

## **Extract from the Minutes of the Cabinet for 29 September 2009**

### **242/09 RIDE PEGASUS' PILOT SCHOOL BUS SERVICE (Item 10)**

Comments from the Transportation Select Committee, held on 21 September 2009 were tabled at the meeting. (Appendix 2)

Two local Members and two representatives from the affected schools were invited to address the Cabinet.

Mr Keith Taylor, local Member for Shere, acknowledged the severe financial pressure that the County Council was under but expressed his concern about the withdrawal of the Pegasus pilot school bus service. He said that 3 of the schools in his Division were involved in the pilot and that he had received many emails about its withdrawal. He was also concerned about the lack of consultation and appealed to the Cabinet to consider matchfunding as an option to consider. He also considered that some parents would be willing to pay increased fares and that schools and parents should have had a reasonable opportunity to discuss the options before a decision was made.

Mr Rooth, local Member for Shalford, said that many parents in his division would be affected by the withdrawal of the Pegasus bus service and suggested that the service could be changed or cut to morning only but not axed. He considered that it would be possible to increase the fares and also make it a driver only service to reduce costs. He also said that options should be considered for using the buses outside school run times.

Mr Evans, Headteacher at Tillingbourne School said that he supported option (4) – to continue the pilot until July 2013 and conduct a review of the scheme. He cited 3 key areas of concern; (i) lack of consultation, (ii) a need for accurate data and, (iii) implications for the local community.

He was concerned that schools had only become aware of the withdrawal of the pilot when the report was published on 18 September 2009 and that there had been no time for written submissions. He considered that the data underpinning the report was incomplete. Also, 60% of his school used this service so its withdrawal would have an adverse effect on traffic congestion in the area. Finally, he considered that Pegasus supported the local community and more time was required to reflect on the best way forward.

Mrs McLaren, Chair of Governors at the Raleigh School said that 'Ride Pegasus' was used at her school and there was a waiting list for places. She considered that the scheme supported the working parent. She also referred to the Executive's decision (December 2008) when it was agreed to extend the existing contract and said that she had only been made aware of the changes 11 days ago. Affected parents only received a letter from the County Council on 26 September.

She had started a petition and collected 1500 signatures but would be unable to present it due to 14 days notice being required for presentation of petitions to Cabinet. (Note: the Chairman accepted the petition)

She said that she would like the opportunity to discuss other options for saving school transport costs such as SEN transport and taxis provided for

school transport. She was also concerned about job losses and their impact plus the effect on working parents.

Finally, she considered that the hasty decision to terminate Pegasus was being made without proper consideration of the impact on the community.

The Chairman reiterated the considerable funding shortfall facing the County Council over the next few years.

The Cabinet Member for Transport said that this report should be taken in conjunction with the report on the review of local bus services in Surrey. He explained that the Pegasus pilot was a heavily subsidised service and that there were 4 options before the Cabinet today. He also made reference to the Pegasus report being considered by the Transportation Select Committee. Finally, he said that, in the light of the current climate, regrettably, he would be recommending that the Cabinet agree to option 1 – termination of the scheme in July 2010. He also gave an undertaking that the School Transport Service would work closely with the affected schools to mitigate the situation as far as possible.

The Head of Transport for Surrey confirmed that transport would still be provided for all children who are statutorily entitled to free transport.

The Deputy Leader reminded Members that when the pilot scheme was first mooted, it was hoped that Government funding would have been provided for it, this did not materialise and regrettably the scheme, which benefits only 1% of the schoolchildren in Surrey, is too costly to continue.

The Head of Transport for Surrey responded to the Headteacher's queries on the data by stating that the study took place in 2008 and therefore current data would be different. Also, whilst Pegasus did reduce congestion, the reduction in the number of cars was very small and finally, he said that increasing fares would help but this action would not be sustainable in the long term.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Learning said that the Pegasus pilot was a terrific scheme, which he would have liked to see rolled out across Surrey to all 303 primary schools. (the pilot serves 14 schools) However, as it is a discretionary service, with no Government grant and the County Council cannot afford to provide this service for all schools, regrettably he considered that the pilot scheme cannot continue.

The Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care said that the Authority did not have sufficient funding to meet its requirements and that the County Council had to meet its statutory requirements first.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Families recognised the value of the scheme for parents and schools. However, it was a service for a small number of people and she considered that the time had come to look outwards at other initiatives and mentioned a specific scheme in Runnymede.

**RESOLVED:**

- (1) That the four options for contract termination presented in the report be considered.
- (2) That Option 1, termination of the contract in July 2010, at the end of the current school year be approved for implementation.

**Reasons for decisions:**

While recognising the benefits and achievements of Ride Pegasus, to end the pilot scheme and terminate the contract in a way that makes best use of the County Council's resources.