

BATH AND NORTH EAST SOMERSET COUNCIL

EARLY YEARS, CHILDREN AND YOUTH POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCRUTINY PANEL

Thursday, 9th May, 2013

Present:- Councillors: Sally Davis (Chair), Ian Gilchrist (Vice-Chair), Liz Hardman, Mathew Blankley, David Veale, Nathan Hartley (In place of Sarah Bevan) and Jeremy Sparks (In place of Loraine Morgan-Brinkhurst MBE)

Co-opted Voting Members:-David Williams and Peter Bradshaw (In place of Tess Daly)

Co-opted Non-voting Members:-

Also in attendance: Councillor Dine Romero (Cabinet Member – Early Years, Children and Youth) and Councillor Paul Crossley (Leader of the Council)

95 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTIONS

The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting.

96 EMERGENCY EVACUATION PROCEDURE

The Democratic Services Officer drew attention to the emergency evacuation procedure.

97 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies for absence were received from the following Members of the Panel:

- Councillor Sarah Bevan (Councillor Nathan Hartley was her substitute)
- Councillor Loraine Morgan-Brinkhurst (Councillor Jeremy Sparks was her substitute)
- Mrs Tess Daly (Mr Peter Bradshaw was her substitute)
- Mr Chris Batten (no substitute)
- Mr Peter Mountstephen (no substitute)
- Andrea Arlidge (no substitute)

The Panel also received an apology from Ashley Ayre (Director of Children's Services).

98 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were none.

99 TO ANNOUNCE ANY URGENT BUSINESS AGREED BY THE CHAIRMAN

There was none.

100 ITEMS FROM THE PUBLIC OR COUNCILLORS - TO RECEIVE DEPUTATIONS, STATEMENTS, PETITIONS OR QUESTIONS RELATING TO THE BUSINESS OF THIS MEETING

The Chairman informed the meeting that the Panel received two statements from members of the public in advance of the meeting.

Both statements are held in Democratic Services.

The Chairman advised the Panel that one of the statements, which was about the provision of the transport to Norton Hill School for some 6th formers, is not relevant for the subject of this meeting.

101 HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT REVIEW 2012

The Chairman informed the Panel that the meeting will run in the following order (according to the Running Order circulated in the Council Chamber):

- Statement from the Lead Call-In Member - Councillor Gabriel Batt
- Questions from the Panel to the Lead Call-In Member
- Statement from the Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children & Youth – Councillor Dine Romero
- Questions from the Panel to Cabinet Member
- Statements from Councillors Eleanor Jackson and John Bull
- Comments and/or statements from anyone else who was in the room but didn't register to speak
- Closing statement from the Cabinet Member
- Closing statement from the Lead Call-In Member
- Members of the Panel to debate the matter
- Panel's decision. The Panel may either:
 - Dismiss the Call-In – in which case the decision shall take effect immediately, OR
 - Uphold the Call-In and refer the decision back to the decision makers for reconsideration, setting out why it has decided that the decision should be reconsidered, or
 - Refer the matter to Council to itself undertake the role of the Panel (NB: the ultimate decision still remains with the original decision maker/s).

Statement from the Lead Call-In Member - Councillor Gabriel Batt

The Chairman invited Councillor Gabriel Batt, the Lead Call-In Member, to read his statement.

Councillor Batt read out the following statement:

'Madam Chairman and Members of the Panel, I would like to declare that I am Foundation Governor of St Gregory's Catholic College. I believe that the decision taken by the Cabinet on 10th April was fraud. Your Panel was asked by then Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Youth, Councillor Nathan Hartley, to consider a review on home to school transport in order to make some financial reductions as part of the 2013/14 budget setting process. Your Panel recognised that doing nothing was not an option and that the school transport system needs to be more effective. I would like to point to a bit of inefficiency related to the home to school transport that is happening in my Ward. Two children, both from primary school age, attend two different schools and they are taken to their schools by two different taxis, paid for by the Council. Your Panel, in 2013, almost unanimously recommended to the Cabinet to accept the recommendation 3C (of the review). This is where the denominational subsidy is kept but reduced. The Panel also confirmed their recommendation at March 2013 meeting. This recommendation was not being available to the Cabinet at their meeting in April 2013 and not at the Council's website. If the subsidy is removed it would cost the Council more. For example, if the pupil from Peasedown St John who attends St Gregory's School and pays part of the transport cost is now attending Writhlington School then Council would have to pay for the whole of the transport cost.

Your Panel asked for the cost neutral option to be investigated. I think this was considered with ambiguity on what the cost neutral option means – was it cost neutral for the Council or for the parents. My understanding is that this Panel never had the opportunity to consider cost neutral analysis.

It is also my understanding that other recommendations made by this Panel were ignored. It would seem that the options to reduce total expenditure were not explored fully and the consequences of this decision were not fully thought through.

When the Council introduced charging policy for denominational transport in 2007, the number of Catholic children attending St Gregory's School fell by approximately 100 in five years, because many Catholic families could not afford increased transport costs. Because St Gregory's is an outstanding school and with excellent reputation, these 100 places were very quickly filled with the children from Bath area and the school became oversubscribed quite quickly.

There are number of faith schools in Bath. St Gregory's School was funded some 33 years ago. It was not intended to be secondary school for Bath children but school in Bath for the children of Clifton Dioceses and the catchment area was defined by Clifton Dioceses to serve primarily Catholic Christian community.

There was a long standing contract to fund transport to faith schools because of distances involved. If this subsidy is removed then Catholic and Anglican families, who live more than three miles away would struggle to get their child to the school of first choice. This would lessen the number of children from areas out of Bath. Catholic and Anglican parents are already paying the taxes for the education of their children. All Catholic and other faith schools have to pay 10% of all capital costs which is funded by the church. That means parents have to pay for their children's education twice.

To conclude – the majority of this Panel, having looked at the all evidence, made the decision that the denomination subsidy should be retained although with the reduction in the subsidy. The Panel stated that there should be no discrimination against minorities. For the reasons I set out I recommend that the Panel should refer the decision back to the Cabinet requesting further consideration of all the options.

Thank you'

The Chairman thanked Councillor Batt for his statement.

Questions from the Panel to the Lead Call-In Member

Councillor Harding asked if Councillor Batt thinks that St Gregory's School will continue to thrive when the denominational subsidy is removed.

Councillor Batt responded that the impact would be significant. When the transport subsidy was reduced in 2007 there was 10% reduction in Catholic children attending St Gregory's School. St Gregory's continue to attract local children and places were available for the same time period. The numbers were fallen at St Mark's. Should the subsidy be removed there will be another drop in the number of Catholic children from more than three miles away from St Gregory's School, though the school will continue to attract local children to these vacant places. This will have significant impact on other schools. St Gregory's School is a school for Dioceses of Clifton to provide places for Catholic families across the large catchment area. To fulfil these purposes the subsidy is necessary for families with greater distances from the school.

Councillor Hartley said that e agreed with Councillor Batt's comment that the society should not discriminate against the minority and asked Councillor Batt if he would also agree that the Council should be subsidising Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish and Sikh children to go to their nearest schools as well.

Councillor Batt replied that he would have no objection to that suggestion.

There were no other questions for Councillor Batt at this point of the meeting.

Statement from the Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children & Youth – Councillor Dine Romero

The Chairman invited Councillor Dine Romero, Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children & Youth, to read her statement.

Councillor Romero read out the following statement:

'Thank you Madam Chairman.

The Cabinet report on 10th April 2013 gave options to the denominational transport to operate in the cost neutral basis. This was one of the options that did require details when the Cabinet made their recommendations. When I was a Member of this Panel (prior to my appointment as the Cabinet Member) I said that recommendation 3C was sensible option but we did not know what cost neutral means. The cost

neutral actually meant for the Council, not to the parents. If it was cost neutral to the parents then we would pick up whole of that cost, which would be £1,000 on average.

Both options, cost neutral basis and continued provision with increased charges, were considered by the Cabinet on 10th April. The Cabinet felt that the increased charges would not be sustainable and it would quickly lead to a cessation of services, as parents would stop using those services. It was for this reason that the recommendation of this Panel was not accepted. The denominational transport will continue to be organised by the Council on behalf of the schools. From September 2014 the size and numbers of vehicles used will gradually reduce. However, it may be possible the new entrants no longer qualify to be accepted as 'fair pay passengers' due to lack of space in the vehicles (this is the scheme that we already have in place). So, the Cabinet agreed that the charges will not increase and that the 50% reduction for the 2nd and 3rd children will remain to keep this affordable for the parents. The Cabinet was very anxious not to increase the cost to full cost in order to make it cost neutral.

The Cabinet also took the decision to give protection for transport to younger siblings of children already in the seats of denominational transport and attending the same school.

The original report indicated that the denominational transport would finish in year 2020, although we could not be precise about the sibling protection this means that transport will continue for number of years after this date. There would be no discrimination between siblings and parents would not need to send their child to different school. Low income families would not be affected by this change and under current legislation they would continue to receive assistance.

The majority of the children will still have access to local schools which will not require provision of transport. Most children will have places to local primary schools where transport is not required. As an example children in Bath and Keynsham who attend St Mary's and St John's will not require transport to their local school. Children in Paulton, Peasedown St John, Midsomer Norton and Radstock who attend St Benedict's would not require transport to their local schools. There may be a small number of children in rural areas who require transport but in most cases they will be accommodated within the existing transport. For secondary schools most children attending St Mark's will not require transport as they will have option of other schools within the statutory walking distance. In respect to St Gregory's - some children will qualify for the transport to their local school. For example, in September 2012 there were 14 children who would qualify for transport to their local school if they were not attending St Gregory's. We do not know how many children will continue to attend St Gregory's in future. We still did not take away anyone's right to choose which school they want to go to.

As it was stated St Gregory's School is not a Bath school and it is not Bath & North East Somerset School and does serve wide area, wider than Bath & North East Somerset, and children from neighbouring authorities do attend this school.

It should be noted that Bristol, South Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Councils have already taken the decision/s to remove the denominational transport. I am not

absolutely certain but I do not believe that all of these authorities have phased it out in the (gentle) way that we are planning to do it. Parents can still apply for St Gregory's and their priority under admissions criteria will not change.

The final point I want to make is on the concerns that more non-Catholic children will attend St Gregory's which will affect adversely of some other secondary schools. The forecast on the number of secondary school children in Bath & North East Somerset will increase as we already know, so there will be an impact on other schools.

Thank you.'

The Chairman thanked Councillor Romero for her statement.

Questions from the Panel to Cabinet Member

Councillor Hardman thanked Councillor Romero for idea that siblings would be not overlooked on this matter. Councillor Hardman asked Councillor Romero to explain the cost neutral analysis.

Councillor Romero responded that cost neutral means no cost to the Council so the parents would pick up the full cost of the transport provision.

Councillor Hardman commented that when the Panel had focus meetings with the members of the public, in particular at St Gregory's Catholic College, the parents were adamant that they would carry on paying for the transport. One of the recommendations from the Panel was 50% reduction and that parents would pay more for the transport. The Panel, and parents, were realistic that current situation couldn't carry on. Councillor Hardman said that she did think this was a good way to move forward and asked Councillor Romero on her thoughts on those issues.

Councillor Romero said that her concern was that any increase from £300 currently paid by parents to the full cost per place (£1,000) would quickly underline the validity of the service because it is clearly not realistic to expect parents to pay that money.

Councillor Hardman queried the figures about children going to schools like St Mark's and in case of St Gregory's there was mention of 14 children that would need to be deported to other schools. Councillor Hardman asked Councillor Romero to verify where these figures are from.

Councillor Romero responded that these figures were provided by the officers so she believed that they were accurate.

Councillor Hardman said that there were 313 children getting a subsidy in their transport to faith schools. Councillor Hardman commented that the only secondary school in North East Somerset that has any places in Somervale School, with very limited number of places. Writhlington School is full and Norton Hill is full. So, there will be much more than 14 children to move elsewhere.

Councillor Romero said that we are not talking particularly of those 14 children as they will receive the transport they currently have. The issue is that based on the

data 14 children who currently go to St Gregory's, if the arrangements in place and they are not able to have subsidised transport to St Gregory's, then they will have to go to different school.

Councillor Hardman said that there will be more children in the future so her position was that this is paper saving.

David Williams commented that at the Panel meeting on 20th January 2013 one of the recommendations, recommendation 3, was asking the Cabinet to consider exploring and implementing from September 2014 the option C, which was combination of A and B recommendations in the review. David Williams asked if that recommendation has been researched before the decision was made. David Williams also asked if there is still an option to trial option C.

Councillor Romero responded that the Cabinet was asked to consider and research that particular option. The figures that came forward showed that each of those places cost the Council £1,000 per place. Councillor Romero said that the Cabinet was not asked to trial option C.

Councillor Romero also said that if the subsidy is removed by 50% for siblings, and couple that with any increase in the payment that parents would be making, that would have a heavy burden on parents.

David Williams also asked if Councillor Romero looked in some other options that would work or just looked at the option D.

Councillor Romero responded that it would be hefty burden to ask parents to pay more and it was deemed unfeasible to continue that route. At the end of the day the Panel was asked, in the review, what savings could be made and that was what came out of the review.

Peter Bradshaw commented that there seem to be less detail in terms of the options that were explored before the decision was made. Peter Bradshaw felt that more could be done in terms of further options, especially when parents were ready to pay more. Peter Bradshaw asked if the Cabinet would be willing to explore option C more fully before making the final decision.

Councillor Romero responded that she believed that the Cabinet had sufficient information before they made their decision.

The Chairman asked Councillor Romero if the Cabinet had the same information that the Panel had before they made their decision.

Councillor Romero responded that the Cabinet absolutely had all (the same) information that the Panel had. All four recommendations and preferred recommendation from the Panel were shared with the Cabinet.

There were no other questions for Councillor Romero at this point of the meeting.

Statements from the public and Councillors

The Chairman invited Councillor Eleanor Jackson (Radstock Ward) to address the Panel.

Councillor Jackson said that the Cabinet made the wrong decision for the wrong reasons. It seems that the Cabinet may have had some information at their informal meeting which was not considered in the public debate and with other Councillors. Councillor Jackson said that she was at the Cabinet meeting when the decision on Home To School Transport was made and it seemed that the greater emphasises were placed on the importance of cycling to school rather than the children might be denied the place at the school of their parents' choice. Councillor Jackson said that the cycling is a form of a lifestyle though having education of your faith, religion, is very important. Councillor Jackson said that her son benefited of attending King David Primary School, which is for the children of Jewish faith, and children learn a lot alongside children of other cultures and faith. Councillor Jackson felt that this Panel was not treated with the degree of respect by the Cabinet as it should be. The process is flawed. Councillor Jackson said that she couldn't find Equality Impact on the Catholic community. There is a significant number of Polish people in Radstock and Westfield area and also Indian and Filipino community. St Gregory's School should be commended for the multicultural diversity. This decision will disproportionately disadvantage minority community. Councillor Jackson asked the panel to either refer back the decision to the Cabinet for the proper consideration or to the Council.

The Chairman said that any response or clarification required from Councillor Batt or Councillor Romero will be provided later at the meeting.

The Chairman invited Councillor John Bull (Paulton Ward) to address the Panel.

Councillor Bull said that the Cabinet, when they made their decision, were entitled to reject recommendations from the Panel. However, in Councillor Bull's view the Cabinet did not take those recommendations into account before they made their decision. The Panel made a number of recommendations. Recommendation number 3 started as a number of options but it developed into recommendation by the Panel. When the report of the Panel reached the Cabinet, the four options were presented as if they had equal validity. Councillor Bull also said that he didn't hear that one of these four options was preferred by the Panel. The Cabinet was effectively bypassing views of the Panel. The cost neutral analysis has been raised and it was suggested that the panel could not come to proper recommendation without having that information beforehand. If that is the case then the Cabinet should have that information ready for the Panel. Councillor Bull concluded his statement by saying that the Cabinet decision was made almost in the absence of consideration on what was the Panel's fully worked out recommendation.

The Chairman informed the meeting that she will allow any other members of the public to address the Panel at this point.

Raymond Friel (Headteacher at St Gregory's School) said that he supports statements from Councillors Batt and Jackson. Mr Friel also said that those 14 children who will need to be moved to other schools will cost the Council money as they will have to be transported to other schools. There will also be an impact across the city - Catholic families stated that if the subsidy goes ahead then they will not send their children to St Gregory's. New housing developments across and outside Bath will generate children but it will take too long before those children are old enough to go to school. In a meantime it will lead to greater decrease in pupils and eventually to school closure.

Councillor Paul Crossley (Leader of the Council) said that, contrary to what Councillor Ball said earlier, the Cabinet did not ignore the Panel's review. The Cabinet considered the report, considered all recommendations and variations, and the Cabinet reached the decision based on that evidence. Councillor Crossley stressed out that the Cabinet did not overlook at all comments, report and recommendations from the Panel. The Cabinet valued the work that this Panel did. One of the things that the Panel should be doing was to look more into the financial implications on the budget and propose the alternative ways for the Cabinet to look at. Councillor Crossley again assured the panel that the Cabinet valued the review from the Panel and did consider all the options that were set in the recommendations.

Councillor Crossley also said that the Cabinet absolutely respect the work of the Headteacher, the staff and everyone involved at St Gregory's School. Mr Friel and his staff are running a fantastic school and the Cabinet has real confidence that it will continue that way. The Cabinet feels that the children could use other ways to reach the school, other than via bus.

Councillor Crossley closed his statement by saying that the Cabinet feels that the process was duly run through and that the consultation was duly considered and all options were duly considered before the Cabinet made its decision.

Councillor Hardman thanked Councillor Crossley for the kind words about this Panel but she queried his comment that the process was not flawed. In Cabinet papers there was no any written evidence that the option 3C was Panel's favourite option. It appears that all four options were considered with an equal value. Councillor Hardman also said that the first time she heard mention of the option 3C was when the Cabinet, at its last meeting, was asked by the Chairman of this Panel to clarify the cost neutral figures. The Panel asked for an analysis of cost neutral figures which never came to the Panel for consideration.

The Chairman said that she expected to speak the last though she spoke the first at the last Cabinet meeting on that matter. The Chairman felt that she should speak the last and sum up the Panel's findings and also require for any further info from the Cabinet.

Councillor Crossley confirmed that the Chairman did attend the last Cabinet meeting and told the Cabinet what the preferred Panel options was.

The Chairman thanked everyone who participated with their statements at this part of the meeting.

The Chairman informed the meeting that she will allow any further questions or comments during the closing statements from the cabinet Member, Lead Call -In Member and also during the Panel's debate before the decision on whether or not to uphold the Call In request is made.

Closing statement from the Cabinet Member (Councillor Romero)

The Chairman invited Councillor Romero to give her closing statement.

Councillor Romero said that the Cabinet clearly heard from the Chairman that the option 3C is Panel's preferred option. The Panel also asked that the cost neutral issue be taken into account (under option 3A). Councillor Romero also said that the Equality Impact Assessment had been included in the Cabinet report (pages 47, 48 and 49). All these were considered by the Cabinet before the decision was made. Councillor Romero also stated that 93% of all parents got one of their first three options for their children's school, for this year, September 2013. Some speakers said that some schools will not be fulfilled and closed, which is not true. The Council had to increase several schools to accommodate children.

Councillor Romero's final point was that the Council cannot fund 2/3 of the cost of taking relatively small amount of children to school. In that case the majority of the residents would be paying for something that they are not receiving. In terms of the Equalities, in the Education Act it says that all children should be treated the same. Councillor Romero said that in the ideal world she would want for all children to have free, or subsidised, school transport though in the present times, in recession that we are now, it is not possible so people and children can get what they need and not what they want.

Closing statement from the Lead Call-In Member (Councillor Batt)

The Chairman invited Councillor Batt to give his closing statement.

Councillor Batt said that, according to the figures from the Council, this year there were 123 surplus spaces in Bath secondary schools. Primary schools in Bath had 66 surplus desks. Also, in North East Somerset there are surplus desks in 29 of schools.

Members of the Panel to debate and make the decision

The Chairman invited the Panel to debate the matter.

Councillor Hardman MOVED a motion to defer the decision back to the Cabinet. Councillor Hardman felt that the option 3C from the Panel's recommendation to the Cabinet has not been fully explored. Councillor Hardman also felt that there was a presumption from Councillor Romero that parents would not pay more though on page 48 of the report it was recognised that 'families, at the contributors' session, were happy to pay contribution to retain the transport' so the Panel suggested the option which would retain but may result in increased parental contribution towards it.

Councillor Hardman also said that she was not quite clear on the impact on equalities. Councillor Hardman said that Councillor Jackson made it clear that we had community groups who attend faith schools, like St Gregory's, and the only assessment made on the equality impact was that the information would be written in different languages. There is also need to assess the impact on other schools in the area and how other faith schools should organise themselves (i.e. special sessions, special classes, etc.) so children from those communities receive special care in their own languages.

Councillor Hardman concluded that in the original report presented to the Panel at January meeting, on page 37, it was said that report will be based on cost neutral analysis. The Panel asked for the cost neutral analysis to be investigated but in no way was Panel's decision made on that. The Panel wanted for the parents to pay more and not for the cost neutral analysis to be based on the decision.

David Williams **SECONDED** the motion from Councillor Hardman and said that he is not convinced that the cost neutral option was fully researched before the decision was made.

Councillor Ian Gilchrist said that he will vote against the proposal from Councillor Hardman and read out the following statement:

'When the working group of this panel started the investigation into HTST we were thoughtfully provided by our officers with some background briefing, which covered both what this Council has done previously, and what similar councils have done or are doing on the subject of support for denominational transport. In the first category, I found reference to a (joint) study done in 2005 which included amongst its recommendations, "Remove or radically reform the current discretionary policy of free transport for pupils attending denominational schools." There it was in black and white - reference to a conclusion reached 7 years previously by this Council. The thought did go through my head at the time, "Why are doing all this again?" Looking at the decisions on the same subject made by some similar councils (Gloucestershire, Cheshire, and Wiltshire) we find some similar conclusions. On the basis of the first point alone it is my belief that the Cabinet was justified in making the decision in April that it did.

But coming to the current survey, which led to the various recommendations made by the working group, we notice the consultation responses on prioritisation for subsidised transport on the grounds of religion or belief. It is immediately apparent that the great majority of responders put this bottom of the list. That is to say, of all the various criteria for continuation of subsidised HTST, the denomination factor was placed lowest. In tough economic times where savings are to be looked for in every corner, then the Cabinet has a fundamental obligation to take heed of the views of the public, the message from which is fairly loud and clear – prioritise on the basis of distance, hazardous routes, SEN, etc, but where savings need to be made then denominational needs come last. Supporters of the current subsidy will point to a lower peak putting religious affiliation first. During our discussions on the subject I ventured that this was possibly due to a campaign run by the denominational schools which distorted the findings. This was denied by some who said there was no campaign. Well, I'm sorry but I am unrepentant on this point. There was a well-run campaign, who got their supporters to respond to the consultation in a way that IMO

has distorted this. I believe the Cabinet has seen through this distortion and has rightly perceived public opinion to be behind the view that other users are more deserving of any support that may be available.

The bringers of the call-in have made (para 4) the assertion that the Cabinet should have predicated its decision on the Clifton diocese boundary rather than the boundary of the authority for which it is actually responsible. In my opinion this is silly – the Cabinet is responsible for the tax-payers of B&NES, and has no moral or other responsibility for the church-goers of the Clifton diocese. In fact I am tempted to go further and suggest that the diocese might like to take direct responsibility for running its own HTST. I understand that this was an option offered to them but they declined to take it.

I am on these grounds opposed to the proposal to refer the decision back to Cabinet.'

Councillor Hartley said that this is quite an emotional issue and one of those issues where people have very strong views on either side of the argument. It was great to be at this meeting and share the views before the proposal was put. Councillor Hartley said that he has very strong belief in equality and everyone would want that every child has free transport to school, not just one particular group. Councillor Hartley said that earlier on someone mentioned the way the education was in year 1944, though then the United Kingdom was quite a different place than it is now. Councillor Hartley also said that he is also a big supporter of minorities but he doesn't believe that any child is less equal than the other. All the children are the same and should have same access to services and rights as they are all equal. It is grossly unfair that one group of children, based on their faith, have to access to subsidised or free transport scheme.

Councillor Hartley said that there were comments on the knock-on on other schools and one thing that upset Councillor Hartley was that someone said tonight that non-Catholic children will go to St Gregory's School. For Councillor Hartley that was a good thing, to see the schools with children of all faiths, which can mix together and learn from each other. Councillor Hartley said that he doesn't believe that the state should be funding organisations that prioritise one ideology over another. This is not an attack on religion or faith. Councillor Hartley informed that the Leader of the Council appointed him to take the lead with some of the Council's work with faith groups across the authority on how to make all faiths feel welcome.

Councillor Hartley concluded that he will not support the proposal from Councillor Hardman.

Councillor Hartley asked Councillor Hardman (mover) and David Williams (seconder) if they would accept the amendment to the motion, which is to refer the decision back to the Cabinet as requested in the original motion but also for the Cabinet to look at the funding sources for people of all faiths to go to their nearest faith school, as it is grossly unfair that children of one religion have access to their school because of their faith.

Councillor Hardman and David Williams rejected the proposed amendment from Councillor Hartley.

Councillor Jeremy Sparks said that he is an atheist and as such he looks at this issue from an outside perspective and it all comes down to rights and privileges. Councillor Sparks said that he didn't like when children are labelled as Catholic children or Muslim children. They should be, in his view, addressed as children of Catholic or Muslim parents. Councillor Sparks agreed with Councillor Hartley and said it is unfair to provide one particular group of children with these privileges and deny to everyone else. It should be either for everyone or for no-one.

Councillor David Veale said that things have changed since 1944 but that we should try to retain what we have in terms of the home to school transport.

Raymond Friel said that he was grateful for the investment that the Council has made so far in the St Gregory's School. Mr Friel commented that his point was about the impact that children that go to St Gregory's School will have on small school if they don't have the transport.

Penelope Restorick (parent) says that her family lives in Peasedown St John and that her children go to St Gregory's School. It is exactly the same distance from her house to Writhlington School as it is St Gregory's and if there was no transport to St Gregory's then they would qualify to paid transport, by the Council, to Writhlington School, which would cost more. Mrs Restorick also said that all village schools are oversubscribed.

Councillor Eleanor Jackson said that Mrs Restorick made a very good point. The Cabinet will be saving the money on the subsidy but it will have to spend more to get the North East Somerset children to their nearest catchment school if they don't go to St Gregory's School.

Councillor Batt commented that currently 25% of the pupils in St Gregory's School are non-Catholics.

Councillor Romero commented that there is very detailed information in the Cabinet report (page 4) explaining how much it would cost Council to transport various number of children to various schools.

The Chairman thanked everyone who participated in the debate at the meeting. The Chairman invited the Panel to vote on the motion from Councillor Hardman.

Voting: 6 in favour and 3 against. Motion CARRIED.

It was **RESOLVED:**

To **UPHOLD** the Call In for the reasons presented by the Lead Call In Member, Councillor Gabriel Batt and refer the decision to remove subsidies for denominational schools transport to be reconsidered by the Cabinet.

Councillor Paul Crossley informed the meeting that, subject to the availability of other Cabinet Members, he will be looking to set the special meeting of the Cabinet on Monday 20th May in order to consider the Call In.

The meeting ended at 6.10 pm

Chair(person)

Date Confirmed and Signed

Prepared by Democratic Services