

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

Thursday 23 May 2024

1. Question from Councillor Jane Taylor (Teignbridge District Council) (NOT IN ATTENDANCE)

Re: School Transport in Kingskerswell

Children and young people living in Kingskerswell, have two designated senior schools, Newton Abbot College, (NAC) and Coombeshead Academy(CHC)), which are adjacent to each other, separated by a road. NAC is designated as the nearest school for the purpose of providing school transport. CHC previously contracted out school transport and provided it free to pupils from Kingskerswell, but last year the provider went into liquidation and CHC could not afford to fund another contractor. Pupils were therefore left without transport and no bus pass. After a campaign, it was agreed with DCC that those affected could apply for school transport to CHC and they would include in the criteria, that those pupils who had asked for NAC as their first choice but could not get a place, would be entitled to school transport.

Many of those families were able to be accommodated, but this year, they will find themselves facing the same situation, with second children as well as new families with children moving up into year 11.

This is unfair to those families living in Kingskerswell, but it also contradicts the Council's own policy. Although both are designated schools for Kingskerswell, in reality, parents can only afford to send their children to NAC, regardless of the child's needs. Families are under extreme financial stress and how they afford to transport their children to school, should not be an added pressure. I therefore ask the Cabinet Member to enable both schools to be designated by DCC for the purpose of providing school transport or a bus pass for families in Kingskerswell.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

There will be no change in assessing entitlement for school transport to Newton Abbot College and Coombeshead Academy from September 2024. Transport is provided in line with the law, Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance and the Devon County Council's (DCC) Education Transport policy.

Any change to the policy, including how transport entitlement to secondary schools in Newton Abbot is assessed, must follow the democratic process, and be approved by Cabinet. Education Transport Policy for the academic years 2023/24, 2024/25 and 2025/26 were agreed at Cabinet on 8 March 2023.

[Education Travel Policy – Education and Families \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/education-travel-policy)

**2. Question from Jenny Dingsdale (IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Race Equality Audit**

At the Teignbridge executive meeting on 7th May, Cllr Martin Wrigley told me that:

"I will point out to you that Devon County Council, last year, had an internal report that was done that found it was carrying out practices that were discriminatory, even in this day and age. It has been working hard with minorities and groups of all types to actually ensure that DEI is in place within DCC. Now, you would have thought that DCC, Conservative run, would be impeccable but clearly even they are subject to learning about diversity and inclusion."

If this report can be provided, I would appreciate it if you could forward it to me. I would like to ask, specifically which 'groups of all types' are being consulted about this and how much council funding have they each received?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR MCINNES (IN CLLR CROADS ABSENCE)

The Covid19 pandemic and the UK Black Lives Matter movement both highlighted that the pace of change to achieve racial equality has been too slow and there is still disparity in the services received by people depending on their ethnicity. The County Council recognised that systemic and institutional racism was something that could exist in any organisation and conducted a Race Equality Audit, published in January 2022, to deepen its own knowledge and understand the nature and impact of structural racism within the organisation so that it may be addressed.

The report was published at [Race Equality Audit 2021 - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/Equality-Diversity-and-Inclusion)

We have a number of staff diversity networks (incl. race, disability, LGBT+, neurodiversity and menopause) as well as our Equality Reference Group, whose members are drawn from the Voluntary and Community Sector and include Plymouth and Devon Racial Equality Council. We have worked closely with the Race Equality Staff Network on our race equality work. Staff networks and the Equality Reference Group were invited to an event in July 2023 to identify challenges, opportunities and priorities for a new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. The Equality Reference Group members received £4,500 per organisation in 2023/2024 under a contractual arrangement. [Equality Reference Group - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion \(devon.gov.uk\)](https://www.devon.gov.uk/Equality-Reference-Group)

Corporate Infrastructure and Regulatory Services Scrutiny Committee receive progress reports on a six-monthly basis. Our [last report](#) was presented to the committee on 16 November 2023. Our next report is being presented on 27 June which will include our plans for 2024 and beyond.

**3. Question from Gillian Blick (IN ATTENDANCE)
Re: Statutory RSE Guidance and Gender Ideology**

The new draft statutory government 'Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) guidance states gender ideology should not be taught in schools, and says "...it risks leading pupils who do not comply with sex stereotypes to question their gender when they might not have done so otherwise."

The Cass Review shows that children in this category have received extremely poor care and a total lack of appropriate safeguarding, with the high referral rate in Devon being particularly concerning.

What steps will the council now take to address this harmful ideology of gender identity, particularly in education and children's services?

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR LEADBETTER

The Department for Education review of Relationships, Sex and Health Education statutory guidance is still subject to consultation which closes on 11 July 2024. We will of course carefully consider the outcomes of the consultation and act appropriately to any future change to legislation or guidance.

I should add that if there are concerns around harmful ideology in schools, this should be reported by staff in schools through their own policy requirements to the Designated Safeguarding lead or through whistleblowing procedures. Our Education Safeguarding Team do not hold a record of any reports that have required action around the teaching of gender ideology.