

Appendix 4

RESPONSES TO QUESTIONS AND COMMENTS RAISED AT THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, 20 JUNE 2011

The following are questions and comments raised by the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee on 20 June 2011 that are not covered elsewhere in the documents to Cabinet.

QUESTION/COMMENT	RESPONSE
1) Will siblings continue to be eligible for subsidised transport?	The current proposal does not include transitional protection for siblings.
2) The consultation was flawed as it did not give 28 days notice, specifically to St. Thomas More High School, Crewe.	<p>Statutory guidance states that 'Local authorities should consult widely on any changes to their local policies on school travel arrangements, with all interested parties included in the consultations. Consultations should last for at least 28 working days during term time. This period should be extended to take account of any school holidays that may occur during the period of consultation.'</p> <p>The Council ran a public consultation from 25 March to 20 May 2011. This is 57 days, 37 working days or 30 working days during term time for most schools (excluding INSET days). As INSET days are classed as working days, all schools received the 28 days consultation period. St Thomas More took 1 INSET day during this period.</p>
3) Parental choice should be paramount.	The Council supports parental choice through the admissions process. However, to subsidise transport for all parents to their choice of school (where this is not the nearest and eligible for free transport) would be cost prohibitive to the Council.
4) Does 685 pupils include those that go to St Nicholas High School	Yes, there are 685 Cheshire East children who are transported to a number of denominational schools both within and outside of the borough, including St Nicholas High School.
5) Proposals will increase traffic congestion	<p>Having consulted with colleagues in both Cheshire East Transport and Cheshire East Highways, it is accepted that the original proposals would have an impact on "school gate" congestion. Also, from a highways perspective, it is likely that there would be a moderate impact on local roads, but no significant impact on major highways. As the school already exists, there would be no planning issue to consider.</p> <p>However, the revised recommendations mitigate against the need for parents to move children who have already started their education and makes provision to work with</p>

	<p>schools, parents and local transport operators to seek to ensure that there is accessible, full cost recovery and sustainable travel available for pupils attending faith schools. Each school has adopted a school travel plan, along with associated funding from central government, and it would be for each school to decide how best to mitigate the impacts of travel to school arrangements.</p>
6) Have safe routes to school been considered.	<p>Yes, routes to school are regularly assessed to ensure that they are safe. Transport would be provided free of charge for a route deemed not safe following a formal assessment.</p>
7) The full cost of these proposals have not been presented as where existing local schools are full, the Council will have to transport to other local schools at a cost.	<p>The coordinated admission process implemented by the Local Authority provides parents and carers with an opportunity to state three school preferences ranked in order of priority. In the event that more than one school can be offered, a single offer is made for the preference ranked highest on the application form. However, where a school receives more preferences than it has places available in the relevant age group, the agreed oversubscription criteria is applied to determine priority for admission. The Local Authority gives priority for admission to its community and voluntary controlled schools to cared for children, children with medical and social needs which justifies admission to a particular school, to younger siblings of children attending the school in reception through to Year 5 and then to children resident within the school's designated catchment area. For secondary applications, the following criterion is based on attendance at a named feeder school. In all cases, applications that are not within one of these higher criteria will be considered on the basis of a straight line 'distance' measured from the home to school. The oversubscription criteria to other non-community or voluntary controlled schools is determined by the governing body of the school and can therefore vary. Some secondary foundation schools and Academies do not use catchment areas as a level of priority for admission but the majority do give priority to siblings and to children attending named feeder schools.</p> <p>For most schools, residency within the school's designated catchment area provides sufficient priority for a place to be offered through the coordinated application process. For admission in 2011, at allocation there was only Wilmslow High School that could not accommodate all the secondary aged children resident within its catchment area and for reception admissions, there were 18 of the 124 primary schools where this was an issue. Many places are declined by parents and carers through this process and these are then re-allocated to parents of</p>

	<p>children held on a school's waiting list, which is held in criteria order. As an example, the waiting list for Wilmslow High for September now holds the names of only 15 children, all of whom are in the 'distance' criterion compared with 106 at allocation, which included 30 children resident in the school's catchment area. In summary, based on the information available, should parents who would have attended a faith school make an application to their local school in the future, it is likely to be successful in the case of most schools, so long as this is their first preference and their application is submitted on time.</p> <p>Other local authorities who have already made changes to denominational transport have not reported a significant impact on admissions.</p>
8) The decision should be deferred until after Christmas so it can be given proper consideration.	<p>The booklet for prospective parents to choose their school for 2012-13 will be published by September 2011. If information relating to school transport arrangements is not included in this document, then there can be no changes implemented from 2012. This will significantly impact on the savings that can be achieved over the next few years.</p>
9) The finances are confusing in the paper.	<p>A summary of the issues around the variance in pupil numbers and savings has been included in the Cabinet paper. A broad sensitivity analysis has been added showing that changes in the numbers of children and other factors etc by 10% either way could increase or reduce the saving achieved by approximately £300k.</p> <p>The financial evaluation estimates the impact over the forthcoming years, including taking into account the numbers of children leaving in year 11 and year 6, the numbers of children from low income families likely to start in reception and year 7 and the loss of income as those children who pay for their transport leave school. The financial evaluation has not included an allowance for the impact of other factors such as children requiring statutory to their nearest local school in place of a denominational school. Until parents express their choices for their children the impact cannot be calculated or estimated. The impact of such issues will be accommodated with the sensitivity calculations included within the report.</p> <p>Following discussion at Children and Families Scrutiny Committee, the financial information has been further reviewed and verified. Whilst this shows some minor variations it continues to demonstrate that savings of approximately £1m, subject to a sensitivity of +/- £300k should be achieved.</p>

<p>10) Why doesn't the Council use the sustainable transport funding to support discretionary transport?</p>	<p>The sustainable transport funding may be an option for the Council to consider in introducing the phased approach to any changes. The funding is only for 2 years so would only be a temporary measure and this assumes that the sustainable school transport funding should be devoted only for denominational and post-16 travel, thereby disadvantaging all other schools.</p>
<p>11) Why doesn't the Council consider other transport alternatives?</p>	<p>Some of the measures suggested – such as reducing the costs of transport to the council by tendering transport – are already undertaken so savings through changes in this area are likely to be low. There is a proposal within the paper to work with schools, parents and local transport operators to explore local solutions.</p>