



By email

12th July 2022

KCC Cllr N Chard
Kent County Council

Dear Nick

We write to add our voice to the welter of adverse reaction to the proposal which emerged over the weekend to discontinue school buses serving Westerham. We appreciate that the decision of KCC to remove one-third of the subsidy to bus services affects the entire county; however, our concern as the Town Council is how our secondary age children will get to their schools in Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells at the beginning of the next school year, September 1, only 7 weeks away.

We have seen a multiplicity of emails from a variety of sources on this subject. What we have not seen is any clear route to resolving the situation. We have already received calls and messages from distressed parents, who without the certainty of bus services for their children are contemplating further hardship if they have to drive their children themselves against a background of rising fuel prices: some are considering the need to give up their jobs in order to do so. This cannot be the outcome intended.

We have not been party to any of the discussions which may have taken place between KCC and Go-Coach, the operator providing bus services for Westerham children. The consultation on the removal of bus service subsidy issued in February made no mention whatsoever of the possible removal of services TW4 and S1. The former serves the Tunbridge Wells schools, the latter Knole Academy, the nearest Kent secondary school to Westerham (5.1m) There is clearly more information which has not made it to the public domain.

Having listened to the webcast of the meeting of the Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee held on 6 July, we understand the issue is that of the reduction of some £3m in the bus subsidy fund. We heard Councillors there make special pleas for services in their area. We also understand that Westerham's are not the only children who will be unable to get to School.

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What we did not hear was any concern or indeed thought having been given to the plight of those affected, children and their parents.

We see that the Issue Decision (ref 22/00052) is not due to be finalised before 18 July at the earliest. The issue, although not on the agenda, was discussed at our Council meeting yesterday evening and the Council was unanimous in its condemnation both of the decision and the timing and method of its communication. It is particularly insensitive that this news emerged at the same time as parents were being asked to apply for Kent Travel Savers for the coming year.

We ask that you intervene as a matter of urgency to find a solution which removes this uncertainty and provides reassurance to both parents and their children. We look forward to hearing from you.

Westerham children do not choose to travel to their secondary schools by bus, they have no option.

Yours sincerely

Helen Ogden

Helen Ogden
Chairman, Westerham Town Council