

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

13 September 2011

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

Statement and question from William and Petrella Pope

We are the very perturbed grandparents of a 15 year old grandson attending St Augustine's Catholic College – very perturbed because of the recently announced proposal by Wiltshire Council to withdraw completely the already reduced part funding of home to school transport for denominational schools. This represents the serious disturbance of a well established arrangement for parents to exercise their wish for their children's education according to their religion and conscience and this is under a system which we personally have seen has worked well throughout the country since the end of World War II.

We respectfully request your serious consideration of the following questions / comments:

1. There is solid accounting training / qualifications in our family but simply applying an accounting knife to certain items of expenditure runs the serious risk of not factoring in the potential lethal and disruptive consequences – social, administrative, political, transport and environmental – in fact the total upheaval of a successful cooperative and integrated education system which has provided for so long. How could the Councillors involved in this proposal have taken this potential disruption and serious disaffection among so many families into account if they had received no feedback on appropriate consultation with the Clifton Diocese or the school concerned – consultation which never took place.
2. Why has a minority segment of the community, based on religious persuasion and choice, been singled out for such discriminatory treatment?
3. To what extent is a proportion of Wiltshire Council members being placated or appeased in order to satisfy a misguided and ill-informed learning which many parents regard as bigotry against faith schools? You must surely know that faith schools are the big success story in education since World War II, their ethos, teachers love of God and our neighbours without exception (including all those whose views may differ from ours). What is wrong with that?
4. Have the Councillors concerned fully thought through the consequences of large groups of Catholic parents/students transferring to alternative schools if the extra transport cost burden becomes intolerable? It is a disruption which would carry drastic social consequences totally out of proportion to the overall cost of the transport for the Council as a whole, but totally disproportionate for

the collaborative parents concerned who already pay full taxes like the rest of the community.

5. What about the consequences for other local schools which may be already oversubscribed, if hundreds of St. Augustine's pupils are forced to secure a place elsewhere.

Finally, Councillor Scott, we would urge your colleagues to reflect on the truth of a well accepted principle; that a decision made under financial duress and often haste, if it carries an element of injustice or unfairness or even discrimination, will prove to be a source of profound regret and may leave a stain which is never really removed. Accordingly the wise decision may be prevention rather than cure.

We will be glad if you will kindly acknowledge receipt of this letter. Thank you.

Yours sincerely

Signed by:

Mr William Pope

Mrs Petrella Pope