

SCRUTINY COMMISSION - 9 JUNE 2010

**PETITION CONCERNING 838 LOCAL BUS SERVICE SCHOOL SPECIAL
BETWEEN MARKFIELD AND SOUTH CHARNWOOD HIGH SCHOOL**

**BRIEFING NOTE OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT AND
TRANSPORT**

Background

1. The above petition will be presented by Mr Sprason CC as local member to the Commission. There are 1822 signatures on the petition and it reads as follows:

"We the undersigned oppose the County Council's £14,000 cut in the school transport budget for the school bus from Markfield/Field head to South Charnwood High School, Leicester. Additionally, we demand a full safety assessment and immediate revision of the County Council's criteria for free transportation to schools."

2. The petition relates to decision at the County Council meeting on 24th February to agree the four year Medium Term Financial Strategy in which the funding for all local bus service school specials would be withdrawn. These service cuts will take effect at the end of the current academic year in July.
3. There are 17 services affected by this funding cut of which one is the 838 service provided under contract between Markfield, Field Head and South Charnwood High School by Roberts Coaches.
4. The details of the proposals and the services affected were circulated in January 2010 to all County Councillors using the Member Information Service. The details were also reported in the local press at the same time.

Detail of Service 838

5. The County Council has received a number of comments about the withdrawal of the 838 bus service from parents, parish, district and county councillors, the local MP, the head and deputy head teachers at South Charnwood High School and parents of children using the service.
6. The route between Field Head, Markfield and the school has been assessed as available, with the Field Head portion becoming available

when the light controlled pedestrian crossing was installed in January 2007.

7. The children using the service pay a fare to use this service because they live under three miles from the school, those children living over three miles from the school receive statutory free home to school transport under the relevant Education Acts. The policy on eligibility to receive school transport is provided in information for parents on the County Council's website and is shown in the appendices, in summary free home to school transport is provided to mainstream schools for primary school pupils living over two miles (this includes primary aged children attending secondary schools i.e. 10+ High Schools) from their catchment school and for secondary school pupils who live over three miles from school. Children attending schools because of religious belief who live over these distances are required to contribute £240 per year towards the cost of transport and those students in further education living over three miles from their nearest appropriate school or college also make a contribution of £240.
8. Farepayers who use mainstream home to school contracts on a discretionary basis pay £300 to travel to primary schools and £400 to secondary schools from September 2010; currently a minimum of £240 and then based on mileage of journey.
9. A number of Freedom of Information Act requests have been submitted to the Authority.
10. There have also been ongoing discussions with a local bus operator around a commercial solution for the provision of this bus link to the school. The operator has indicated he can provide a commercial service if 100 parents agree to pay £1.40 per school day in advance. This would mean the service could be provided commercially on a long term basis. At present there are not enough expressions of interest to give the company confidence the service can be operated commercially.
11. South Charnwood High School has a School Travel Plan and all schools affected by the removal of these services will be approached by school travel planning staff to discuss alternatives such as walking and cycling and have also to help schools think about commercial local bus services to school and how they might be provided. The commercial offer at £1.40 a day appears a good one; farepaying places on statutory school contracts equate to £2.10 per day paid in advance or by direct debit from September 2010.
12. Discussions with the school are also investigating whether a mainstream contract bus service into South Charnwood could operate earlier and then run a service to pick up Markfield children similar to how we currently transport Thornton children. This may allow for a lower fare but still be commercial.

13. The opportunity to load some of entitled children onto the standalone commercial service being proposed is also being investigated.
14. It is worth noting that passenger numbers drop off significantly during the summer term. The current contract operator has indicated this is because children walk to/from school.

Circulation under Local Issues Alert Procedure

Mr. D. Sprason CC

Recommendation

15. It is recommended that:
 - (a) The Commission:
 - (i) considers the information in this report;
 - (ii) notes that the assessment for the route has been undertaken as per the policy on walking routes;
 - (iii) notes that discussions with South Charnwood School are ongoing around the provision of a commercially provided bus between Markfield and the school.
 - (b) The policy on home to school transport entitlement is reviewed annually and published as information for parents on the County Council's website from 1st June every year.

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