



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Bexley Tories blame parents for SEN transport debacle

Bexley's Labour councillors have reacted with dismay after the Tory councillor responsible for education blamed the parents of SEN children for the transport debacle which occurred at the beginning of the school term, during the Full Council meeting on 7th November.

Over the last two months, council officers have apologised to parents both at meetings and in writing and outlined lessons that needed to be learnt for next year's process. However, when asked to apologise Cabinet member John Fuller instead said any problems that had occurred were the fault of the parents.

Parents have previously been advised that application forms for SEN travel assistance should have been sent out in May so that all appeals could have been heard by the end of the summer term. This would then have allowed parents who were denied travel assistance to make alternative arrangements to get their children to school.

What in fact happened was that the travel assistance application forms were given to parents at the end of the school term in July, with little or no communication on how the SEN travel assistance policy was going to be implemented, even though the council had decided to be more stringent. Consequently chaos ensued as a number of parents were denied travel assistance for their SEN children and had to go through an appeal process.

The council then went on to make a mess of this process as there was a complete lack of communication between the parents and the council in the first few weeks of term, in some cases advice given to parents wasn't in line with the legal framework, some children were kept on transport for too long having to do pick-ups across the borough and a number of administrative errors occurred.

At the council meeting when challenged, Councillor Fuller refused to apologise for any of the issues that had occurred within his portfolio and went on to blame parents for not reading their post on time. He then attacked a third of parents for not contacting the council until the Friday, at the end of the first week of term.

Councillor Wendy Perfect, Shadow Cabinet Member for Education said following the meeting, "Bexley council clearly messed up. I personally met parents at the Bexley Voice AGM and heard for myself the problems parents of our most vulnerable children were facing. The stress and strains this caused was immense and it was a very difficult time for them. I find it incredible that Councillor Fuller should be blaming parents. It's an indication of the lack of understanding and respect Bexley Tories have for some of our most vulnerable residents and suggests they have not learnt from the issues that occurred."

For further information, please contact Cllr Wendy Perfect.