

## **Responses to the recommendations of the Rapid Scrutiny Group from the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport**

The Cabinet would like to thank the Rapid Scrutiny Group for carrying out a thorough and effective review of the proposals, and for their report and recommendations. In reaching their decision, Cabinet members took careful note of these, as well as the many representations received throughout the consultation period and made in person at the meeting.

Cabinet were particularly concerned about the potential impact on children already attending the denominational schools, and in order to minimise the risk of such children having to change school agreed to implement the Rapid Scrutiny Group's second recommendation;

*for assistance to continue for the remainder of the pupils' time at their current school (but not for post-16 education).*

This has been done by approving Option 3, which will result in funding being provided by the Council to the schools to assist them in providing transport for these children until such time as they move to another school or into post-16 education.

This will cause financial stress on the passenger transport budget as savings will be deferred, and this will have to be addressed through the budget setting process. Cabinet did not however consider that it could agree to the Group's third recommendation;

*that transport continues to be arranged by the Council, except where schools are willing to take over this responsibility.*

If long term arrangements are to be put into place to provide transport to denominational schools after the Council's funding has ceased, it will be vital that the schools take the responsibility for making transport arrangements for their own pupils as the Council contribution declines. This should start at the earliest opportunity whilst the Council is still providing a funding contribution for the maximum number of pupils.

The Group's concerns about the ability of schools (in particular the smaller schools with relatively expensive transport arrangements) to arrange their own transport were however noted, and it was emphasised again that assistance will be provided to them by the passenger transport team in setting up cost-effective transport. The recommendation was also amended such that the allocation of funding to the schools will be adjusted to reflect the variation in transport costs between schools in different circumstances.

As transport arrangements will from September 2012 be the responsibility of the schools (albeit with a fixed contribution from the Council), it will be for the schools themselves to decide what contribution should be made by parents, and whether they implement a 10% increase as recommended by the Rapid Scrutiny Group. The schools will also be able to decide for themselves who is eligible for transport, and

on what terms. This will give them more flexibility to develop sustainable arrangements for the long term as the Council's funding contribution reduces.

Cllr Dick Tonge  
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport