

DEPUTATION ONE – SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

THE LORD MAYOR: Deputation one is School Transport Policy. Good afternoon and welcome to today's Council meeting. Please now make your speech to Council, which should not be longer than five minutes, and please begin by introducing the people in your Deputation.

MR A BATTY: Thank you, Lord Mayor, Members of Council. I am Andrew Batty, I am the Chairman of East Keswick Parish Council. My colleague here is Andy Dodsworth, one of the many parents that are aggrieved about the situation.

We represent the parents of the secondary school children in the villages of East Keswick and Bardsey. Recently the Council changed its transport policy and this altered the way that free bus passes are issued and in the new way it is a hugely unfair way, which is causing a grave injustice to the families in those villages, as I shall explain in a second.

Previously where parents found that there was no school within three miles, the rule was that the Council provided a zero fare bus pass to the nearest secondary school. Both Boston Spa and Wetherby Schools are roughly equidistant from the villages and in fact the Leeds Schools website stated Boston Spa was the designated recommended school. On that basis, many parents chose Boston Spa school for their children.

Now, imagine the injustice that parents feel when they are told that Wetherby School, and not Boston Spa School, is nearer and that only Wetherby pupils now are eligible for zero fare.

Those parents cannot change schools as there no places and even if they were willing to allow their children to be moved they would be adversely affected by a school change.

Parents wanted to verify the distances themselves. Measurements on Googlemaps and Tom Tom and other easily available things, such as Ordnance Survey, show in many cases that Boston Spa is the nearest of the two schools, just as the Leeds Education site suggested. Ordnance Survey suggests the same, but Leeds City Council officers are saying they use a different Dutch mapping system to which the public has no access and to which they cannot check or challenge themselves.

The definition of the nearest school might be down to as little as 50 yards' difference and Council officers who attended a packed public meeting, which we organised at East Keswick Parish Council last August, said measurements were going down to the exact distance – that might even be to feet and inches. It was certainly less than 0.1 mile, which is 176 yards, less than 500 feet.

Many parents believe it would be wholly unfair to move children part way through their critical secondary education. Wetherby School has insufficient spare places anyway and parents chose Boston because the Leeds Education website certified that that Boston Spa School was eligible.

For parents the extra unplanned-for cost is £9.50 per week. For parents with more than one child at the school that unplanned-for cost is doubled or trebled. The fare,

incidentally, is higher than First Bus would charge for a week pass, but of course no service bus is available.

Whilst parents can go through the appeals process it is unfair to expect so many to do so. In fact, all the appeals that have gone to the local Council Ombudsman have been overturned – the Local Council Ombudsman has voted against the Council. We should not have a situation where we have got to go to that length in order to get fairness.

The way to correct this injustice is quite simple. I would suggest it is to allow a margin of tolerance – at Council discretion – of half a mile where two schools are nearly equidistant to the communities.

These villagers are not asking for favours, only fairness. Thank you for listening.
(Applause)

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Charlwood.

COUNCILLOR CHARLWOOD: Thank you, Lord Mayor. I move that the matter be referred to the Executive Board for consideration.

THE LORD MAYOR: Councillor Latty.

COUNCILLOR G LATTY: I second that, Lord Mayor.

THE LORD MAYOR: I call for the vote. *(A vote was taken)* The vote is CARRIED.

Thank you for attending and for what you have said. You will be kept informed of the consideration which your comments will receive. Good afternoon and thank you.
(Applause)