

Home to School Transport

Cllr Liz Hardman

As a member of the Early Years, Children and Youth Panel I would like to ensure that the Cabinet is aware of the recommendations we made at our meeting January and re affirmed at our subsequent panel meeting on March

Our panel was asked by the then Cabinet member for Early years, children and Youth, Nathan Hartley to consider undertaking a review of Home To School Transport in order to make some financial reductions as part of the 2013/2014 budget setting process.

Bearing in mind the financial constraints facing the Council, our Panel recognised that doing nothing was not an option and that the school transport system needs to be more efficient.

A steering group was set up of which I was a member and we reported our findings to our panel in January..... The most controversial element was Home to School Denominational Transport and as the steering group, we put forward 4 recommendations which you will see are on pages 253 and 254 of your notes.

At our panel meeting in January.... almost unanimously, we recommended that the cabinet adopt recommendation 3c. This is where the denominational subsidy is kept but it is reduced. We confirmed this decision again at our March meeting.

The rationale behind keeping the subsidy is that many of the savings would be on paper only. Many of the pupils who currently are transported to Faith schools would need to be transported to other schools, free of charge, thus incurring extra costs for the Council.

As a ward councillor for Paulton, some of my residents attend Faith Schools such as St Gregorys in Bath. At the present time they and other pupils in surrounding villages have the opportunity to attend a faith school in Bath. If we remove the subsidy, we as a Council are in danger of being accused as being too Bath centred. We are not offering to pupils in North East Somerset the same choices as those offered to Bath residents

Finally the impact on Faith schools such as St Gregorys should the subsidy be removed would be enormous. You only have to look at the figures from when charging for transport was introduced in 2008. The numbers attending St Gregorys from outside Bath fell from 321 to 228. A drop of almost a 100 pupils. The numbers attending from the city of Bath rose in the same period from 436 to 542 pupils. Well over a 100 pupils. The impact on these numbers should the subsidy be removed would be even greater

To conclude, the majority of the Early Years , Children and Youth panel, having looked at all the evidence have made their decision that the denominational subsidy, should be retained, although reductions in the amount should be made. This would enable considerable savings to be made whilst at the same time giving parents from outside of Bath the choice of sending their child to a secondary Faith school. On my panel's behalf I put this recommendation to you