

**Denominational Home-to-School Transport – rapid scrutiny exercise
(Children’s Services Select Committee)**

8th September 2011

**Guide to the Denominational Home-to-School Transport
rapid scrutiny exercise**

1. Given the large amount of public interest in this issue (and consequently this meeting), the following is provided to describe the powers and processes of rapid scrutiny exercises. The exact procedure for the meeting itself will be described by the Chairman on the day.
2. The rapid scrutiny exercise was established by the Children’s Services Select Committee on 22nd July. The relevant minute from that meeting is attached at Appendix 1. Having discussed the report, the Committee resolved to undertake a rapid scrutiny exercise at a later date in order to allow members more time with the information included. Members asked that further analyses of the anticipated savings and potential risks of the proposals be provided at the rapid scrutiny meeting. It was also agreed that this meeting would include an opportunity for public participation.
3. The Children’s Services Select Committee’s full terms of reference are included in the attached Appendix 2. In summary, however, the Committee’s main role is to make recommendations to the Council’s Cabinet on matters relating to services for children and young people in Wiltshire. The Select Committee has **no decision-making powers**, but does have powers to require senior officers and Cabinet Members to attend its meetings, and to require a formal response from the Cabinet Member to any recommendations it makes.
4. As well as discussing issues at its main meetings, the Select Committee can also establish smaller working groups of just a few members to look at specific issues in detail. These can be ‘task groups’, which conduct longer reviews (e.g. six months) and meet on several occasions, or ‘rapid scrutiny exercises’, which are formed when an issue requires urgent attention due to tight timescales – rapid scrutiny exercises often therefore have only a few members and meet just once.
5. Rapid scrutiny meetings are not generally open to the public (except where particular individuals are invited to attend as a witness). However, in this case the Select Committee recognised the level of public interest and requested that the meeting included an opportunity for public participation. Statements and questions will be received under item 4 and then members of the rapid

scrutiny exercise will ask questions of officers and executive members and discuss the evidence provided. As is normal procedure for a rapid scrutiny exercise, the chairman will then announce that the meeting will go into a closed session, members of the public and press will be asked to leave, and members will agree their final conclusions and recommendations.

6. When a task group or rapid scrutiny exercise has met and agreed its conclusions and recommendations, a scrutiny officer, in consultation with the chairman of the group, writes these up into a report. Usually the report is then submitted to the next meeting of the Select Committee for formal endorsement, before being submitted to Cabinet for response. However, in cases where Cabinet is scheduled to make a decision on the matter in question **before** the next meeting of the Select Committee (as in this case) the Select Committee can delegate power to that task group or rapid scrutiny exercise to submit any recommendations it agrees **directly to Cabinet**, without referral back to the full Select Committee. In such cases, the report is still submitted to the next meeting of the Select Committee for retrospective endorsement and the decision taken by Cabinet is also reported.

7. In the case of this rapid scrutiny exercise, members will meet on 8th September to discuss the matter and agree any recommendations it wishes to submit to Cabinet. These will then be written up into a report, which will be submitted to Cabinet for consideration alongside the report of the Director for Neighbourhood & Planning (included elsewhere in this agenda) at its meeting on Tuesday 13th September (10.30am, in the Council Chamber, Bradley Road, Trowbridge). The rapid scrutiny exercise's report will also be available on the Council website.

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Appendix 1

Draft Minute from Denominational Home-to-School Transport item considered by the Children's Services Select Committee on 22nd July 2011

Denominational Home-to-School Transport

The Chairman introduced this item and announced that she would agree to take the report by the Corporate Director for Neighbourhood and Planning, which was made available on Tuesday 19 July 2011, as an item of urgent business because there would not be a further meeting of this Committee to consider and make comments before it was presented to Cabinet for approval on 13 September 2011.

Cllr Richard Gamble, Portfolio Holder for Public Transport, gave a brief overview of the contents of the report, explaining that following consideration of the representations received, and of the financial, environmental, legal and equalities impacts, the following three options were now put forward for consideration:-

Option 1 – implement original proposal to withdraw all discretionary denominational transport assistance with effect from September 2012.

Option 2 – withdraw discretionary denominational assistance with effect from September 2012, but with transitional provisions to assist pupils entering the final year of their GCSE course in 2012.

Option 3 – withdraw discretionary denominational assistance with effect from September 2012, but with transitional provisions to assist all pupils who are already receiving transport.

The Committee received statements from members of the public as follows, expressing their opposition to the proposal:-

Mr Alastair Erdozain – Retired Governor, St John's RC Primary School, Trowbridge

Ms Emma Kayne – Governor, St Patrick's RC Primary School, Corsham

Ms Helen Ward – Parent & Foundation Governor, St Augustine's RC School, Trowbridge

Mr Michael Stevenson – Chair of Governors, St Augustine's RC School, Trowbridge

The Committee also noted that questions had been received from the following members of the public and to whom written responses were given:

Mrs Jane Keogh – a parent

Mr Tony Lowe –

Father Jean-Patrice Coulon – Parish Priest, Our Lady, the Immaculate Conception, Devizes

The Committee also received letters opposing the proposal from:

Dr Michael Thompson – representing Clifton RC Diocese

Mr Paul Hughes – Headteacher, St Joseph's RC School, Salisbury

During the ensuing debate the following points were raised:

- A suggestion was made that a Rapid Scrutiny Exercise be arranged in order to give more time for consideration to be given to the contents of the report prepared by the Corporate Director for Neighbourhood and Planning. The Exercise should be open to the public and its views and comments would be forwarded to Cabinet to consider at its meeting on 13 September 2011.
- Whilst supporting in principle the setting up of a Rapid Scrutiny Exercise, a number of Members considered that all Members of the Select Committee should be invited to participate, rather than a small number of its membership, bearing in mind that the Rapid Scrutiny Group would be sending its views and comments direct to Cabinet.
- Many parents make arrangements for their children's primary or secondary education to be carried out in one school and to be suddenly faced with having to either pay for denominational school transport or finding a totally new school might not be viable.
- Consideration should also be given to a further Option of no change to the current arrangements and a detailed examination should be given to costing figures provided.
- The following members of this Select Committee expressed an interest in taking part in the rapid scrutiny exercise:

Cllr Christine Crisp, Cllr Peter Davis, Cllr Mark Griffiths, Cllr Russell Hawker, Cllr Jon Hubbard, Cllr Jacqui Lay, Cllr Carole Soden, Mr Neil Owen, Mrs Rosheen Ryan and Dr Michael Thompson.

After further discussion,

Resolved:

- 1. To establish a Rapid Scrutiny Exercise to consider the proposals to Cabinet on Denominational Home-to-School Transport and to make recommendations as appropriate, this meeting to take place prior to Cabinet's meeting on 13 September 2011 and to include an opportunity for public participation.**

- 2. To request that the Chairman and Scrutiny Officer liaise with the Cabinet Member and officers to ensure that the further information requested by members is made available for the Rapid Scrutiny Group.**

Appendix 2

Terms of Reference of the Children's Services Select Committee

- (1) To review and scrutinise any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of children's services in Wiltshire
- (2) To consider any matter relating to children's services affecting the area or its inhabitants, including matters referred by area boards and Councillor Call for Action, and exercise the right to call in, for reconsideration, decisions made but not yet implemented by the cabinet
- (3) To make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which the function of education and children's social care services are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness
- (4) To commission groups of members to carry out scrutiny activities and reviews relevant to the annual work programme's priorities
- (5) To carry out strategic oversight of the scrutiny activities the committee commissions, including task groups and rapid response exercises
- (6) To establish and publish an annual work programme that ensures a thorough but focussed overview of the plans, strategies, policies and decisions of children's services in Wiltshire, including those provided and commissioned by the council, and those delivered by partners – using the Wiltshire children's trust board as a key focus
- (7) To foster and encourage an inclusive, structured, non-partisan and non-adversarial approach to overview and scrutiny, which is reliant on evidence rather than anecdote
- (8) To meet at least four times a year to consider reports from task groups and other commissioned individuals/groups, and to receive reports on the assessment/inspection of services within the department for children & education
- (9) To contribute to policy development within children's services
- (10) To use the cabinet forward work plan to identify and provide appropriate contributions to key and other decisions relating to children's services

- (11) To hold the relevant cabinet member/s and officers with delegated responsibility for children's services to account
- (12) To require cabinet members and officers to answer questions raised by the committee, its task groups and other groups or individuals commissioned to carry out its work
- (13) To hold children's services' partners to account, particularly those listed within the local area agreement and local agreement for Wiltshire
- (14) To work with partners and other public and private sector agencies to identify issues of concern and work together to improve services for children
- (15) To invite and receive evidence from external witnesses, including service users and providers
- (16) To make reports and recommendations to the council, cabinet, department for children & education, or partners on any matter reviewed or scrutinised
- (17) To manage and coordinate the training and development of elected members and other representatives involved in the overview and scrutiny of children's services
- (18) To develop appropriate overview and scrutiny operational protocols, including:
 - (a) involving and engaging with children, young people and their families
 - (b) joint working with the health overview and scrutiny committee on public health matters as they impact on children and young people
 - (c) maintaining effective communication with the Corporate Parenting Group to facilitate joint working where appropriate
 - (d) maintaining and further developing constructive relations with the executive, especially between the relevant cabinet member/s and the chairman and vice chairman of the committee
 - (e) working and involving partners in scrutiny activities

- (f) developing a productive interface with the area boards, including support for local task groups and links through which Councillor Calls for Action and petition appeal requests can be channelled