

Children and Young People Committee - 14 September 2021

Item 4: Petitions and Public Questions

This petition relates to Item 8: Home to School Transport. The petition was originally submitted in February 2020 as proposals relating to home to school transport were due to be considered by the Children and Young People Committee in April 2020. Consideration of this issue was subsequently postponed due to Covid-19.

Text of the petition titled ' Please keep the after school transport for Cambridgeshire children with additional needs' containing 1889 signatures

It has been recently reported that Special school transport services could be axed due to Cambridgeshire County Council funding issues. This is terrible news and another blow to children and families here in our local community . I meet these families on a daily basis in my work, at the hospital, out in the community and visiting them in schools .

As a local Councillor and as an advocate fighting for the very best public services for all children I have been approached by many families who fear that a cut in current service provision to after school transport will have a detrimental effect on their children's already limited opportunities to socialise, play and develop as children.

The reasons why we need to keep this important transport service are best explained by the words of a mum, Nadia, who is worried how her daughter Chloe will be affected

"I am a parent of a non-verbal, disabled child with complex health needs that attends, enjoys and is cared for at after school club. I am thoroughly dismayed to learn that Cambridgeshire County Council are considering making cuts to the transport to these invaluable services that benefit the most vulnerable children in our communities. While attempting to justify the proposed cuts, CCC states that it is unfair that those with additional needs attending mainstream school do not receive after school transport. I believe that it is important to consider that if a child can cope and thrive in a busy mainstream school then it is quite possible, they are able to attend and enjoy mainstream activities/social opportunities in mainstream society.

Our children cannot.

After School Clubs are often the only opportunity that our children get to spend time with friends and peers outside of the structured, task and target orientated school day. After School Clubs provide a safe, familiar and accessible place for our children to simply hang out with their peers with staff that are familiar, skilled and trained in their needs. Most importantly they get to do this without their parents or carers. Visiting friends in

their homes is often not possible due to wheelchair access. Accessing leisure centres, play areas is often not possible because of anxieties and sensory issues. Our children do not get the opportunity to play at the park, meet at the pitch, play for their team on a Saturday morning, go to ballet class or have sleepovers.

At Samuel Pepys, St. Neots, after school club attendance is limited to one afternoon a week for most, further increasing the value of this club to our children.

Removing or charging for the transport will make attendance at afterschool clubs difficult or impossible for many families. This will then further reduce the already incredibly limited opportunities our children receive for social opportunities and increasing their independence.

We all know how fleeting childhood is and how important friendships are.

Children with disabilities needs are assessed and awarded Direct Payments to help them access social opportunities/activities in their communities and provide families with respite from their caring responsibilities. Unfortunately, large proportions of these personal budgets go unused and are claimed back by Cambridgeshire County Council each year. The main reasons for this are the difficulties in finding appropriate, experienced and trained carers to attend to our children's needs. So, essentially their assessed needs of having social opportunities/activities continue to be unmet. While Social Care has been proactive in trying to solve these issues by further spending on private companies (Perfect PA, Care.com) to assist families in finding support, the current availability of social carers continues in its national crisis.

To further limit opportunities for children and families by removing or pricing transport from the current cost effective, valuable service that is accessible, familiar and safe for our children seems incredibly cruel and very short sighted. "

Thank you for taking the time to read to the end of this explanation as to why a petition is now necessary.

There is a process of consultation already underway . The Cambridgeshire County Council children and young people committee is scheduled to take the final decision in April. We want to present this petition and speak at that meeting to convince the committee that the continuation of this invaluable transport service is in the best interests of these children and families and for the community as a whole

Thank you for your support

Chloe and Nadia

and

Cllr Dr Nik Johnson