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Ms Theresa Grant
Chief Executive
Northamptonshire County Council
1 Angel Square
Northampton

4.10.2019

Dear Ms Grant,

I am writing about the decision by Northamptonshire County Council to introduce changes to the transport services for children with special educational needs and disabilities. Instead of being collected and dropped off at home, they will in future be obliged to walk up to a mile to a pick up point to meet their school transport.

The changes are said to be an initiative by the Council to be applied to children of all ages with special educational needs and disabilities.

Please could you let me have more information about this initiative. It's a major change in policy applying to children with special needs and disabilities now and in the future. It will have a profound impact on the children and also their families. Where was it agreed, when and by whom? What expert advice was sought?

What consultation took place before the decision was taken and with whom? The parents are key stakeholders, yet they were only informed by a note in their children's bookbags and were told, not consulted, about the changes.

What testing of the policy has been undertaken? I understand that some children at Corby Business Academy have started walking from home to pick up points. These were, I understand, children in the Specialist Unit at the Academy and a limited number of them are now walking to pick-up points. What assessment has been made of their experience, and how has this influenced the decision to roll out the policy in Northampton and countywide? Why is it thought that the experience of children in a specialist unit within a larger Academy provides a model for a specialist school such as Northgae?

What were the criteria for selecting Northgate for this trial?

Normally children would be provided with some training before starting to walk to pick up points to meet their school transport. What support, either financial or organisational, is being provided by the Council for traffic training, or what steps is the Council taking to ensure that children have had traffic training before being required to walk to pick up points. The implementation date is just a month away – what steps will the council be taking to ensure that the children have received traffic training before then?

Although the day earmarked for implementation, November 4th, is just a month away, the parents have still not been told where the pick u/drop off points will be. So they are unable to prepare their children for what will be a major change in their lives. When is it proposed to tell them where the pick up/drop off points are? Please can you let me know what consideration the Council has given to the fact that November 4th is after the clocks go back so the children will find themselves walking home from the drop off points – a new and challenging activity – in the dark?

Any major policy change such as this should have been the subject of public consultation, with full information set out so that people, especially parents of the children affected, could make an informed response. Yet just a month away from the implementation date, parents still don't know crucial details of the proposals, such as the pick up points, whether their children will be able to be exempted from the scheme and what any appeal process against the new arrangements would be, and how they will be able to get their other children to school if they have to walk one or more to a pick up point. It also seems that the parents of some children who face especially substantial challenges have been told that they will have to walk to pick-up points. This has caused real distress.

Please can the County Council defer the implementation date of November 4th, as this is impractically short notice to give of such a profound change. Please can the County Council publish full information about the new policy, including the financial implications and impact assessments, and undertake a full consultation on the proposals with stakeholders and the wider public before any implementation takes place.

I look forward to an early response to this letter, given the very short timescale involved.

Yours sincerely,



SALLY KEEBLE

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