

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

26 July 2011

**Public Participation
From Mrs Emma Kayne – Denominational Home to School Transport**

Question

In the Children's Services Select committee meeting on 22nd July 2011, the Chair asked the Cabinet representatives for a delay in their meeting planned for 13th September so that all parties could be consulted in order to assist the assigned Rapid Scrutiny Task Group's brief to properly cost the impact on the removal of Denominational Transport.

This request was denied. How can this Cabinet allow this meeting to proceed, given that no parents and schools can be easily contacted over the summer break to assist with information on how many children, (up to 450), may leave their current schools and have to be relocated?

Does this Cabinet agree that democratic consultation has been fairly achieved in this situation? Would the Cabinet delay its consideration of the Denominational Home to School Transport issue from its meeting in September in order to achieve the democratic and fair consultation that is purported to be taking place?

Response

The extent to which parents may choose to relocate their children to other schools will depend on the nature and extent of the alternative transport arrangements that are put in place by the denominational schools. Until these are known, it would not be meaningful to ask parents about the decisions they would make. It is expected that both the schools and the parents will be keen to ensure that the impact on attendance at the denominational schools is minimized, and that the numbers transferring to other schools will be a relatively small proportion of the total numbers who currently receive transport. However, to assist the Rapid Scrutiny task group, various scenarios (in terms of % of children who relocate) will be tested to determine estimated budget costs.

The extent to which changes in pupil numbers will give rise to additional costs to the education budget is limited, as a result of the way in which funding is allocated to the schools;

Revenue funding for each individual maintained school is largely based on the pupil numbers within the school as recorded in the pupil census in the January prior to the start of the financial year. Any increase in pupil numbers is therefore reflected in the following year's budget. However should a school experience a significant increase in numbers on roll within a financial year, i.e., sufficient numbers to generate the need for an additional class, there is a

mechanism within the funding formula to reflect the increased cost in year. Subject to the appropriate criteria being satisfied, as laid out in the local authority's funding scheme, this cost is met from the contingency held within the delegated schools budget.

Should there be insufficient space at an individual pupil's designated school then the Council has a duty to provide transport to the next nearest available school as long as eligibility criteria are met. This cost would be met from the local authority transport budget. An estimate of additional costs arising from this has already been allowed for within the estimated savings.

If the number of pupils in a school decreases then the reduction is reflected in the school's revenue funding allocation for the following financial year. All schools are required to submit three year budget forecasts and years 2 and 3 would be based on estimated pupil numbers. If a school is forecasting a financial deficit then the Authority will work with that school to develop a financial recovery plan. If it is agreed that staffing reductions are necessary for financial recovery then redundancy costs are met from the centrally held Dedicated Schools Grant and are therefore a cost to the overall schools budget.

Should additional physical capacity be required at any individual school then this needs to be considered against the capital allocation for additional accommodation and would be taken in to account in the Council's prioritisation of capital expenditure.

Every effort has been made to consult those affected by the proposal. From the feedback received to the consultation it is evident that those affected have been given adequate opportunity to convey their views, and these views have been incorporated into the report. The period of consultation has now been extended to 8 August, and consideration of the proposals by Cabinet deferred to 13 September, to give a further opportunity for all affected parties to express their views. The Rapid Scrutiny exercise established by the Children's Services Select Committee will provide yet another opportunity for discussion of the proposals, and in particular for the educational impacts to be fully considered.

It is important that a decision is made in September so that parents who are considering sending their children to a denominational school in September 2012 know what transport assistance they can expect before the deadline for applications in October 2011. With this in mind, and given the extensive opportunities that have already been given for those affected to make their views known, Cabinet has decided that it would not be appropriate to further delay its consideration of the proposals.