

Dear Councillor Smail

Many thanks for your response - unbelievably and frustratingly, the only one from amongst all elected representatives or paid employees previously contacted. Typical of the experience parents have had of a wall of silence.

I'm glad that you agree that a rethink and a compromise on cuts to DHS bus services are necessary.

I have just returned from a meeting of over 50 constituents - parents and young people who are deeply unhappy, not only with the withdrawal of this service but also the negligent way that this process has been managed by the council.

As Provost, as you have the remit to ask for this to be discussed at the June Council meeting as a matter of priority. We ask that this decision be paused so that meaningful and previously stated investigation and consultation can actually be undertaken.

When these cuts were suggested, they were not backed by adequate information enabling councillors to make good decisions on the safety of our young people. Please allow time for this information to be gathered, considered, made available and consulted.

Currently none of the points that I have raised have had any response from the council. Additionally;

- Parents have different information to one another and have been sent multiple versions of maps.
- Although Cllr Hackett advised the meeting tonight that "there is no such thing as a safe route to school, only safer routes", your policy document of December 2018 states otherwise (please see excerpt below and full doc attached.) While the distance has been revised upwards, the definition remains the same.

1.4 Home to School Transport

A pupil may receive free transport if they attend their catchment school and their home address is more than two miles from the school based on the shortest safe walking distance.

Some parents have measured the distance and believe that young people may be forced to walk for over 3 miles to find a safe route, especially as Eskbank Toll is clearly not a "safe" or "safer" route to school. The council has created such ambiguity that this is impossible to ascertain from maps provided and no-one in the council will respond with this information.

It is obvious, according to Cllr Hackett that Safer Routes to School were not consulted. (No traffic studies have been undertaken on the route recommended by the map MLC have sent to parents.)

Lack of information and uncertainty about whether the council's measure of 'as the crow flies' is compliant with the Education (Scotland) Act. Section 51 and 42. Scot Gov states that the council will advise on these. This has also been omitted by the council.

- Cllr Hackett mentioned that this is based on a consideration of a half mile distance and what an adult can navigate?
- There seems to be no equity between schools and pupils in Midlothian (several schools still have pupils bussed in from shorter distances), some local children living only 300m apart are differently provisioned simply by which bus picks them up (some routes being unaffected while others withdrawn) and it seems that St David's HS which shares the same campus, remains unaffected? Again, no information has been provided.

- If it is the case that some routes remain unaffected and buses literally drive past the affected children, why not simply hire bigger buses (a charge could be made for the service?) When the council plainly needs to generate revenue, surely this would help mitigate a dangerous situation and also generate income. Parents (who can afford it - further inequity) will be paying for a lesser service from Lothian Buses (if indeed this is available.)
- I have been told that what little information that there was has now been altered as various information and policy documents have been removed from the council's website. Again, this is the complete opposite of the council's stated consultation with parents. Again at best this creates further mistrust.

All of this is indicative of the way that departments have worked in isolation from each other, contradicted each other and have passed parents between them, resulting in parents being unable to get answers or information from anyone (including those who have authored council communications.)

This is totally unacceptable as I'm sure you'll agree.

We believe that this negligence is something that Council Director, Grace Vickers should be addressing and holding departmental directors accountable for.

With so much uncertainty about basics such as lighting, drainage, gritting and even distance of these recommended routes, we urgently request that the council pauses to address and indeed answer parental concerns, to address safety issues, research revenue generation, consult with Lothian Buses re appropriate services and find compromises.

We request that this is debated as a matter of urgency at your June meeting.

I understand from Cllr Hackett that due to the necessary timescales for this to be added to the agenda this must be called today, so I look forward to your earliest attention to this.

I also look forward to hearing from you at your earliest convenience.

Best wishes

Caroline Pearson

Chair, Dalkeith High School Parent Council