

AGENDA SUPPLEMENT (1)

Meeting: Children's Services Select Committee
Place: Council Chamber, Bradley Road, Trowbridge
Date: Friday 22 July 2011
Time: 10.30 am

The Agenda for the above meeting was published on Thursday 14 July 2011 and indicated that the report detailed below would follow. This is now available and is attached to this Agenda Supplement.

Please direct any enquiries on this Agenda to Sharon Smith, of Democratic Services, County Hall, Bythesea Road, Trowbridge, direct line (01225) 718378 or email sharonl.smith@wiltshire.gov.uk

Press enquiries to Communications on direct lines (01225)713114/713115.

This Agenda and all the documents referred to within it are available on the Council's website at www.wiltshire.gov.uk

7. **Budget & Performance Monitoring - DCE** (Pages 1 - 14)

A full copy of the budget monitoring report to be considered by Cabinet on 26 July 2011 is attached for the Committee's consideration. Relevant appendices are also attached.

There is no performance report this month.

Where possible, members are asked to forward any specific questions regarding the current DCE budget position to the Senior Scrutiny Officer in advance of the meeting.

11. **Denominational Home to School Transport** (Pages 15 - 32)

A report is attached in relation to discretionary transport provision, including denominational home-to-school transport.

Please note that the report was initially expected to be considered by Cabinet at its next meeting on 26 July but will now be considered on 13 September 2011.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and comment as appropriate.

Wiltshire Council

Children's Services Select Committee

22 July 2011

Cabinet

26 July 2011

Subject: Budget Monitoring

Cabinet Member: Councillor John Brady - Finance, Performance and Risk

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary

Council set the 2011-15 Financial Plan at its meeting in February 2011 and as part of that also set the base budgets and resultant Council Tax for 2011-12. At the time of submitting this report, the quarter end occurred only 2 weeks ago and as such detailed budget monitoring information is still being finalised. As such this report focuses on updating members on progress made in the first quarter (up to 30th June 2011) of the financial year to deliver the savings identified within the Financial Plan reported to Council in February 2011. A further detailed budget monitoring report for the first quarter will be presented to the next Cabinet. At this stage this is felt prudent as the levels of savings required to be delivered in 2011-12 form the largest risk to delivery of the budget overall. Where shifts have occurred in other assumptions arising from the first two months monitoring, such as demand, costs or income, these have also been covered in this report.

The assessment of the delivery of savings has been done using a new risk reporting format that is explained in the report to focus attention on those areas of risk. To date 87.5% (£27m) of savings have or are being delivered on target (and considered green or green/amber), with only 2.1% (£0.652m) being classed as no longer deliverable (Red). This level of non-deliverable savings is not significant and within the tolerable level at this stage identified in the risk assessment reported to Council in February and covered by General Fund reserves that allowed for £3.5m. The red areas of concern and reasons for the changes are set out in the body of the report and officers are working on actions to introduce alternative proposals in order that the budget is delivered by year end so no draw on reserves is needed.

At the same time we estimate there are a number of cost pressures that are unfunded that will need to be assessed further to identify ways to meet these costs, the most significant including:

- £3.1m cost pressure is forecast in Community Services, caused by demand for adult care services;
- £0.3m pressure in looked after children;

- £0.5m estimated shortfall of income from car parks; and
- £0.783m under provision in waste assumptions.

In addition, Members should note that since the original base budget was set the Council has received £2m of additional un-ringfenced grant. This money has not yet been allocated. As such the £3.5m in reserves and un-ringfenced grant could as a matter of last resort meet the total potential under delivery of the 2011-12 budget. The first step however, will be for managers to look at options to potential shortfalls and report back to the September Cabinet on progress.

As part of this review, officers will:

1. Seek alternative savings where overspends / shortfalls in income are identified;
2. Assess departmentally the bottom line for all services to assess if projected underspends could be vired to support overspends;
3. Review the use of the risk based assessment of General Fund reserves to fund Adult Care, as well as £2 million of additional un-ringfenced government grants the Council has received since the budget was set, to balance this year's budget.

Proposals

Members are asked to note the outcome of the first quarter budget monitoring and receive updates as to how officers have taken action to address potential shortfalls in order to balance the budget, or where Financial Regulations require, be in a position to take decisions on proposals for alternative savings at the next Cabinet meeting.

Reason for Proposal

To inform effective decision making and ensure a sound financial control environment.

Michael Hudson
Chief Finance Officer

Wiltshire Council

Children's Services Select Committee
22 July 2011

Cabinet
26 July 2011

Subject: Budget Monitoring

Cabinet Member: Councillor John Brady - Finance, Performance and Risk

Key Decision: No

Purpose of Report

1. To inform members of progress in delivering savings identified in the 2011-15 Financial Plan in relation to the 2011/12 base budgets, and of any significant new cost pressures.

Background

- *Setting the 2011/12 base budget*

2. On 28th February 2011 the Council set its Annual Budget for 2011/12 as part of a medium term Business and Financial Plan for 2011-15. This identified £31.085 million of savings from across all areas of the Authority. In addition, the Council agreed for 2011/12 to utilise £1.0 million from its Collection Fund Reserves as one off contributions to deliver a frozen Council Tax (i.e. 0% change). As these savings are recurring any none delivery will increase the scale of savings required to be found in future years.
3. The full lists of savings were reported to members as part of the setting of the 2011/12 budget and are restated at Appendix 1. This is shown in line with Departmental analysis prior to the corporate restructure for an audit trail to the Finance Plan. The budget report in September will analyse savings out in line with the latest realignment of functions. The amendments have now been made to base budgets and that input to SAP. In line with best practice the Finance Team have completed budget books for each service detailing the movements between their 2010/11 and 2011/12 base budgets for additions and savings.

- **Process for monitoring and reporting the 2011/12 base budget**

4. At the time of submitting this report the detailed forecasts (two weeks after quarter end) for the end of the first quarter are still being finalised. As such this report focuses on the delivery of the Finance Plan savings agreed by Council to as these form the most significant risk to the Council not delivering on its balanced budget and thus contributing to an overspend.
5. To help with the focus on priority areas the budget monitoring format to senior officers and members has been revised to use a 'traffic light' risk assessment process. Therefore, the reporting against savings is broken down as follows:

Risk assessment	Definition
Red	There is a high likelihood that this saving will not be delivered in 2011/12 at all. This could be caused by changes in such factors as legislation, policy or outcomes of further consultations, etc...
Red/Amber	There is a high likelihood that significant levels of the saving will not be delivered in 2011/12. This could be due to factors such as un-foreseen changes in demand or other assumptions, slow progress in implementation, delays due to external factors such as Government policy, etc...
Amber/Green	There is still a high likelihood that all or a significant part of the saving being delivered. This could be due to a small slippage in progress, or a restructure being planned to happen in October is on target to meet the deadline but as yet it has not happened and posts deleted from the system, etc...
Green	All of the savings planned have been delivered and signed off as such by Accountancy in removal from base budgets.

6. The assessment is set out in the following paragraphs and in detail at Appendix A to this report.
7. Accountancy have also been reviewing service outturns for 2010/11 with 2011/12 projections to identify and raise any discrepancies for further review, and in more volatile demand led risk services such as care of the vulnerable (Adults and Children), and car parking Accountancy have been working with Heads of Service to assess the initial costs being incurred in the first quarter to assess this against prior year experiences.

- **Progress in implementing 2011/12 savings**

8. Overall Accountancy have assessed the deliverability of the 2011/12 savings against the risk assessment criteria set out above at paragraph 5 of this report, as follows:

Savings category per Financial Plan	2011/12 Target per the Plan £,000	Green	Amber / Green	Amber / Red	Red
A. Management & standardising our pay	8.378	8.023	0.376	0	0
B. Reduce & make better use of our buildings	0.325	0.120	0	0.205	0
C. Procurement	7.400	1.942	3.638	1.364	0.449
D. Service Efficiencies	13.982	7.283	4.833	1.654	0.212
E. Systems thinking	1.000	0	0.994	0	0.006
Total £	31.084	17.368	9.841	3.223	0.652
Total %	-	56%	31%	10%	2%

9. This shows that significant levels of savings (87%) are on target to be delivered. There are areas though that require further examination and action. The causes and actions for those Amber/Red and Red assessments are set out in more detail below, and by Department at Appendix B:

- **Management and standardising our pay**

10. All of these savings have or are being delivered, with costs of redundancies being absorbed in 2010/11.

- **Reduce and make the best use of our buildings**

11. The business cases for Campus developments are being developed and the extension of this project has extended the timeframe for reporting. This should realise even greater savings as a result, but as yet detailed analysis remains to be completed and the timetable has changed to the autumn for delivery. Although, as Members will be aware, key aspects of the first year programme, most notable County Hall, are ahead of schedule.

- ***Use the best providers through commercial procurement***

12. 75% of savings have been delivered or are on schedule to be delivered in line with the target. As with all contracts there are a number of areas where following negotiations the levels of savings have not been realised due to external factors. In particular, the following have been assessed as Amber/Red or Red:

- Retendering of bus contracts at Salisbury was delayed by a few months but is now progressing and savings are expected.
- There was a double counting of Leisure savings with the service proposals that was identified after the budget was set that has been removed.
- The proposed approach to Adult residential placement has been amended to reflect new legal cases and the current market, and individual negotiations with providers will now need to be resourced. Plans to resource this are just being drawn up.
- A number of the phase 1a proposals have not yielded the original opportunities and are now being replaced by alternatives, but as yet assessments for these replacements are incomplete.

- ***Service efficiencies***

13. This was the largest area of savings for 2011-12. Overall £12m out of a target of £14m (85%) has or is being delivered in line with plans. £2m has been assessed as Amber / Red, the significant areas being:

- £353,000 – accommodation strategy savings are linked to the overall management of residential care and are being reviewed in light of greater number of care placements discussed later in this report.
- £797,000 – Passenger Transport reviews are taking longer than forecast due to the interdependency with the wider transport strategy.
- £150,000 – Tourism plans have slipped following member decisions.

14. A further £212,000 has been assessed as not deliverable, in all cases the level of savings has not reached the assumed level but savings in the areas have been found, so it is the level of savings that has been assessed down.

15. Alternative plans to replace the red savings are being assessed in all cases.

- ***Transform the way we deliver services***

16. The delivery of these savings is progressing in line with plans.

- ***Cost and income assumptions / pressures***

17. Accountancy have continued to carry out monthly monitoring of budgets with a focus on those budgets assessed to be subject to a higher risk of volatility due to factors such as changes in demand or assumptions. This has

identified that there are a few areas where costs have risen quicker than forecast in the first quarter of 2011/12, in particular care of vulnerable adults.

18. The investment built into the base budget for Adult Social Care corrected the base position for last year to fund existing numbers of packages of care and placements as at 31st March 2011. The forecast increase in 2011-12 for increased care needs was assessed by the service as £2m. As Section 151 Officer, in making assumptions for the level of investment for additional growth to be included in the financial plan, I considered the timings of the increase. Normally it is reasonable to assume the increase will be spread across the year and there will also be a reduction in numbers as people leave care. As such, £500,000 was provided for within the General Fund rather than within base budgets. Demand for residential and nursing placements in the early part of the financial year has exceeded that which was assumed for budget setting and the death rate has also reduced. The activity experienced to date has been used to forecast demand for the remainder of the year and it is now forecast that there will be demand for 108 more placements across the year with a potential cost of £3.125m if no action is taken. This amount includes 71 placements already made to date resulting in a £0.972m cost pressure.
19. Officers have already begun discussions with NHS partners to address this in the short term, this includes potentially some element of match funding from NHS partners, and a long term commitment to develop joint planning and ways to address this going forward into 2012-13. It is recommended that proposals to address this are brought back to the next Cabinet.
20. Numbers of Looked After Children (LAC) had increased to 397 at 31st May and have varied as follows since that date. Numbers of children with a Child Protection Plan have also increased:

Children who are:-	04/07/2011	27/06/2011	20/06/2011	13/06/2011	06/06/2011
Looked After	398	400	397	393	392
Child Protection Plan	175	156	159	156	157

21. This level of LAC is higher than budgeted for. The number of children coming in to care because of neglect or emotional abuse is increasing and the number of active court proceedings currently stands at 60, against an average in previous years of 38 at any one time. Currently placement budgets for looked after children are projected to overspend by £0.135

million and the increase in numbers cannot be sustained within the current budget. The increase in court proceedings is also causing pressure of the Department's legal budget as the Council's legal service is unable to meet the current demand and has therefore had to put work out to external solicitors. Pressures on the Leaving Care budget are also significant. The Service will review options to address these pressures and bring further proposals back to the next Cabinet.

22. A review of car parking income has identified that assumed user numbers are currently down overall on previous years in total, although the levels vary across the whole County. Due however to the increase in charges the level of income shortfall is proportionately less than the fall in usage. At this stage it is unclear if user numbers will pick up and this is just an initial reaction to the increase or part of a wider economic position. As such an estimate only has / can be made at this point, that being a shortfall of potentially £0.5m. More detailed modelling is being carried out to assess the forecast position, and further reports will be brought back in September with proposals to address the position.
23. At the point of setting the base budget assumptions around waste contract inflation were removed incorrectly. The total cost pressure is £0.783 million. If this is not absorbed by other savings this cost will need to be funded. The management of this pressure within other areas of the service and Department are currently being explored and will be brought back to the next Cabinet.

- **Additional grant income**

24. Set aside against these the Council has also received further un-ringfenced government grants since it set its budget in February 2011. These include:

Grant description	2011/12 allocation £,000
Transport Grant	300
Local Support Scheme	400
New Homes Bonus (note total £1.8m of which £0.5m assumed in February 2011).	1,300
Early Years Intervention Grant – <i>additional allocation</i>	67
Total	2,067

25. It is proposed that these grants, with the exception of the additional Early Years Intervention grant are not allocated at this stage and the use of this income is considered further at the September Cabinet meeting alongside proposals to address Red and Red/Amber savings.

- **Overall conclusions**

26. The overall assumption is that without further action, the current monitoring of the first quarter for 2011/12, suggests an overspend / shortfall on the balanced budget of £5 million. The early identification of potential issues is part of sound and prudent financial management. The position is similar to last year and members are reminded that positive early action in that instance resulted in a turn around to a £700k underspend at outturn.
27. Action to address this year's forecast should thus be taken where officers have the delegated powers to do so and this has started. Where the Council's Constitution and Financial Regulations require Cabinet approval to changes in the Financial Plan to deliver replacement/additional savings these should be brought back to the next Cabinet.

Implications

28. This report informs member's decision making.

Risks assessment

29. If the Council fails to take actions to address forecast shortfalls, overspends or increases in its costs it will need to draw on its reserves. The level of reserves is limited and a one off resource that cannot thus be used as a long term sustainable strategy for financial stability. Budget monitoring and management, of which this report forms part of the control environment, is a mitigating process to ensure early identification and action is taken. At this stage that is in place.

Equalities and diversity impact of the proposals

30. None have been identified as arising directly from this report.

Financial implications

31. The Chief Finance Officer is the author of this report and the financial implications are discussed in the detail of this report. There are no further matters to add.

Legal Implications

32. None have been identified as arising directly from this report.

Proposals

33. Members are asked to note the outcome of the first quarter budget monitoring and receive updates as to how officers have taken action to address shortfalls in order to balance the budget, or where Financial Regulations require, be in a position to take decisions on proposals for alternative savings at the next Cabinet meeting.

Reasons for proposals

34. To inform effective decision making and ensure a sound financial control environment.

Background Papers and Consultation

2011-15 Business Plan

2011-15 Financial Plan

Contact Name:

Michael Hudson, Chief Finance Officer, ext 713601

Michael.hudson@Wiltshire.gov.uk

Appendices:

Appendix A: Risk assessment of the delivery to date of the 2011-12 saving proposals

Appendix B: Individual Departmental Analysis

APPENDIX A

Risk assessment of the delivery to date of the 2011-12 saving proposals

*1 Note – Risk classification

Red = undeliverable or significant concerns about progress for which new proposals need to be found,

Red/Amber = progress has stalled but action or decisions can be taken to amend or introduce other options to ensure delivery of this amount of savings;

Amber/Green = in progress and is at the position of delivery expected at this point in time, thus still considered deliverable,

Green = delivered and removed from the base budget

	DCE	DCS	DNP	DOR	PH&W	Corporate	Total		
Mgmt									
target	2.249	1.837	1.900	1.901	0.240	0.250	8.377		
green	2.249	1.837	1.922	1.722	0.043	0.250	8.023	96%	
G/A	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.179	0.197	0.000	0.376	4%	
A/R	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0%	
R	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0%	
Total	2.249 0.000	1.837 0.000	1.922 0.022	1.901 0.000	0.240 0.000	0.250 0.000	8.399 0.022	100%	TRUE
Bldgs									
target	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.175	0.000	0.150	0.325		
green	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.120	0.000	0.000	0.120	37%	
G/A	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0%	
A/R	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.055	0.000	0.150	0.205	63%	
R	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0%	
Total	0.000 0.000	0.000 0.000	0.000 0.000	0.175 0.000	0.000 0.000	0.150 0.000	0.325 0.000	100%	TRUE
Proc									
target	1.620	1.760	1.865	1.310	0.000	0.845	7.400		
green	0.789	0.000	0.910	0.243	0.000		1.942	26%	
G/A	0.813	1.244	0.060	1.031	0.000	0.490	3.638	49%	
A/R	0.000	0.444	0.705	0.000	0.000	0.215	1.364	18%	
R	0.046	0.073	0.190		0.000	0.140	0.449	6%	
Total	1.648 0.028	1.761 0.001	1.865 0.000	1.274 -0.036	0.000 0.000	0.845 0.000	7.393 -0.007	100%	TRUE
12 percent									
target	2.032	2.467	5.582	3.329	0.572	0.000	13.982		
green	1.941	1.813	2.137	1.354	0.038	0.000	6.931	52%	
G/A	0.091	0.191	2.244	1.773	0.534	0.000	4.833	35%	
A/R	0.000	0.353	1.099	0.202	0.000	0.000	2.006	12%	
R	0.000	0.110	0.102	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.212	2%	
Total	2.032 0.000	2.467 0.000	5.582 0.000	3.329 0.000	0.572 0.000	0.000 0.000	13.982 0.000	100%	TRUE
ST									
target	0.188	0.806	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.006	1.000		
green	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0%	
G/A	0.188	0.806	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.994	99%	
A/R	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0%	
R	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.006	0.006	1%	
Total	0.188 0.000	0.806 0.000	0.000 0.000	0.000 0.000	0.000 0.000	0.006 0.000	1.000 0.000	100%	TRUE
Total									
target	6.089	6.870	9.347	6.715	0.812	1.251	31.084		
green	4.979	3.650	4.969	3.439	0.081	0.250	17.368	55.9%	
G/A	1.092	2.241	2.304	2.983	0.731	0.490	9.841	31.7%	87.5%
A/R	0.000	0.797	1.804	0.257	0.000	0.365	3.223	10.4%	
R	0.046	0.183	0.277	0.000	0.000	0.146	0.652	2.1%	13.6%
Total	6.117 0.028	6.871 0.001	9.354 0.007	6.679 -0.036	0.812 0.000	1.251 0.000	31.084 0.000	100.0%	100.0%

Service Review Savings 2011/12

Financial Plan Description		Team	Description	Financial Plan Saving 2011-12	*Staff	Other staff costs	Income	Contracts	Other	Forecast 2011-12	RAG
Schools & Learning	School Improvement		Narrowing of Curriculum Support	464,764	464,764					464,764	
			Reduction in School improvement Partners	150,000	150,000					150,000	
	Traded Services		Removal/Reduction in LA subsidy to Braeside	24,000			24,000			24,000	
			Removal/Reduction in LA subsidy to Urchfont	31,000			31,000				
			Removal/Reduction in LA subsidy to Wiltshire Music Service	35,000			35,000			35,000	
			Removal/Reduction in LA subsidy to Wiltshire Swindon Learning Resources	9,000			9,000			9,000	
Total Schools & Learning				713,764	614,764	0	99,000	0	0	682,764	
Social Care & Integrated Youth	Integrated Youth		Information, Advice & Guidance (IAG)	341,400						341,400	
			Savings from Connexions Service	60,664						60,664	
			Service Reductions across Targeted Services	134,647						134,647	
			Removal/Reduction in LA subsidy to Traded Services	37,406			37,406			37,406	
			Reductions in grants allocated to youth projects	216,100					216,100	216,100	
			Service Transformation within the Youth Development Service	0						0	
	Social Care		Business Support	142,692	142,692					142,692	
			Family Support	105,000	105,000					105,000	
			Family Placement Service	71,000	71,000					71,000	
			Out of Area Placements	0				0		0	
Total Social Care & Integrated Youth				1,108,909	318,692	0	37,406	0	216,100	1,108,909	
Commissioning & Performance			Reduce net budget for Contact Point	56,000					56,000	56,000	
			Reduce Children's Trust Board Admin Support	7,000	7,000					7,000	
			Reduction in Teenage Pregnancy Worker	31,000	31,000					31,000	
			Reduce Administration within Co-ordination Team	19,000	19,000					19,000	
			Reduction of staffing within Research & Stats Team	16,000	16,000					16,000	
			Service Reductions within Commissioning & Performance	19,648	19,648					19,648	
			Staff Development Team	60,000	60,000						
Total Commissioning & Performance				208,648	152,648	0	0	0	56,000	148,648	
Grand Total				2,031,321	1,086,104	0	136,406	0	272,100	1,940,321	

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Wiltshire Council

**Cabinet
13 September 2011**

**Children's Services Select Committee
22 July 2011**

Subject: Denominational Home-to-School Transport

Cabinet Member: Councillor Dick Tonge - Highways and Transport

Key Decision: Yes

Executive Summary

As a result of significant budget pressures, the Council has had to review all the services it currently provides. This has included a review of all discretionary transport provision, including denominational home-to-school transport. A letter has been sent to parents and schools informing them of the proposal to withdraw discretionary denominational transport with effect from September 2012 and giving the opportunity to respond. A significant volume of representations have been received, and these are summarised as an appendix to this report. As a result of the representations, two further options have been developed which are presented alongside the initial proposal.

Proposals

From the three options presented, Option 2 is recommended (withdraw discretionary home-to-school transport assistance for children attending a denominational school on grounds of their religion) with effect from September 2012, but with transitional funding of £409 per student made available to the schools for a period of one year only to assist with the costs of transport for students already receiving transport who will be entering year 11 (their final GCSE year) in September 2012.

Reason for Proposal

To achieve savings that will be required to balance the budget, while providing continuity of education for pupils already attending a denominational school who will be entering their final year of GCSE studies in September 2012.

**Mark Boden
Corporate Director, Neighbourhood and Planning**

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet
13 September 2011

Children's Services Select Committee
22 July 2011

Subject: Denominational Home-to-School Transport

Cabinet Member: Councillor Dick Tonge - Highways and Transport

Key Decision: Yes

Purpose of Report

1. To seek approval for a change to the Council's Education Transport Policy in respect of denominational home-to-school transport in order to achieve financial savings.

Background

2. As a result of significant budget pressures, the Council has had to review all the services it currently provides. As far as is possible, it is seeking to make savings from improvements in efficiency and procurement, but these are not enough on their own and it has also been necessary to consider whether it can continue to afford to provide services that are discretionary – i.e. not required by law.
3. Currently, the Council provides subsidised home-to-school transport for children attending a denominational school on grounds of their religion; this is over and above that provided for children not attending a denominational school. This assistance is discretionary and was reviewed in 2006/7, at which time a charge was introduced. Information about the current scheme (number of pupils benefiting, the schools attended, and the cost of the transport) is attached as **Appendix 1**. It can be seen that the current charge to parents only covers a proportion (on average around half) of the cost. The law requires local authorities to provide free home-to-school transport for children attending the nearest denominational secondary school where the child receives free school meals or the parent receives the maximum level of Working Tax Credit for their case, and where the school is at least two miles, and no more than 15 miles, from home. In all three options the Council will continue to provide free transport in these circumstances.
4. A letter was sent on 5 May to all parents receiving denominational transport assistance, to the headteachers of affected schools, and to the Clifton Diocese, explaining the Council's proposals and stating that Cabinet would be asked to approve proposals at its meeting in September. In order to make it clear what channels were available for representations to be made to the Council about the proposals, a further letter was sent to the parents and headteachers on 27 May giving details of the date and venue of the Cabinet

meeting and of the rights to attend that meeting, and explaining how representations could be made.

5. At the Cabinet meeting on 24 May the Leader of the Council emphasised that no decision had been made by Cabinet, and that the decision would be made at their meeting on 13 September.
6. A meeting has also been held between Members of the Cabinet, the Head of St. Augustine's School and a representative of the Clifton Diocese to discuss the proposals.
7. A summary of the representations received, and the issues raised (together with the Council's response to these), is attached as **Appendix 2**.
8. Following consideration of the representations received, and of the financial, environmental, legal and equalities impacts outlined below, three options are now put forward for Cabinet to consider:

Option 1 – implement original proposal (withdraw all discretionary denominational transport assistance with effect from September 2012)

- From September 2012 the Council would cease to provide transport for pupils attending denominational schools on the grounds of denominational preference, except where there is a legal entitlement to free transport (i.e. for low income families in certain circumstances, as described in paragraph 3).
- During 2011/2012 Council officers would seek to support the schools to arrange their own transport, to try and ensure that, as far as possible, transport continues to be available but funded by the users or from other sources rather than by the Council.

Option 2 – withdraw discretionary denominational assistance with effect from September 2012, but with transitional provisions to assist pupils entering the final year of their GCSE course in 2012

- As Option 1, but;
- The Council would provide a fixed amount of funding direct to the schools, to assist them with the costs of providing transport for pupils who are part-way through their exam course when the new policy takes effect. The payment would be for one year only, and would be based on the number of pupils at the school already receiving transport and who would be entering their final year of GCSE studies in September 2012. It is suggested that this would be set at £409 per pupil, which is equivalent to the average overall cost per head of providing the existing transport in 2011/12, less the 2011/12 parental contribution. Transport would have to be arranged by the schools affected.

Option 3 – withdraw discretionary denominational assistance with effect from September 2012, but with transitional provisions to assist all pupils who are already receiving transport

- As Option 1, but;
- The Council would provide a fixed amount of funding direct to the schools, to assist them with the costs of providing transport for all pupils who are already attending the school, each year until they leave. The payment would be made once each year and would be for a fixed amount per pupil, for each child still attending the school who was receiving transport in the 2011/12 academic year. The overall amount paid by the Council would therefore decrease each year as successive year groups leave the school. It is suggested that the amount paid per pupil would be set at £409 per pupil, which is equivalent to the average overall cost per head of providing the existing transport in 2011/12, less the 2011/12 parental contribution. Transport would have to be arranged by the schools affected.

Main Considerations for the Council

9. The Council will need to balance the need for financial savings against the impacts identified elsewhere in this report, and in the representations received from parents and schools (summarised in **Appendix 2**). The main issues to be considered include:
 - Restricting choice – the proposals would make it more difficult for parents, especially those on lower incomes or with more than one child in the family, to send their children to a school of the faith to which they adhere.
 - Financial hardship – the proposals could cause financial hardship for parents who already have children at a denominational school, as the cost of transport would be likely to increase significantly or may not be available at all (although children from the lowest income families would continue to receive free transport). Options 2 and 3 would mitigate the impact of this to some extent.
 - Continuity of education – the proposals could oblige some parents to transfer children currently receiving transport assistance to another school if there is no alternative transport available or they are unable to afford the higher cost. Options 2 and 3 would mitigate the impact of this to some extent.
 - Impact on denominational schools – it is argued in some of the representations received that the proposals would have a detrimental impact on the viability of the denominational schools, and that their ethos would change if fewer adherents to the faith are able to apply and their places are taken by children from other backgrounds. A consideration, raised by the schools and the Diocese, is that the financial contribution to the running of the schools made by the Church benefits the Council by reducing the funding it has to provide, and that the subsidy for transport compensates for this.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

10. Removing the home to school transport subsidy for children at denominational educational establishments would be likely to result in pupils travelling to school using a number of different modes. If this were to happen, there would be a number of potential detrimental environmental impacts, including an increased carbon footprint (as not as many children will be using mass transport), increased volumes of road users and decreased air quality arising from more vehicular movements.
11. The extent of these detrimental impacts would depend on the extent to which alternative transport arrangements were able to be made by the schools, and the nature and cost of these arrangements. The Council has offered to support the schools to make their own transport arrangements (or take over existing contracts) so that this impact is minimised. Options 2 or 3 would also reduce the potential environmental impact to some extent during the transition period. The Council is also able to assist schools in developing a travel plan with targeted objectives and feasible projects that aim to make home to school travel more sustainable.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

12. The equalities impact of the proposals would again depend on the extent to which alternative transport arrangements are able to be made by the schools to replace the current services that are provided under contract to the Council. The Council has offered to support the schools to make their own transport arrangements so that the impacts are minimised, as without these there would, in some areas, be no suitable transport available and parents would have to make their own individual arrangements. If alternative arrangements could be made, the impacts would be lessened, as transport would still be available, but the charging arrangement would have to be made by the school concerned. Options 2 and 3 would again mitigate the impacts to an extent, as described below.
13. The main impacts would be as follows, and would particularly affect the following groups:
 - Adherents to the Roman Catholic faith - although the denominational transport policy applies equally to all faith groups, in the Wiltshire context recipients are all from the Catholic faith.
 - Lower income families – although some children from low income families will continue to receive statutory free transport, families falling just above the qualifying income threshold may suffer financial hardship if they choose to continue attending a denominational school.
 - Families with more than one child attending a denominational school – for whom the costs of transport are multiplied if charged per seat.
 - Families living in areas where it is not possible to arrange alternative transport – this will depend on what alternative arrangements can be

agreed with the schools, but may particularly affect some rural areas where transport is currently expensive to provide (e.g. where taxis are used).

Impact 1 - restriction of ability to choose a school of the faith to which the family adheres

14. This is identified as a major concern in the majority of the representations received. The Council continues to recognise and support faith schools as providers of education. However, it also has to take into account the financial cost to council tax payers in general of providing transport. It is also noted that although the Council supports the right of all parents to send their children to a preferred school for other reasons, (e.g. educational preference) it has a policy that it is not able to provide financial assistance for transport. Although it can be argued that the ability to choose a school that allows a child to grow up with the values of the faith to which the family adheres is not the same as choosing a preferred school on educational grounds, there are others who would argue that it is not fair that some groups receive funding to support their choice of school, while others do not.

Impact 2 – financial hardship

15. This is another of the main concerns raised in the representations received. Transport is expensive to provide – this is why the Council is unable to fund transport for parents who choose to send their child to a more distant school on grounds of parental preference, and is why it is now proposing to withdraw assistance for denominational transport. The average cost to the Council of providing the existing transport is £781 per pupil per year, to which parents currently contribute between £302 and £400, depending on distance and age (2010/11 charges). In some cases (e.g. in some rural areas where taxis are used) the cost to the Council is very much higher – although the charge to parent remains the same. If parents have to pay a higher proportion of the costs, or make their own transport arrangements if the schools are unable to provide transport that meets their needs, then this could be a significant burden for families who are on a relatively low income but are above the threshold for statutory free transport, and particularly those who have more than one child at school. However, this would depend on the charging arrangement made by the school concerned.
16. Option 2 would mitigate the financial impact for pupils who will be in their final GCSE year in 2012/13, and Option 3 would mitigate the impact for all pupils who are already at a denominational school and receiving transport. The extent of the mitigation would depend on how the schools were able to use the transitional funding allocated to them and, in particular, whether they were able to make cost-effective arrangements for (for example) transport from the more isolated rural areas, and what charges they would make to parents.

Impact 3 – continuity of education

17. If the availability of transport is reduced, or the cost to parents increased significantly, it is possible that some parents with children already at a denominational school would be obliged to move them to another school. This would cause disruption to the child's education and be unsettling.

18. Several of the representations received have expressed particular concern about the impact on GCSE students who may have to transfer part-way through their course. Option 2 is proposed as a way of mitigating the impact on this particular group of students (the year group who will be starting their GCSE studies in year 10 in September 2011, and will take their exams in the year beginning September 2012). Option 3 extends this mitigation to all students who are already at a denominational school and receiving transport.
19. In both cases, the extent of the mitigation would again depend on how the schools were able to use the transitional funding allocated to them and, in particular, whether they were able to make cost-effective arrangements for (for example) transport from the more isolated rural areas, and what charges they would make to parents.

Risk Assessment

20. There is a risk that if a large number of children transfer to other schools as a result of the implementation of the proposals, there might not be the capacity to accommodate them in their nearest local school. If this were the case, the Council would be obliged to provide transport to the next nearest suitable school, and this would erode the savings achieved.
21. The Admissions Team have analysed the data for children attending the schools by year group and have concluded that, should denominational transport be withdrawn, there will be places at the pupils' designated local school for any applications made in the normal admissions round, e.g. admission into reception or year 7. However, if parents of pupils already attending denominational schools decide to withdraw their children, and then seek a space at their local designated school, it may not be possible to secure a school place as the year group may already be full. The schools where this has been identified as a potential issue are as follows:
 - St. Laurence Secondary School, Bradford-on-Avon
 - Corsham Secondary School, Corsham
 - Devizes Secondary School, Devizes
 - Lavington Secondary School, Market Lavington
 - Broughton Gifford Primary School, Broughton Gifford
22. The extent to which this will result in extra cost to the Council is hard to assess, as it will depend on the number of children who seek to change school, the number of spare places available in the relevant year group, and whether transport to the next nearest school is already being provided for other children. It has been assumed that most parents will want their children to remain at the current school, and that the schools will be able to make alternative arrangements that will enable most to do this; however, the savings estimates shown below include an allowance for a limited amount of extra transport to alternative schools. The risk would be significantly reduced with Option 3, and this is also taken into account in the financial calculations.

23. It has been assumed that, if the proposals are approved, the denominational schools will be able and willing (with support from Council officers) to make alternative transport arrangements, such that transport will continue to be available for most of those who need it. If this is not the case, the impacts on pupils and their families will be much greater as other existing transport services are not sufficiently extensive, or do not have sufficient capacity to cater for the numbers of children currently travelling in some areas.
24. There is a risk that if a decision on the proposals is deferred, the period of notice given to parents and schools will be insufficient to allow them to make alternative arrangements. It is recognised as 'good practice' (though not a statutory requirement) to give 12 months notice of major changes to transport policy such as this.

Financial Implications

25. The current denominational transport policy, under which the Council provides transport and levies a charge for its use, was introduced in September 2007 and was phased in such that it only applied to new pupils starting at the school. There are still some children (those currently in years 11 and above) who are receiving transport assistance under the pre-2007 policy and do not pay a charge. Under the existing policy there will therefore be additional income (estimated at £30,000) that will accrue to the Council over the next two years (2011/12 and 2012/13).
26. The additional savings from implementing the options outlined in this report, on top of those being achieved under the existing policy, are estimated as follows. All figures are best estimates at the time of writing and are liable to change:

Option 1

2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
£153,000	£159,000	£160,000	£161,000	£162,000	£162,000	£162,000

(Savings achieved from withdrawing transport contracts (net of income from charges), less an estimated cost for continuing to provide free transport to meet statutory requirements; and for providing transport to alternative schools where children transferring cannot be accommodated in their local school; and for the cost of continuing to provide transport for sixth form students who will continue to be entitled to transport assistance under the 'same cost' provisions of the Council's Post 16 Education Transport Policy.)

Option 2

2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
£132,000	£159,000	£160,000	£161,000	£162,000	£162,000	£162,000

(As for Option 1, less an estimated one-off payment to the schools in 2012/13)

Option 3

2012/13	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
£38,000	£69,000	£100,000	£134,000	£158,000	£160,000	£162,000

(As for Option 1, less an estimated payment to the schools each year up to and including 2017/18; 2018/19 would be the first year in which the full savings would be achieved, although the bulk - £158,000 – would be achieved by 2016/17). Also with a reduced estimate for the cost of providing transport to alternative schools, where children transferring cannot be accommodated in their local school)

Legal Framework

27. Section 509AD of the Education Act 1996 places a duty on local authorities in fulfilling their duties and exercising their powers relating to travel, to have regard to, among other things, any wish of a parent for their child to be provided with education or training at a particular school or institution on grounds of their parent's religion or belief. There is, however, no general duty to provide transport.
28. The exception to this is for children of parents on low incomes who attend the nearest suitable school preferred on grounds of religion or belief, where they live more than two miles but not more than 15 miles from that school. These are defined as 'eligible children' by the Education Act 1996, and the authority has a duty to provide free transport in these circumstances. The proposals take this into account.
29. The authority has a duty under the Equalities Act 2010 to consider the equalities impacts of its actions, and to demonstrate that these have been taken into consideration when decisions are made, and that the decision is proportionate with its Public Sector Equality Duties. Religion or belief is defined as a 'protected characteristic' by the Act, which must be taken into consideration. This process has been followed in drawing up the current report, and relevant equalities issues are considered in paragraphs 12-19.
30. DfE guidance states that local authorities "should consult widely on any changes to their local policies and that such consultations should last for at least 28 working days during term time". It is considered that the letter sent to parents and schools on 5 May, and the subsequent letter of 27 May, has provided ample opportunity for those affected to make representations. The issues raised in the representations are reported in **Appendix 2**, and reflected in the body of the report and in the three options that are put forward for Cabinet to consider.
31. The same Guidance also says that "as much notice as is reasonably possible should be given of any changes to support given to parents, so that they can make alternative arrangements". By bringing the report to Cabinet in September 2011, it is intended to give parents and schools adequate notice so that there will be ample time to make new arrangements, both for pupils already at the school and for those who are considering applying to a denominational school to start in September 2012.

32. The Guidance also says that it is good practice that any such changes should be phased in and come into effect as pupils start school. The Council is required to have regard to DfES guidance, but (particularly in the case of suggested “good practice”) can depart from it if there are sound reasons for doing so. Financial considerations are relevant in this context, and are the reason why the option to phase in the proposal was rejected (see paragraph 34 below). However, Option 3 does provide an alternative ‘phased’ option, although still with a major impact on the timescale over which the financial savings would be achieved.

Options Considered

33. The Council’s Business Plan for 2011-15 identifies the need to make significant reductions in spending, and puts forward a strategy for achieving these through reductions in management costs, improved procurement and commissioning, workplace transformation, systems thinking reviews, raising income, and reshaping services to improve efficiency and focus on priorities. The preferred option has been to make savings that will not impact on service users, and transport has played its part in these, with major savings identified or achieved from procurement and efficiencies. However, due to the scale of the reductions in spending needed, it has also been necessary to review all discretionary (i.e. non-statutory) transport and consider all options in respect of these. In addition to the current proposals in respect of denominational transport, savings of £600,000 are being made in 2011/12 from changes to public bus services. It was considered that the other major area of discretionary education transport spending, the Post16 Transport Scheme, that provides assistance for students attending sixth forms and FE colleges, should be retained owing to its importance in providing access to further education for young people.
34. At the stage of considering what changes might be made to achieve savings from denominational transport, the following options were considered in addition to the current proposal:

Option A – increase charges by up to 20%; rejected as the savings achieved would be much lower (less than £20,000).

Option B – increase charges to the point where the service became self-funding (this would require a charge of at least £800 per annum per pupil); rejected as savings are uncertain, and would depend on parental reaction to a significantly increased charge.

Option C – phased withdrawal; the Council would continue to provide transport for pupils already attending the schools as at September 2011, but not for new starters in subsequent years. Rejected as the Council would still have to meet the cost of the transport until numbers had declined to the point where transport contracts could be combined or withdrawn, so the bulk of the savings would not be realised until much later. If there was an ongoing demand for transport at this stage it would also then be necessary to find a way of providing this without Council funding.

35. The current report puts forward three options for Cabinet to consider, as described above. Option 1 is the initial proposal as detailed in the letter to parents and schools; Options 2 and 3 have been developed subsequently to address some of the concerns raised by those who have responded.

Conclusions

36. Taking into account the representations that have been received, and the assessment of impacts above, it is recommended that Option 2 is approved. Option 3 is also put forward for consideration; this would further mitigate some of the impacts of the initial proposal, but would defer the timescale over which the savings would be achieved. This would require compensating savings to be made from elsewhere in the Council.

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The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

Passenger Transport Policy Review (internal report)

Denominational Transport Review Summary (internal working document)

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Current arrangements

Appendix 2 – Summary of responses received

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Current denominational transport policy; background information

Policy

Before September 2007

Primary schools - free transport for pupils living 3-5 miles from school
 - pupils living more than 5 miles from school received a daily allowance of £1.86 towards cost of transport

Secondary schools - free transport for pupils living 3-10 miles from school
 - pupils living more than 10 miles from school received a daily allowance of £2.85 towards cost of transport

From September 2007

- Children already at school - previous policy continues to apply until they change or leave school (so pupils in current years 11, 12 and 13 will continue to receive transport under the old policy until they leave).
 Tighter criteria and procedures introduced for checking that families are regular attenders at church.
- New starters – required to pay a contribution towards the cost of transport. Charges (as at September 2010);

Primary £302 per annum

Secondary £302 - £400 per annum depending on distance

Spare seats sold to non-entitled children (e.g. those not meeting the 'churchgoing' criteria) at a charge of £131 - £267 per 'double term' (i.e. 3 payments in a full year) depending on primary / secondary and distance.

From September 2008

Education & Inspections Act introduced a new entitlement to free transport for children from low income families – where the child receives free school meals, or the parent receives the maximum level of Working Tax Credit for their case – where they are attending their nearest denominational secondary school (for reasons of faith), and the school is at least 2 and no more than 15 miles from home.

Facts and figures

429 students are receiving transport under the policy, plus 27 who are not entitled but purchase spare seats. These attend:

Secondary schools

Trowbridge St Augustines	297 (plus 5 spare seats)
Bath St Gregory's	47 (plus 22 spare seats)
Salisbury St Joseph's	12
Swindon St Joseph's	4
Bath St Marks (C.E.)	2
<i>Total Secondary</i>	389

Primary Schools

Amesbury Christ the King	1
Corsham St Patricks	30
Calne St Edmunds	9
Chippenham St Marys	3
Salisbury St Osmunds	3
Malmesbury St Josephs	3
Wardour nr Tisbury	9
Devizes St Josephs	1
<i>Total Primary</i>	59

Types of transport arrangement used (and numbers of students):

St Augustine's – contracted buses from Melksham area (73) and Warminster area (66). School organised buses from Devizes (150), service bus from Bradford on Avon (15)

St Gregory's – contracted bus from Chippenham, via Corsham (69)

Salisbury St Josephs – service buses from Amesbury (4) and Salisbury (5), rail from Tisbury (2)

Swindon St Josephs – service bus from Calne (1) via Wootton Bassett (3), west Swindon (Wiltshire) (1)

Corsham St Patricks – contracted buses from Melksham area (26)

Other arrangements include taxis and petrol allowances

Costs

Gross annual cost of provision	£349,000
Estimated annual income by 2013/14 (when phased intro of 2007 policy complete)	£166,000
So, estimated net cost of provision by 2013/14	£183,000
Average gross cost per pupil entitled to transport	£781
Average net cost per pupil entitled to transport (from 2013/14)	£409

Summary of representations received and issues raised

Total responses received **213**

Of which;

From individuals (mainly parents)	196
From schools and Church representatives	17

134 letters were exactly the same

125 respondents live in the Devizes area

In addition, a petition of 450+ signatures was considered by Council on 12 July. A further petition of approximately 250 signatures was presented to the Prime Minister.

NB 1 Some respondents contacted more than one person in the Council (e.g. local member, leader, Cabinet members, officers). These have been recorded as a single response.

NB 2 Many responses (approx 35%) were the same letter received from different people. These have been recorded as separate responses.

Issues raised

Below is a summary of the issues raised, and the number of times each issue was mentioned. A brief response is given in italics below each issue.

A folder including all the responses is available for inspection in the **Members' Room**.

This proposal discriminates against / denies a faith preference. The Prime Minister holds faith schools in high regard. The law encourages local authorities to support faith schools. (mentioned in 167 responses)

The Council recognises the wish of some parents for their children to attend a faith school. However, there is no legal duty on the Council to provide transport, and it has to balance the cost of maintaining the current level of assistance against the need to respond to the significant financial pressures now facing all local authorities. The Council has stated that it will support schools to make their own transport arrangements so that as far as is possible, children are able to continue to attend faith schools where their parents express a preference to do so.

Although the Prime Minister may have expressed this view, the Government has not offered local councils any additional support to fund the costs of transport, and the overall reduction in local authority funding has meant that all areas of discretionary provision have had to come under increasing scrutiny.

The law requires local authorities to 'have regard' to parents' wishes for their children to attend a faith school. However, it does not require local authorities to provide transport (except for low income families). Local authorities are having to make difficult decisions about what services they will continue to provide given the requirement by Government to significantly reduce public spending during the course of this parliament.

A proper consultation should be carried out (mentioned in 178 responses)
The Council has written to parents, schools and the Diocese making it clear how representations can be made about the proposals, both in writing and by attending the Cabinet meeting. The responses received are reported below and will inform Cabinet's decision. The decision will be made at the cabinet meeting, no decision had been made prior to the letter being sent out. A high level meeting has also been held between members of the Cabinet, the Head of St Augustine's School, and a representative of the Clifton Diocese.

The changes should be phased in, not cease at once / it is unfair to withdraw this for those already at a school or starting next term (mentioned in 141 responses)

Phased withdrawal was considered as an option at the early stages, but rejected as the Council would have to continue providing most of the existing transport until numbers travelling had reduced to the point where buses could be withdrawn, or arrangements made for the funding and operation to be transferred to another body such as the school or a parents' club. A revised proposal for phased withdrawal, with transitional funding provided to the schools to assist them with providing alternative transport, is included as Option 3 in the report. This would however defer the majority of the financial savings until 2015/16 and later.

Some children will need to move to other schools – this will be unsettling. GCSE students may have to change schools halfway through their course. The Council has not considered the wider impact of unsettling pupils and how this will affect communities. (mentioned in 163 responses)

It is recognised that, as the Council is having to make difficult decisions, some parents may also have to make difficult choices about their child's place of education and that this would be unsettling. The Council has stated that it will support schools to make their own transport arrangements so that as far as is possible, children are able to continue to attend the same school.

It is recognised that GCSE students part way through their exam course could be affected by a change of school at such an important time. To minimise the risk of this happening, the recommendation in the report is to adopt a revised proposal option 2) that would provide the schools with transitional funding to assist with providing transport for students who are already in the final years of their GCSE studies.

There will not be enough spaces at other schools if children need to transfer, and the Council will not make the savings it expects as it will have to provide transport to the next nearest available school (mentioned in 147 responses)
The risk of this occurring has been evaluated and taken into account in estimating the expected financial savings.

Faith schools contribute significantly to the educational standards achieved in Wiltshire (mentioned in 156 responses)

The Council acknowledges the significant contribution to educational standards made by faith schools. The former Wiltshire County Council's decision to provide assistance with transport to faith schools over twenty years ago has enabled such schools to develop and flourish in that time. However, this help has always been at the discretion of the local authority and is not required in law, and the financial pressures facing the Council have necessitated a review of all discretionary provision.

The RC community already contribute 10% of school costs through church collection plates (mentioned in 9 responses)

The contribution to school costs made by the Church is acknowledged, but does not diminish the need to review the affordability of discretionary transport assistance at a time of increased financial pressures.

This proposal will result in an increase in car use, impacting on the environment / health and safety (mentioned in 164 responses)

The Council has stated that it will support the schools to make their own transport arrangements, with the aim of ensuring that transport continues to be available for those who want to use it. This would help to mitigate any adverse environmental or health and safety impacts.

There is no other transport available in rural areas (mentioned in 6 responses)

It is recognised that those in more rural areas may have difficulties accessing transport, and that schools may have to investigate alternative ways of providing cost-effective transport (for example car sharing) in some places.

This subject should be scrutinised by Children's Services Select Committee (mentioned in 1 response)

The report is being considered by Children's Services Select Committee on 22 July.

It places a greater financial pressure on parents. Some households will not be able to meet the new transport costs. (mentioned in 161 responses)

Children from households with the lowest incomes will continue to be entitled to free transport. It is acknowledged that if parents have to pay a higher proportion of the transport costs, or make their own arrangements, those who are on relatively low incomes but are above the qualifying threshold for free transport, may find difficulty in meeting the cost. However, this would depend on the charging arrangements made by the school for any new arrangements that they put into place.

Unfortunately, where an educational or faith preference is being made, there is generally no responsibility placed on local authorities to assist with transport, and given the financial pressures faced by local authorities the Council has had to review its ability to continue to provide assistance in these circumstances .

The Council will still need to provide transport to local schools for many children so full savings will not be realised (mentioned in 134 responses)

In the vast majority of cases, transport already exists to the local school and in most cases children who transfer to a local school (and are entitled to free transport) could be accommodated at no additional cost to the Council.

Wiltshire has not been affected by Government cuts as much as other authorities (mentioned in 11 responses)

Following its move to unitary status, the Council has been better placed than many other local authorities in its ability to respond to the need for spending reductions. However, it has still been necessary to review all areas of discretionary spending in order to respond to these and other financial pressures such as the rising demand for services due to demographic and social changes.

This is against the Government policy allowing preference (mentioned in 163 responses)

The law regarding school admissions allows parents to express a preference for a particular school, even if that is not the nearest one. The law regarding school transport entitlement only makes local authorities responsible in cases where the nearest school is attended and when certain distance criteria are also met. The Council's policy has always been that it will not fund transport assistance for children attending a preferred school for educational or other reasons; the proposed withdrawal of assistance for children attending a preferred school for faith reasons would (if approved) bring the policy for denominational preference into line with that which already applies for families who express a preference for other reasons.

Other issues raised (mentioned in xx responses)

This will lead to a reduction in funding for the school as the numbers on roll drop

Non-faith parents will take up places at the school and change the ethos. Religious teaching is important to us

This discriminates against lower incomes.

I will have to give up work to take my children to school – this contravenes my human right to work

This will affect parents whose children can't access public transport – it will not be possible to drop and collect children by car

This will result in children from the same family attending more than one school

Parents will car-share, more cars on the road

The Council should use the money wasted in other areas before taking from this group

This should be postponed for 12 months to allow more time for alternative plans

NB This is a summary of responses received in the Education Transport team by 13 July 2011. Any response received after this date will be included in final total and made available to Members for Cabinet on 26 July.