

Wiltshire Council

Cabinet

13 September 2011

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

Statement from Paul Hughes

While a wide range of reasons were presented to retain the 2007 agreement the main argument in favour of removing the subsidy for denominational transport seems to be economic rather than educational and more specifically the economics of transport. Firstly I would argue that the economic argument has not been as clearly made as might seem. The figures do not take account of the knock on effects of such a shift in pupil population because the full effects are unknowable.

It has been said that schools could become the providers of transport. Do we really want our schools to take on this role?, is this not another example of the rolling back of public services for all the wrong reasons?

More importantly in this debate is the human cost. I frequently read in literature from Wiltshire that there is a commitment to 'diversity and choice'.

Let us imagine we have a child from a minority faith who will be told that they cannot continue with their education because the Council cannot afford to continue to subsidise transport. They must leave their friends and change their courses go to a new school, catch up on the work they have missed and try to fit in - Why ?, because of 'the cuts' -That is the human cost of this proposal and it will scar and damage the lives and educational chances of Catholic children. We will be going from the forward thinking of the 1944 education act to a pre-war system which denies parental choice.

Diversity and choice; no, the message Cabinet will be sending to young people is that if you are Catholic, if your parents want to educate you in a value system which has been the backbone of Western Civilization for 2000 years, you will not be given that choice unless you are from a rich or very poor background.

I must also ask members to really consider the environmental considerations of this proposal which really have not been thought through. Quite simply if you vote for this it is a vote for hundreds more vehicles on our roads during the school run.

For almost 50 years Wiltshire has worked in partnership with the Catholic diocese of Clifton to deliver good quality education. Cabinet members must understand that your decision today will be sending a clear message, either you value our Catholic schools and the work we do, or you do not.

Paul Hughes