

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

13 September 2011

**Public Participation
Item No. 6 - Denominational Home to School Transport**

Statement from Kate Saunders

I am writing to you about the proposed changes to the home-to-school transport arrangements for denominational schools. If the changes go ahead as currently proposed, they will have a major impact on my family and many families who have chosen their current school on Faith grounds.

I currently have 3 children attending St. Augustine's who will still be at the school when and if the new changes are implemented. There will be a huge increase in what we currently pay through standing order as the amount we pay will double. This September, we will pay £150 a month but next September this will increase to £250 or £300 if you also increase sixth form payments too. I'm sure you will agree that this is a large sum of money in these difficult times.

The letter states that we have been given sufficient notice to make suitable alternative arrangements if we are unhappy with the new charges (i.e. change schools/ use other transport means). If children have to change schools, it would involve some children having to move schools in the middle of GCSE or even A level courses. This would be difficult not only for the children but all schools concerned. If they use alternative forms of transport, this may lead to the discontinuation of the buses altogether (making life for those who have to continue to use the buses, no matter what the cost, very difficult indeed). It may also lead to more congestion on the roads at a time when councils are supposed to be encouraging us to be more environmentally friendly.

Faith schools have been recognised by many people to be one of the successes of the state system. I know that when the charges for transport were first introduced that some parents had to make the decision then not to send their children to the school of their faith because of the costs involved. As the increased costs will inevitably force more children to make this difficult decision, the make up and ethos of this school and other faith schools will undoubtedly change and I am sure that this will ultimately have an impact on learning. Also what impact will it have on local schools? Will they be able to absorb the children who would previously have gone to their local Faith schools?

My children have always attended the local faith school. I am a practising catholic and it is important to me that my children are also brought up in the catholic faith. In fact when I married this is one of the promises that I made. When they were younger, they went to the local catholic school in Warminster. The closest catholic

secondary school is St Augustine's in Trowbridge and that is why, they go there.

I know that the council has to save money but I think it would have been much fairer and cause less disruption if the changes were phased in.

I will look forward to hearing the council's decision after the 26th July and hope that they consider all possible courses of action that may be open to them.

Kate Saunders