

Cyngor Bwrdeistref Sirol Pen-y-bont ar Ogwr Bridgend County Borough Council



Swyddfeydd Dinesig, Stryd yr Angel, Pen-y-bont, CF31 4WB / Civic Offices, Angel Street, Bridgend, CF31 4WB

GYFRINACHOL – I'W HAGOR GAN
CYREIRIWDYD ATO UN UNIG / CONFIDENTIAL
TO BE OPENED BY ADDRESSEE ONLY

Lee Waters MS
Deputy Minister for Climate Change
Welsh Government

Correspondence.lee.waters@gov.wales

cc. Jeremy Miles MS – Minister for
Education and Welsh Language

Cadeirydd Pwyllgor Trosolwg a Chraffu
Corfforaethol / Chair of Corporate Overview and
Scrutiny Committee
Deialu uniongyrchol / Direct line: (01656) 643515
Gofynnwch am / Ask for: Scrutiny

Ein cyf / Our ref: AW / ML
Eich cyf / Your ref:

Dyddiad / Date: 14 November 2023

Dear Minister

Publication of the Welsh Government Review into Home to School Transport

I am writing to formally put on record the concerns of our Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee which met on 23 October 2023 to consider the Budget Monitoring 2023-24 – Quarter 2 Revenue Forecast.

During discussions, the Committee was concerned to note that the Report highlighted a projected overspend of £1.158 million on the Council's Home to School Transport (HtST) budget.

The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 (whose primary remit is Education matters), which I also Chair, have regularly reviewed the Council's increasingly overspent HtST budget which both Committees are advised is due to higher costs associated with unfavourable market conditions and the aftermath of the pandemic, resulting in a shortage of drivers and escorts and increased fuel costs internationally.

However, as you may be aware, Bridgend provides HtST well above the statutory minimum and, like most Councils, faces an incredibly challenging MTFs and budget setting process in coming months where cuts to budgets and services are increasingly likely in order to achieve a balanced budget.

Notwithstanding the potential impact on learners and their families, in an effort to identify areas of savings, the Committees often enquire about the possibility of reducing the Council's generous HtST and have been advised for a number of years that the Council is awaiting the publication of the Welsh Government review into HtST.

As there is a need for public consultation before any potential changes can be implemented, the earliest that they could take effect is the following academic year. Until the outcome of the review is available,

Ffôn/Tel: 01656 643643

Facs/Fax: 01656 668126

Ebost/Email: talktous@bridgend.gov.uk

Negeseuon SMS/ SMS Messaging: 07581 157014

[Twitter@bridgendCBC](https://twitter.com/bridgendCBC)

Gwefan/Website: www.bridgend.gov.uk

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there is an understandable reluctance to roll back the Council's HtST offer to make changes that may cause distress and disruption to learners, only for the need to consult and make further changes to the level of service. Any possible savings cannot, therefore, be achieved for two years, at the earliest, and currently remain dependent on the outcome of the outstanding review.

I have been asked as Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee to express the Committee's concerns to you as the Welsh Government Minister for Climate Change. Members have become progressively frustrated at the delay in the publication of the review which is now impacting on Council's ability to consider difficult but necessary options regarding the Education and Schools budget and the Council's budget position as a whole and the Committee requests that a clear timescale be provided regarding the publication of the outcome of the review as soon as possible please.

I look forward to hearing from you please.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Alexander Williams". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Y Cyng / Councillor Alex Williams

Cadeirydd Pwyllgor Trosolwg a Chraffu Corfforaethol / Chair of Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee