because there are so many varying factors which influence cost. It depends entirely on whether a child is entitled to receive transport assistance from the Local Authority. As the majority of children who have opted to attend a Tunbridge Wells or Tonbridge school, from the Sevenoaks area, would not be eligible to receive free home to school transport, their parents would have to make their own arrangements. Their transport, therefore, would not be a cost to the Authority. Most vehicles are commercial buses and the operators are unlikely to reveal the exact costs of operating the routes as this would be commercially sensitive information. Consequently I do not think we can answer this question.

Another factor restricting our ability to accurately calculate costs, stems from students starting their journeys from different locations. For example, a Weald of Kent student living in Leigh Village would have significantly lower travel costs than a Weald of Kent student living in Knockholt or Crockenhill.

In the event that a child is eligible to receive transport assistance, the costs could vary significantly depending on whether existing transport could be utilised (due to an existing vacant seat) or if new, dedicated services would have to be obtained it is therefore not possible to provide detailed costs for transporting 1100 children.

The Kent Young Person's Travel Pass is an option available to any student resident in Kent, who attends school in years 7 – 11. It costs £250 per year. The pass is KCC subsidised by about 60%, so there is a cost to KCC per pass. However this is a county-wide offer and purely optional.

In terms of question 5, Kent County Council already do a lot to encourage the use of public transport. All secondary schools are supported by the Local Authority to produce school travel plans which is a statutory requirement placed upon them. The focus of these is very much on sustainable options such as public transport as well as walking and cycling. In addition to the statutory provision that is made for children entitled to free transport to school, Kent also offers the Young Person's Travel Pass. This is offered on a discretionary basis providing heavily subsidised bus travel to secondary school children and remains one of the most generous schemes of its type outside of London. As far as I am aware, there is nothing that the local authority can do to compel private schools to engage with their parents to encourage their children using public transport but we would entirely agree that they should be encouraged to do so”.

Email from County Councillor Margaret Crabtree to Councillor Brown (14 August 2015)

Dear Cameron

Our KCC Head of Fair Access is now back from holiday and this is his response to your latest message:

“If Mr Brown requires a financial estimate which I emphasise is only that, then I think in very broad terms we can say that if the children were all entitled to free school transport and therefore had dedicated transport then we could estimate somewhere around £850k to £1m per annum to move them on the number of coaches that would need to be provided.

If they were all to be able to access a public bus service then the cost to the families to purchase the Young Persons Travel Card would in the main be £250 to the parents and additional subsidy of (average) £338 per pass by the LA would represent a £370k a year cost to KCC.”