

Wiltshire Council

Council

12 July 2011

Item No. 5 – Petitions

Denominational Home to School Transport

**Supporting Statement by Mr Michael Stevenson MBE, Chair of Governors,
St Augustine's Catholic College, Trowbridge**

As Chair of Governors at St. Augustine's Catholic College, I would like to voice my concern at Wiltshire Council's proposal to cancel the subsidy for denominational transport for Faith schools with effect from September 2012. A proposal which appears to have been made without consultation of the parties involved, including your own councillors – thus silencing the voice of our elected representative which cannot be right under any circumstance. To compound the error your decision to place the matter before Cabinet during the school's summer recess smacks of a Council afraid to face up to its responsibilities.

I will take a moment to refer you to the events in 2007 when the Council previously wanted to reduce the subsidy to Faith schools. There was a full consultation process, well led by the Education Department of the Council, where everyone was given the opportunity to voice their concern. An evening meeting was arranged which allowed parents and other concerned parties to meet the Council. As a result a compromise was reached which satisfied all parties and everyone felt that justice had been done. I fail to see why this procedure cannot be adopted now and would like you to explain the Council's reasoning.

You will be aware there are currently a lot of parents with pupils attending Faith schools that rely on the subsidy and have factored it in to their budget – often a very tight budget in these troubled times. Yet your decision to remove the subsidy for all from 2012 has given no consideration to these families. A decision which I would challenge on both moral and financial grounds particularly as part of the headline on the Wiltshire Council web page states '*Where everybody matters*' - I fail to see how this can be true when this proposal affects so many people, including those of religious minorities.

If Central Government insists on giving parents the right to choose the school their children attend; if parents have the right to send their children to a school which upholds the ethics and teaching of their faith; if West Wiltshire Council has always in the past given its constituents a full opportunity to voice their concerns, why has the

new unitary Council – which is supposed to be more efficient - suddenly ignored all these factors.

In summary I am very concerned at the way the Council has handled the matter of Denominational transport for Faith schools. I am very concerned at the loss of the subsidy and the effect it will have on families who want to send their children to a school which upholds and teaches their Faith. I am very concerned at the loss of income to families with children already attending Faith schools particularly in these troubled financial times.

Finally I would at this stage point out on current Council spending the minimal amount of money you would have to find to keep the Denominational Transport subsidy intact and how much benefit it would give to so many families.

I would like you to reconsider your proposal and consequent decisions and ask you:

- a. To allow a full debate on the matter for all parties involved.
- b. To change the date of the Cabinet meeting to within school term time to allow all those who wish to attend to do so, and/or to schedule an evening meeting to allow parents to meet with the Council.
- c. To keep the present subsidy for Denominational Transport for the foreseeable future.

I would also like to present to the Council this petition showing the concern parents have regarding your proposal.