

Dear Anne,

Thank you for your further correspondence following the meeting of Tattenhall and District Parish Council on 7 September and for setting out the concerns raised by parents regarding travel arrangements to Bishop Heber High School.

We do recognise that the transition to secondary school is an important time for children and their families, and I appreciate the concerns being expressed where families may have expected their child to receive Council-funded travel assistance. I hope it is helpful to clarify the Council's position and respond to the matters you have raised.

Catchment areas and transport eligibility

There is an important distinction between a school's catchment area for admission purposes and the assessment of eligibility for Council-funded home-to-school travel assistance. We publish information about school catchment areas to assist families when considering school admissions applications. However, living within a school's catchment area does not in itself create an entitlement to free home-to-school travel assistance. Transport eligibility is determined separately to school admissions, in accordance with the statutory framework, national guidance and the Council's Home to School Travel Assistance Policy.

For children of compulsory school age, one of the principal statutory tests relates to attendance at the nearest qualifying school and the relevant statutory walking distance. There are also other grounds on which a child may qualify for assistance, including special educational needs, disabilities or mobility difficulties, and the extended rights provisions for eligible low-income families.

A child may live within a school's catchment area, attend a feeder primary school and then be admitted to a school, without that school being their nearest suitable school for the purposes of determining transport eligibility.

Choice and information provided to parents

I acknowledge the point being made about parents needing sufficient information to make informed school preferences. Admissions and home-to-school travel assistance are separate processes, governed by separate legislation and guidance. The offer of a school place does not determine, or guarantee, eligibility for Council-funded travel assistance to that school.

Section one of the School Admissions Booklet addresses travel assistance and parents are strongly encouraged to consider the practical arrangements for getting their child to school, including any potential transport costs, when deciding which schools to include as preferences. Where a parent chooses a school which is not their child's nearest qualifying school, responsibility for travel arrangements rest with the parent unless another statutory entitlement applies.

I note the concern that parents did not have access to the Council's detailed GIS distance assessment before submitting their preferences and the suggestion that different choices may have been made had that information been available. While I recognise that concern, I do not agree that the circumstances described establish that the Council has acted contrary to statutory guidance. The precise assessment of transport entitlement takes place in accordance with the applicable eligibility criteria and the circumstances relevant to the individual child. Again, section one of the school admissions booklet recommends parents to contact the School Transport Team to find out which school is their nearest for travel assistance purposes before submitting their application for a school place.

The Parish Council's comments about the clarity and accessibility of information for parents are noted, and we are working on a parent portal solution which will make this clearer without the need to contact the School Transport Team. Until that portal is ready the School Transport Team can still advise on this matter.

Different outcomes for siblings

I understand why families may perceive it as inconsistent where an older sibling has received free transport but a younger sibling, living at the same address and attending the same school, subsequently does not (and vice versa). Eligibility cannot automatically be carried forward from one sibling to another. Each child's entitlement must be assessed according to the legislation, statutory guidance, Council policy and circumstances relevant to that child at that point in time.

Those circumstances can change between academic years, including the availability of places at nearer qualifying schools which affects eligibility. It is therefore possible for siblings from the same address to receive different transport eligibility decisions without those decisions being inconsistent with Policy or legislation.

The nearest suitable school and Bishop Heber

I note the statement that information subsequently provided to families indicates that Bishop Heber is the fourth nearest qualifying school for many Tattenhall addresses. The School Transport Team would have clarified this had they been contacted as recommended in the School Admissions Booklet.

Rurality and public transport

I recognise the Parish Council's wider concern about the particular challenges faced by families living in rural communities where public transport options are more limited. However, the availability or convenience of public transport does not, on its own, determine statutory home-to-school travel eligibility. The Council must assess eligibility against the statutory criteria and its published policy and do so consistently for families across Cheshire West and Chester.

For families who are not eligible for Council-funded school travel assistance, responsibility for making suitable arrangements for their child's journey to and from

school remains with the parent or carer. This does not mean that concerns about the operation, capacity or reliability of public transport should be disregarded, and the specific operational issues raised about the service have been referred to the appropriate colleagues in the Transport Commissioning Team.

Public transport capacity and standing passengers

Thank you for the reports that pupils travelling to Bishop Heber have experienced difficulties with the public bus service, including the reported number of standing passengers and the report that the bus did not stop at Milton Green. These operational concerns have been passed to the appropriate colleagues in the Transport Commissioning Team so that they can be considered with the relevant transport operator.

Spare seats on Council-contracted transport

I also note the concern raised that there were reportedly 15 vacant seats on a Council-contracted school vehicle at a time when other pupils were experiencing difficulties using the public bus service. The existence of vacant seats on a contracted school vehicle does not create a statutory entitlement to free home-to-school travel assistance for pupils who have been assessed as ineligible.

Council contracts must first meet the requirements of pupils who have a statutory entitlement to travel assistance. Any arrangements concerning spare capacity must then be considered separately and in accordance with the Council's policy, operational requirements, contractual arrangements and the need to ensure that places remain available for eligible pupils.

Request for a meeting

I appreciate the Parish Council's request that Council officers attend a meeting to which parents can be invited. Having considered the request, I must respectfully decline the invitation.

The concerns raised encompass a number of distinct matters, including individual decisions about statutory home-to-school travel assistance eligibility, school admissions, the operation of the public transport network and the availability of spare capacity on Council contracts.

Individual home-to-school travel assistance decisions are made by applying the relevant legislation, statutory guidance and Council policy to the circumstances of each child. Where a parent disagrees with a decision, the appropriate route is the Council's established review and appeal process, which provides a formal mechanism for the evidence and individual circumstances of that case to be considered. A public meeting would not be an appropriate alternative to that process, nor would it be appropriate to discuss individual children's circumstances or personal information in such a forum.

Attendance at a public meeting could unintentionally create an expectation that individual eligibility decisions, or the Council's application of its published policy, could be reconsidered collectively. That would not be the case, and it is important that all applications, reviews and appeals continue to be considered fairly and consistently through the appropriate processes.

Please continue to advise parents who believe that their child's travel assistance eligibility has been incorrectly assessed to continue to use the Council's published review and appeal arrangements. This ensures that each family's individual circumstances, and any supporting evidence, can be properly considered through the established process.

I hope this response provides clarity on the matters raised.

Kind regards

Carolyn Davis (She/Her)

Senior Manager, Education Infrastructure

Cheshire West and Chester Council

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From: clerk@tattenhallpc.co.uk <clerk@tattenhallpc.co.uk>

Sent: 11 September 2026 14:40

To: DAVIS, Carolyn <Carolyn.Davis@cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk>

Subject: RE: School Transport Letter

Importance: High

CAUTION: This email originated from outside of the organisation. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognise the sender and know the content is safe.

Dear Carolyn,

Tattenhall Parish Council has requested that I write to you again following our Parish Council meeting on Monday 7th September where a large number of residents raised the on-going issue of school transport to the Bishop Heber High School in Malpas.

The Tattenhall & District Parish Council requests you or your colleagues attend a meeting to which parents can be invited to help resolve this issue which is impacting the year 7 students and their families who should be settling into and enjoying their new school.

The following matters were raised at the meeting and by email.

Catchment Area

Residents were advised by CW&C Cllr Mike Jones that people did not live in catchment areas however the CW&C website leads resident to a map to identify their catchment area

<https://www.cheshirewestandchester.gov.uk/residents/education-and-learning/school-admissions/catchment-areas>

Choice

The booklet provided by CW&C about applying for secondary school places talks about making an 'informed decision' yet it is clear parents have not been provided with the information required to do this.

The admissions process and the transport eligibility process are not operating in a way that allows parents to make a genuinely informed choice.

Inconsistency

A policy which permits a child free school transport one year but not their sibling the following year from the same address is inconsistent and lacks the clarity to allow parents to make an informed decisions.

Lack of Information

At the point of applying for secondary school places, parents were not provided with the Council's internal GIS distance data. Information subsequently shared and indicates that Bishop Heber High School is ranked as the fourth nearest qualifying school for most Tattenhall addresses.

Had this information been available during the admissions process:

- Bishop Heber would have been recognised as a high-risk preference for transport eligibility.
- Many families would not have used one of their three school preferences on Bishop Heber.
- Parents would have made significantly different application decisions.

This information was clearly material to parental decision-making yet was unavailable, contrary to the principles set out in Sections 44 and 124 of the Home to School Travel and Transport Statutory Guidance.

Disproportionate impact on rural families

The impact on Tattenhall families is particularly severe because of the limited public transport available. There is effectively one bus capable of getting pupils to Bishop Heber before the start of the school day, assuming there is capacity.

This use of public transport creates significant safeguarding and welfare concerns.

Public Transport Capacity

It has become clear that the only public bus which can be used by pupils to reach the Heber is at capacity.

It was reported that approximately 20+ pupils travelling to school on Monday 7th April were forced stand while the bus travelled along the A41. Not all children were issued tickets which raises the question if there were more people standing on the bus than is permitted.

Given the nature and speed of traffic on the A41 from Tattenhall to Malpas it is highly dangerous to have passengers standing on the bus. Standing for the duration of a busy public bus journey is clearly not an appropriate or safe transport arrangement for 11-year-old children or older ones.

In addition, the bus did not stop at Milton Green leaving pupils to make their own way to school.

While the free school bus had 15 seats free.

Ann Wright

Clerk to Tattenhall & District Parish Council

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I work 15 hours a week. My normal working days will vary however every attempt will be made to respond to Emails and telephone messages as soon as possible.

