

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET

CABINET

Monday, 20th May, 2013

These minutes are draft until confirmed as a correct record at the next meeting.
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Present:

Councillor Paul Crossley	Leader of the Council
Councillor David Dixon	Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Neighbourhoods
Councillor Simon Allen	Cabinet Member for Wellbeing
Councillor Tim Ball	Cabinet Member for Homes and Planning
Councillor David Bellotti	Cabinet Member for Community Resources
Councillor Caroline Roberts	Cabinet Member for Transport
Councillor Dine Romero	Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Youth
Councillor Ben Stevens	Cabinet Member for Sustainable Development

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chair was taken by Councillor Paul Crossley, Leader of the Council.
The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Chair drew attention to the evacuation procedure as set out in the Agenda.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

There were no apologies for absence.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

5 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIR

There was none.

6 QUESTIONS FROM PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

There were none.

7 STATEMENTS, DEPUTATIONS OR PETITIONS FROM PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS

There were none.

8 MATTERS REFERRED BY POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY BODIES

The Chair referred to the recent meeting of the Early Years, Children and Youth PDS Panel, which had considered the Call-in of the Cabinet decision on Home to School Transport. He observed copies of the notes and resolution from the Panel meeting had been placed in the public gallery prior to this meeting [and *a copy of which is attached to these minutes as appendix 1 and on the Council's website*].

He welcomed Councillor Davis, Chair of the Panel, to the meeting and asked her to introduce the Panel's recommendations to Cabinet.

Councillor Davis in a statement [*a copy of which is attached to these minutes as appendix 2 and on the Council's website*] explained that the Panel had agreed to ask Cabinet to reconsider their decision made on 10th April. She laid out the reasons behind the Panel's request.

The Chair thanked Councillor Davis and the Panel for their hard work and said that the decision would be reconsidered, taking into consideration all the new evidence alongside the previously existing evidence.

9 HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT REVIEW 2012

Councillor Liz Hardman in a statement said she felt the Cabinet had been misinformed when they had made their previous decision, resulting in a decision which was discriminatory. She also felt that the cost analysis had been flawed, so Cabinet had made a decision which would not deliver the headline savings figures, and had not properly considered other options which might have delivered substantial savings without abolishing the subsidy entirely. There were therefore no good grounds for withdrawing the subsidy.

Councillor Sarah Bevan in a statement [*a copy of which is attached to the Minutes as Appendix 3 and on the Council's website*] declared an "other" interest because her son attended a faith school and she received a transport subsidy from the Council. She felt that the process had been flawed from the outset because the original research had been based on the LEA boundaries, yet the two schools in question served much larger geographical diocesan areas. The decision would discriminate against families who lived in the outer parts of the dioceses. Removing the subsidy would also represent a discriminatory disadvantage for ethnic minority families, a substantial number of whom were catholic and whose children attended St Gregory's.

Cllr Bevan was very concerned that the decision might lead to large numbers of catholic parents being financially unable to send their children to the one school in the diocese which would uphold their faith.

Raymond Friel (Executive Head Teacher, St Gregory's and St Mark's) in an *ad hoc* statement emphasised the impact the decision would have across the city. He challenged the argument about a demographic bulge which it was claimed would provide increasing numbers of children into the schools in Bath; he said that it would have only a short-term effect. He asked the Cabinet to consider carefully the impact their decision would have on the whole school provision in the city and much wider.

Councillor Dine Romero in her introduction referred to Raymond Friel's statement and said that primary school numbers supported the contention that secondary admissions numbers in future years would increase. She assured Councillor Davis

that Cabinet had been aware of all the facts available at the time, and that all the new evidence now available would be considered. She explained to Cabinet that it was not in fact possible to be sure how many parents might decide not to send their children to a faith school as a result of losing the subsidy. She acknowledged that it would be some time before the full savings would be delivered, but explained that this was because Cabinet had been determined not to deprive existing families whose children already received the subsidy and whose younger children would also be able to enjoy it.

Councillor Romero reminded the Cabinet that she had addressed all the issues when she spoke at the Call-in Panel; it was not correct to say that some evidence had not been taken into account. She was very clear that the phrase “cost-neutral” meant cost-neutral to the Council. She warned that a large increase parental contribution might in any case dissuade a number of parents and would lead to an unsustainable model.

She proposed to Cabinet that they CONFIRM the original decision made on 10th April.

Councillor David Bellotti seconded the proposal. He reminded Cabinet that it was necessary to save £30M over 3 years because of cuts in central funding and that the option to increase Council Tax had been rejected. He also observed that government would conduct a further funding review in 2015/16, out of which further funding pressures would arise.

Councillor Bellotti rejected criticisms of discrimination. He said that when making its original decision, Cabinet had been mindful to avoid the possibility of discriminating against younger siblings of existing pupils. He acknowledged that it would therefore take longer to realise the savings but he had felt that this was the right thing to do.

He reminded the Cabinet that government had made no cuts to education and nor had this Council. On the contrary, substantial capital sums had been invested in St Gregory’s, Beechen Cliff and Ralph Allen.

As a member of the faith community, he had felt uncomfortable that the subsidy appeared to give special treatment to a few parents. Bristol, South Glos and Wiltshire authorities did not subsidise parents whose children attended St Gregory’s. He felt that this authority should come into line.

Councillor David Dixon said that previous speakers had been right to point out the risk that some children from further afield might not opt for a faith school because of their transport costs; but the two schools were very special places and would remain so. He had looked at a number of policies of authorities across the country. The policy in Kent had been raised by one respondent but he said that Kent’s policy was not as generous as the one being proposed for confirmation because the proposals would ensure fairness for families who had already shown a commitment to faith education. He gave an assurance that the council was meeting and exceeding its statutory duty.

Councillor Paul Crossley thanked all the contributors and correspondents. He expressed the Cabinet’s incredible respect for the work done by Raymond Friel and others although he felt that Mr Friel was being pessimistic in saying that the balance of catholic children in his school would be at risk. He reminded Cabinet that there were a number of ways of transporting children to school, one of which for longer journeys would be to lift share. He restated the Council’s commitment to work with St Gregory’s on its exciting VI form project.

Councillor Dine Romero in summing up paid tribute to the hard work done by the PDS Panel, which had provided the main source of information leading to the decision. She stressed that the decision was about fairness and that parents' right to choose a good school for their children was not being removed.

On a motion from Councillor Dine Romero, seconded by Councillor David Bellotti, it was

RESOLVED (unanimously)

To CONFIRM the previous Cabinet decision:

- (1) To AGREE that the Council should continue to seek to encourage more sustainable methods of home to school transport, particularly an increase in cycling;
- (2) To AGREE that the Council should encourage the promotion of safe cycling routes to school as an alternative to using the car where there is a safe route to do so and that the feasibility of establishing the following two routes should be investigated.:-
 - a) Between Bishop Sutton and Chew Valley School.
 - b) Between Compton Dando and Marksbury.
- (3) To AGREE with effect from September 2014 a phased withdrawal of subsidised home to school transport services for new starters attending denominational schools from September 2014 who would not qualify under other home to school policy subsets, (e.g. as a low income family) save in the case of children with siblings currently at the school. This option would not affect students who currently attend the school, only new pupils joining in September 2014. The anticipated savings from this withdrawal would be seen over a number of years can be found in the table in 3.2.5.
- (4) To AGREE to maintain the budget to provide transport for Children in Care [circa £70,000] for the foreseeable future; and
- (5) To ASK Passenger Transport Services to review home to school transport routes on a termly basis to ensure best value for money and that home to school transport bus routes are as efficient and effective as possible. This should also include liaising with parents/carers of students who have Special Educational Needs to consider whether it is appropriate for them to receive independent travel training and a personalised transport budget to arrange their own transport which may be more suitable for their needs, similar to the system used at Coventry City Council.

Additional Documents

The meeting ended at 7.20 pm

Chair _____

Date Confirmed and Signed _____

Prepared by Democratic Services