

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 26TH SEPTEMBER 2012

POSITION STATEMENT BY LEAD MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT

Home to School Transport

I wish to place on record the County Council's position on the provision of home to school transport after the start of the new academic year.

A report on proposed changes to the policy on home to school transport was deferred by Cabinet from its meeting of 8th May. This means that the policy that applied at the time remains in effect. Consequently we will provide transport to the catchment or nearer school for students living over three miles from secondary school or two miles from primary school. The catchment areas are those that the County Council had set prior to 31st May 2012 and are published on our website. This also applies to the age range of students that schools were accepting at that time. Changes to age ranges and catchment areas made by schools after that date will not be accommodated for free transport.

I believe that this is a sensible way forward at present which will provide parents and students with clarity and certainty about the arrangements for home to school transport.

Ausden Clark

Members will be aware of the recent court case and findings against Mr Paul Ausden Clark, the Managing Director of Ausden Clark. As a result of the case, the Traffic Commissioner will now need to consider whether Ausden Clark can continue to hold an Operator's Licence. This hearing will take place in the next few weeks.

The County Council currently has 35 bus contracts with this company. The County Council will continue to monitor the quality and reliability of the coaches and buses Ausden Clark operate. The position will be reviewed again when the outcome of the decision of the Traffic Commissioner is known.

Whilst I recognise the reporting of this story may have caused some concern to parents and students it is worth noting the Judge's comment "*there is no suggestion the vehicles were anything other than perfectly roadworthy*".

Supported Bus Network

I also wish to set out our approach to the support of non-commercial public bus services pending a recommendation from the Scrutiny Panel that is looking in to this matter.

The consultation that took place in the summer was highly effective, eliciting over 1500 responses. The in-depth nature of the responses and our desire to ensure that we have a good, affordable network mean that we will need more time to design the range of services for the future. In the meantime, we will not be adding services in line with the policy on 95% coverage that we have had to date, as it is generally agreed that this is no longer sensible nor affordable in the current climate.