

From the County Councillor (2nd November):

I confess to being a little confused as to where we have reached on this and potential next actions.

First off let me be clear, I totally support Arlingham Parish Councils efforts to address the issue of nearest vs nearer, and always have been.

Where I am confused is what is the solution. At the last Parish Council meeting I specifically asked if the requirement was for Gloucestershire County Council to change its policy and got the response that it was a National Issue. I have always been concerned that our issue is with Academies not GCC, which I think has been our only point of disagreement. If this is not the case, then let me know.

If this is a National Policy that requires changing, I fully support whatever action the Parish Council agrees on, although my influence is more limited.

Finally on transport, I have tried hard to find a solution to the current issue of Bus connections to Archway, but so far have had no success. Again, if there is a policy change at GCC that you believe is required I would be happy to help.

Arlingham Parish Council's response (3rd November):

The clarification below needs to read in conjunction with the paper sent to yourself and Siobhan attached to my email of 10th October. It's intended to complement that paper by pointing to the areas of focus where action and support from yourself and Siobhan are sought. I hope the following helps. For ease of reference the following uses the same headings as the paper from the Parish Council which I sent to you on 10th October.

The Nearer of Nearest Issue

In my covering email of 10th October, I said 'The nearer/nearest issue is a good case in point as Kirsten Harrison's letter says that such a policy is not permissible under the current national admissions code, whereas Nick Gibb's response suggests it is possible and indicates that some areas have done this.'

Did you share Nick Gibb's seemingly different take on policy with Kirsten? If she read that Nick Gibb is suggesting it is permissible, then it would be interesting to know how she reflected on that.

We are looking to yourself and Siobhan to work together to establish who is correct (Nick Gibb or Kirsten Harrison). If the situation is so nuanced that they can both be considered to be correct, then the Parish Council would greatly appreciate an explanation.

Following on from that:

If Kirsten Harrison is correct and it is not permissible it is interesting to note that Nick Gibb considers it is. Consequentially perhaps we might together be leaning on an open door to bring about national change to ensure it is permissible.

However, if Nick Gibb suggest it correct and it is permissible, then given your welcome confirmation of support the Parish Council would hope that you would consider and propose what role you could play in bringing more equitable policies and practice to Gloucestershire.

First Preference v Equal Preference

On Page 2 of the Parish Council's paper quotes a section from Nick Gibb's letter to Siobhan which concludes with the words '...The County Council may be willing to facilitate discussions between the schools' admission authorities to find a solution for children in Arlingham.'

Later on, that same page the Parish Council reflects that efforts by Siobhan with Rednock have to date been unsuccessful and that may be in part because it is not something openly supported/advocated by the County Council. At the foot of page two the paper sets the question for yourself and Siobhan as to what needs to be done to further Nick Gibb's suggestion.

Cabinet Lead Member Support

In welcoming this support from the Cabinet Lead Member, we asked whether this support indicated that the County Council is ready and willing to lead the engagement with schools that Nick Gibb suggests in his letter as per the paragraph above.

Is there a response from Nick Gibb to the Cabinet Member as yet?

As a supplementary point it would understandably be helpful if we could receive a copy of the Cabinet Lead Member's letter to Nick Gibb and his reply.

Statutory Guidance on Travel to School for Children of Compulsory School Age (June 2023)

Page 4 of the paper asks Siobhan to seek clarification on the intention meaning of paragraph 38.

The query we raise in relation to the interpretation of paragraph is a matter that the views of both yourself and Siobhan would be welcomed; in particular whether you consider the interpretation being applied to be fair and reasonable.

The question raised about the interpretation of paragraph 42 is one directed to yourself as County Councillor. This is where the Parish Council expresses the view that the Statutory Guidance makes clear that expecting parents to list their nearest school as their first preference should not normally be necessary. The Parish Council is unclear as to what is abnormal about Gloucestershire which makes this necessary. That abnormality and consequent necessity must surely have been explicitly set out within the report to elected members when Gloucestershire's policy was adopted. Clarification is sought from you as County Councillor as to what the abnormality is and could you also, please obtain for us a copy of the decision report where this was set out/explained to the decision maker(s)?

My follow up email of 31st October attached a BBC News article about North Northamptonshire's revised policy in relation to Home to School Transport to nearest school with available places. It was forwarded to both yourself and Siobhan FYI, but I am sure the Parish Council would be interested in hearing from you both as to whether or not you consider the North Northamptonshire policy to be fairer than Gloucestershire's?

For your information, the Parish Council have received FOI requests in relation the correspondence referred to. Whilst they are public documents the Parish Council has not made a conscious decision to place them in the public domain, rather this is entirely as a consequence of public interest culminating in a recent FOI request which statute requires us to comply with.