

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

13 September 2011

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

Statement from Michael Stevenson MBE

My name is Michael Stevenson and I am the Chair of Governors at St. Augustine's Catholic College. Having addressed the full Council, the Children's Select Committee and the Rapid Scrutiny Task Group previously I would like to reiterate my initial statements and add the following.

I want to thank the Council for the opportunities offered to discuss the Denominational Transport subsidy but have to admit the more facts I am given the more I have come to the conclusion that there is a real possibility Faith Schools are being discriminated against either directly or indirectly by your Transport Department. When I say Faith Schools I actually mean the pupils within those schools because when it comes down to the final analysis the decision to remove the subsidy, if taken, will affect most of all the children and my final plea to the Cabinet is on behalf of those children.

You should not underestimate the traumatic effect the removal of a child from a school against their will can have, not only on the child but on their family. As a member of the Armed Forces with children who went through this on a number of occasions I know first-hand what a debilitating experience it can be for the child and how much their education can suffer. The Government is aware of the problem and millions of pounds are spent to assist Service families and children get through the experience.

I am sure you as Cabinet members are all aware of the Armed Forces problem yet the forcible removal of a child from his or her school is what you as a Council are intending to do if you cut this subsidy – and all for the insignificant sum in your £1 Billion budget of £162000; thousands of pounds less than the salary of your Chief Executive. You are going to force a child out of their school where they are settled and learning into an environment which is alien to them and could affect them for the rest of their lives. You are going to unsettle families who are already struggling to make ends meet with the most serious problem they can face – the happiness and well being of their child. You could in theory – and a lot of the figures produced by your Transport department are theoretical - make 450 happy, settled children into 450 vulnerable children and the cost to your Council would run into millions.

This is only a short address but in conclusion I urge you on behalf of the children to throw out this request by the Transport department and keep the subsidy intact. I urge you to see what value you are getting for the small amount of money invested

in the subsidy and finally I urge you not play with our children's lives because if you do then you and I will have failed in our duty of care.

Thank you for your time.