

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

13 September 2011

**Public Participation
Item No. 6 - Denominational Home to School Transport
Statement from Anthony Leonard OBE**

Thank you for the opportunity to make this statement.

There is not a person in this room who does not appreciate the difficulty of your task in balancing the budget by bringing in the required savings. You have extremely complex decisions to make but as the Wiltshire Council's senior decision making body you are ill-served by the report proposing the removal of the Denominational Home-to-School Transport subsidy.

It is clear at first reading that the report has been written in defence of a decision that has already been made by the Transport Department, and, as we heard repeatedly at the Rapid Scrutiny Exercise last week, it does not provide sufficient information in a range of important areas. The risks associated with these shortcomings will, I am sure, be illuminated in other statements made at this meeting and during the debate so, in the interest of time, I will restrict myself to an area that was not addressed in the report: educational continuity and the human cost.

As an example, my 12 year old Grandson attends St Augustine's Catholic College and a week does not go by without him asking for my reassurance that he will not be forced to move to another school because of '*the problems with the school transport*'. He has been at St Augustine's for one term; he is settled; he has friends; he is not bullied; and, despite his dyslexia, he is thriving. He is not a front runner by any means, but he is happy and both we and the school are delighted with his progress.

At the Rapid Scrutiny Exercise last week there was some ill-informed discussion on how Service children were able to cope easily with moving school. As an ex-military man of many years I can state that moving school was agony for my three sons and it is one aspect of our family life that I deeply regret. Many of my military colleagues would say the same.

This proposal will force some parents to move their settled children against their will because they will not be able to afford the additional travel costs; that cannot be right.

Thank You