



David J. Rowlands AM,
Chair, Petitions Committee,
National Assembly for Wales,
Cardiff Bay,
CARDIFF.
CF99 1NA

Please ask for : Mainstream School Transport

My Ref : 101004259615//CN

Date : 11 October 2017

Dear Mr Rowlands,

Petition P-05-716 Free Train Transport for School Pupils with Arriva Trains Wales

Thank you for your letter of 5 October 2017, regarding the petition from Elin Tuckwood that is seeking the provision of free, safe transport following the withdrawal of the above provision in June 2016.

The criteria used by this Council to determine the eligibility to receive free school transport is based on walking distance, measured by the shortest, available walking route, with free transport being provided to secondary school learners whose home address is more than two miles from the nearest or catchment school. The efficient use of resources dictate the mode of transport provided and in this case, safe and stress free travel is solely provided by contracted school buses, which operate from Blaencwm, Blaenrhondda, Gelli, Maerdy, Tynewydd, Ynyshir and Ystrad.

The provision of free train transport to Treorchy Comprehensive School was a long standing arrangement between the school and the train operator, to which the Council has had no direct involvement. It was promoted by the school primarily for the benefit of learners who lived outside of the school's catchment area, who were not entitled to the Council's free school transport.

However in 2014, the Council did express concern to the school following the receipt of complaints from concerned parents that issues of overcrowding on the trains and the station platforms were possibly being exacerbated by some pupils, who were in receipt of free school transport on the Council's contracted services, choosing instead to use the train. The Council operates a strict "no pass no travel" policy on its contracted transport and it was therefore suggested that it might be appropriate for the school and the train operator to put in place some form of entitlement control for the arrangements that they had put in place.



I would also add that in May 2016, the Council's Integrated Transport Unit was approached by a number of parents, Councillors and the local MP, all of whom were attributing the Arriva Trains Wales announcement that it was replacing free train transport with a chargeable Educational Season Ticket to the Council's withdrawal of funding from school transport. However it was easy to see how this conclusion had been reached, as the train operator was claiming that "The increase in pupils travelling (by rail) is partly a consequence of the local authority reducing road transport subsidy to local families...." This statement was totally untrue. There had been no change in the Council's funding in this area, nor in its school transport provision, and although it had been under review during the spring / summer of 2015, the ongoing, unchanged provision was confirmed on 16 March 2016.

This provision, which continues to be predicated on one of the most generous eligibility criteria in the country, forms part of the largest school transport operation in Wales. Sufficient capacity is provided on the contracted school buses for the 415 pupils who live within the Treorchy Comprehensive School catchment area and who are two miles or more from school. The rail arrangements therefore remain a matter for the school and the train operator.

I trust the foregoing is of assistance in clarifying the Council's position.

Yours sincerely,

Chris Bradshaw
Chief Executive