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Councillor Jonathan Hulley
Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning
Surrey County Council
Woodhatch Place
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15 December 2025

Dear Jonathan,

I am writing to raise concerns shared by many of my constituents and local councillors, particularly in Lightwater, about ongoing difficulties with secondary school admissions and the provision of school transport. While these challenges are most acute in Lightwater, parents across areas of Surrey Heath report similar difficulties in securing safe and reliable transport for their children.

Lightwater is a village surrounded by busy arterial roads, including the M3, A322, Maultway (B3015) and Red Road (B311). These roads carry high traffic speeds, meaning that many sections lack safe crossing points, have narrow or missing pavements, and suffer from poor lighting. Under Surrey County Council's three-mile school transport policy, children living within this distance are expected to walk across Lightwater to Collingwood College, including through isolated woodland or alongside sections of the A30. With no practical public transport alternatives, many families feel forced to drive their children to school, disrupting working hours and, in some cases, limiting access to employment.

These concerns are compounded by inconsistencies in how the "nearest school" is defined. The Surrey County Council Education Portal lists Collingwood College as Lightwater's nearest school "as the crow flies", while the Travel and Assessment Team applies a "shortest road route" test that designates Tomlinscote School as closer. Parents who apply to Collingwood in good faith are therefore denied transport, despite Tomlinscote having no dedicated bus service and only a limited concessionary scheme from the village centre. This conflicting approach misleads

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families, penalises those applying to traditional catchment schools or with siblings already attending, and leaves many without a safe or practical transport alternative.

In light of these concerns, I would be grateful if you could respond to the following questions:

1. **Provision for unsafe routes:** What provision exists for children who live marginally below the three-mile threshold, “as the crow flies”, but are expected to walk along hazardous arterial roads or through poorly lit and isolated routes?
2. **Review of methodology:** Will Surrey County Council urgently review its methodology for determining the “nearest school”, to ensure families are not misled by conflicting definitions across different council services?

To better understand these concerns, I walked the route today from the Briars area of Lightwater to Collingwood College. The journey took over 1 hour and 15 minutes and involved fast-moving traffic, poorly lit roads, and muddy, slippery woodland paths, with a total climb of 134 metres. These conditions raise serious doubts about whether the route can reasonably be considered safe, particularly during the dark winter months and given its isolated nature. I would strongly encourage Surrey County Council representatives to walk the route themselves as part of any formal review.

I would be grateful for a response to the points outlined above, to provide clarity for families and improve the safety and wellbeing of pupils in Lightwater and across Surrey Heath.

Thank you for your time and consideration. I look forward to your swift response.

Yours sincerely,

Dr Al Pinkerton MP
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