

SCHOOL AND COLLEGE TRANSPORT POLICIES CONSULTATION FINDINGS

1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides Cabinet with an analysis of the consultation completed in relation to the specific proposals for the changed School and Transport Policies, to be implemented in September 2014.
- 1.2 Extensive consultation has taken place in relation to this proposal, providing opportunities for all relevant individuals, groups and members of staff affected by this proposal to make their views and suggestions known.
- 1.3 The feedback contained within this report demonstrates that consultees would prefer all School and Transport Policies to remain unchanged.

2.0 CONSULTATION METHODOLOGY

- 2.1 The recommendation from officers to implement the proposed new policies followed an intensive period of consultation on a series of Council budget options, 'What Really Matters'.
- 2.2 As part of that process, a budget option was published which proposed the development of new transport policies to make significant budget savings while still providing transport support at a statutory level. This was supplemented by a report which outlined the rationale behind this option.
- 2.3 A series of events and meetings related to this option were held with interested groups across the borough, and everyone potentially affected by the option was provided with the opportunity to have their say. The consultation findings were reported to Cabinet on February 7 2013, who in turn included the option in the Budget Resolution on February 18 2013. This budget was approved by Council on March 5 2013, which led to the Director of Children's Services publishing a detailed report in April 2013 which outlined the proposed new policies and thereby commencing this final round of consultation.
- 2.4 This recommendation was published on the Council website, and sent to relevant individuals, in April 2013. The Director of Children's Services further commenced a series of meetings with interested groups, including the Wirral School's Forum, the Children's Trust and groups of Head teachers.
- 2.5 At these briefings, people attending were provided with detailed information as to why the option was proposed, and the rationale behind the individual changes which are being proposed. People were also provided with a report which contained detailed information on this rationale in plain English.
- 2.6 People at the events were provided the opportunity to ask questions of the Director and other senior officers, and were also provided with questionnaires in order to provide their feedback at any point throughout the 90 day consultation. These questionnaires, and reports, were provided to everyone potentially affected by the budget option, irrespective of whether they attended the consultation event.

3.0 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

3.1 Over 600 people completed a consultation questionnaire in relation to this proposal. These responses came from a range of sources, including teachers, governors, students and parents. The full breakdown of who responded is provided below.

Are you?	%	Count
A student currently receiving transport support	6.1%	34
A parent/carer of a pupil currently receiving transport support	41.0%	229
A parent/carer of a pupil NOT currently receiving transport support	12.9%	72
An employee or governor of a special school	7.5%	42
An employee or governor of a mainstream school	8.6%	48
An employee or governor of a further education establishment	3.8%	21
Other (please describe your connection to the consultation):	20.2%	113
Other (please specify)	129	
answered question	559	
skipped question	48	

3.2 Where people have stated 'other' in response to this question they primarily stated they were governors, students not receiving transport or otherwise employed in services or roles related to this service. The responses received were predominantly from female consultees, 68.5%, and came from a broad range of age groups. The age breakdown of the response can be shown in the table below.

Your age:	%	Count
Under 16	5.4%	25
16-24	7.3%	34
25-44	37.6%	174
45-64	39.1%	181
65+	5.0%	23
Prefer not to say	5.6%	26
answered question		463
skipped question		144

3.3 The consultation highlighted specifically the changes to the proposed new policies and asked consultees to identify if they supported the changes. The results of these questions are provided in the three tables below.

I support the removal of free denominational transport.	%	Count
I agree	10.6%	63
I neither agree nor disagree	6.1%	36
I disagree	83.3%	493
answered question		592
skipped question		15

I support the change in assessment for eligibility for access to free transport for children with special educational needs.	%	Count
I agree	7.8%	46
I neither agree nor disagree	8.0%	47
I disagree	84.3%	498
<i>answered question</i>		591
<i>skipped question</i>		16

I support the removal of free post 16 transport provision.	%	Count
I agree	5.2%	31
I neither agree nor disagree	6.9%	41
I disagree	87.8%	520
<i>answered question</i>		592
<i>skipped question</i>		15

- 3.4 Specific responses received from key stakeholders included: Wirral Association for Special School Headteachers, The Diocese of Shrewsbury, The Chairs of Governors of Sacred Heart Catholic Primary School, St Marys Catholic College, St John Plessington Catholic College, Upton Hall School, St Anselms College and Foxfield School. Representation was also made from Our Lady of Pity Catholic Primary School, Birkenhead Sixth Form, Wirral Hospital School and Councillor John Hale. A number of specific responses are included below:

Wirral Special Schools Headteachers Association (WISPHA)

"We have concern that the withdrawal of transport for pupils at the age of 16 will:

1. dramatically affect pupils' attendance at school
2. cause more special schools who have previously had excellent Ofsted inspections to be down graded as a result of a lower level of attendance
3. put far more pressure on vulnerable families especially those living in poverty who do not have access to a car to get their child to school
4. place unrealistic expectations on some pupils and their families where the pupil's needs are such that they could not travel to school on public transport.
5. Increase the likelihood of pupils with SEN becoming NEET above the age of 16
6. Increase the demands on ESW time as schools ask that service to address more non attendance issues.
7. create issues where families have a number of children attending different schools or the same school e.g. the younger pupil gets transport to a school but their older sibling does not; families may be unable to take their child to a special school if they have to wait for a transport bus to come and collect their other child.

We recommend that more work is done in Wirral on independent travel training for pupils with SEND.

We also recommend that transport is not withdrawn from any pupil who attends a special school or mainstream SEN base. This should be recognition of their

additional needs. If they are able to attend a mainstream school then the child's needs should be assessed as it is likely to indicate that transport is unnecessary."

Birkenhead Sixth Form College

Birkenhead Sixth Form College is particularly concerned that the removal of free transport may have considerable implications for students with learning difficulties and disabilities(LDD). Our concerns are that:

1. all students should have the freedom of choice as to which Post 16 institution they attend. For students with LDD travelling can be a major barrier. If all transport costs are taken away then the choice of institution / programme of study may be compromised for a Post 16 student with LDD needs.
2. Students that have LDD may not be able to overcome the initial difficulties of travelling to a Post 16 institution, especially if they are moving to a new institution. Therefore there is a danger that the student may take the decision to stay at home and not pursue his/her education and ultimately become a NEET figure. This has greater cost implications in the longer term and is certainly not in the interests of the individual student.
3. For students with LDD transport can be a barrier to progressing to the next stage unlike students who do not have such issues. Therefore the utmost should be done to ensure that such students have equality of access and so we should be working towards ensuring any barriers are removed and not erecting them.

If the assessment of students with LDD as to whether they require free or reduced cost training is to be reviewed, the College would urge that the assessment should be objective, have clear criteria but take into account individual needs and that it should be undertaken in consultation with the relevant Post 16 provider.

Additionally the College would suggest that although some students will require assistance with transport throughout their post 16 studies there is the possibility of reducing the dependence on this for some students as they progress through their programme. We would ask that strong consideration is given to providing funding support for travel training. This would ultimately reduce expenditure on transport costs but more importantly it would enable more young people to become independent travellers and prepare them for entering a working environment.

I would also ask for consideration for some subsidy for transport to be given to those students whose parents are on a low income. It is only right that students choice of where to study should not be impeded because of financial difficulties. In fact there should be a greater emphasis on raising the aspirations and widening the horizons of those students from families where there are financial difficulties. Bursary funding is made available to students on low income and can be used to help with transport costs but it should be remembered that bursary funding is limited and not all students have access to the higher levels. The amount of bursary funding awarded by government to institutions is not sufficient to cover all needs and certainly not all transport costs for students from low income families. This is only going to be exacerbated further as the compulsory staying on age is raised to 18. In areas where there are high levels of deprivation, thought and support has to be given to how we ensure that these students that have financial difficulties have the same access to all Post 16 provision and that barriers to them progressing in education are removed.

Upton Hall Chair of Governors

"As Chair of Governors of Upton Hall School FCJ, I write to formally lodge my strongest objection to the proposals to remove entitlement to transport support for pupils enrolling at Catholic schools from September 2014. Parents sending their children to the nearest Catholic school deserve to maintain their existing rights to transport support and should not have an additional financial burden placed upon them.

Under these proposals children accessing their nearest Community schools, Academies and Church of England Controlled schools will continue with their present support whilst those looking to attend this Catholic school may well be penalised. These same parents already create additional savings for education in Wirral via their contributions to building and maintenance costs and as tax and rate payers should be entitled to retain their existing transport support.

The proposals threaten long established practices and arrangements in Wirral to provide transport support for eligible parents seeking a Catholic education for their children. Such well established practices should not be disturbed and parents deserve the opportunity to choose a school or college in accordance with their religious convictions.

In addition, any change if introduced will make it harder for parents, particularly those just above the income thresholds for transport support or families with two or more children to access popular and successful Catholic schools in the Authority. This runs counter to Government policy on extending choice for parents and preventing transport costs from being a barrier to educational choice.

I recognise the financial constraints upon the Authority but do not understand why the Authority seeks to undermine its Catholic schools which are making such a positive contribution to standards of education, community service, diversity of choice and social cohesion in Wirral.

When the Authority introduced similar proposals as recently as 2008 they were withdrawn as a result of the opposition against them and the arguments presented at that time. Those arguments are equally valid in 2013 and the current proposals should also be withdrawn. Please ensure that my views are made available to elected members as is my full backing for the submission put forward by the Diocese of Shrewsbury in opposition to any changes to the school transport policy. Yours sincerely Professor James Keaton MBE BSc LL.D, Chair of Governors
(transcribed from letter sent, received 17th May 2013)"

We also recommend that transport is not withdrawn from any pupil who attends a special school or mainstream SEN base. This should be recognition of their additional needs. If they are able to attend a mainstream school then the child's needs should be assessed as it is likely to indicate that transport is unnecessary."

Our Lady of Pity unsigned

"Our Lady of Pity school provides education for 3 to 11 years with children from Meols, Hoylake and West Kirby using school buses from the age of 5 to 11. For children who live in these areas there is no feasible way they could walk or cycle to school each day. Most would access the Greasby school site via Heron Road, a very busy commuter route with no pavement facility the entire length of the road

through to Greasby. The loss of the buses would see an extremely high increase in the number of parents/carers driving their children to school each day. The site of OLOP in Greasby means access is particularly difficult being at the end of a residential cul-de-sac whilst sandwiched between Greasby Infants and Greasby Juniors schools and all the parents and children attending both of those sites on a daily basis. I know that a number of local residents already complain about the cars that come to take children to school each day at OLOP, the loss of the buses would only exacerbate this issue.

Last but not least this policy will clearly discriminate against Catholic families and children in west Wirral of which OLOP is the only Catholic school serving those areas of Hoylake, Meols and West Kirby."

St Anselm's College Chair of Governors

The Director of Education, As a member of the Wirral Schools Forum I have previously voiced my concerns over this issue and now wish to confirm in this e mail my views as Chairman of Governors at St. Anselm's College. The Headmaster and Governors do understand the financial difficulties faced by the Local Authority and sympathise with the decisions having to be made regarding savings. This was a major issue many years ago when similar savings were proposed. Thankfully at that time the strong views of parents were taken into account and the proposals dropped. I was at that time a parent with a leading role in changing the decision of the then Local Authority and as a consequence became a Local Councillor. Today's problems are similar and again appear to discriminate against (in our case) boys choosing a Catholic Education. The fact that some, but not all, may pass a Catholic School to attend St. Anselm's is incidental as those who choose St. Anselm's, and their parents, believe that the College provides an all round education which meets their needs. As you must be aware many boys, not of the Catholic Religion also opt for St. Anselm's for a number of reasons. Are they to be discriminated against also? St. Anselm's is a thriving School with a glowing reputation and a warm and valued relationship with the Education Authority. I must point, however, that these proposals should they be enacted could have a devastating effect on the future of the well-being of the College as currently 25% of our students receive free bus passes. It appears to me that while all the Wirral Schools may be affected, St. Anselm's, because of its outstanding reputation for offering all round educational excellence to boys throughout Wirral and beyond will be handicapped more than any others. This really cannot and should not be allowed to happen. I urge the Education Authority, therefore, as you did thirty years ago to think again and reject this proposal in its present form.

Brian Cummings MBE Chairman of Governors.

St John Plessington Chair of Governors

"As Chair Of Governors at a Catholic Secondary School, I feel I, and all our governors, have a responsibility towards pupils and their parents, in respect of the matter of home to school transport.

Parents choose St John Plessington Catholic College, when deciding on the best secondary school for their children, for its exceptional academic performance as well as for its Christian ethos and pastoral care. We are told that parental choice is held in high regard.

It is well known that our entry cohort is drawn from wide and diverse socio-economic areas in the Borough of Wirral, many of our pupils coming from the most deprived parts of the peninsula. We believe that these children deserve the best we can offer them. On being awarded the TES Secondary School of the Year award, in 2010, the citation commended the school for its support for underprivileged children. Free transport to and from the school of choice has given parents freedom from concern about the cost of travel for their children. To remove this benefit would have serious consequences, for the school as well as, importantly, for many of the children of Wirral.

We realise that savings must be made, but we would ask you to retain the status quo and find savings elsewhere."

Foxfield School Chair of Governors

"At Foxfield we have a relatively large post -16 group, of whom only a select few are able to use public transport. We have a proportion of autistic and other pupils with ""challenging behaviour"" in the post-16 group who could not under any circumstances use public transport without putting themselves and/or the wider public at risk.

There is no realistic alternative for pupils such as Foxfield's post 16 group other than the present system of them being bussed into school with escorts, especially when you consider they come from virtually the whole of Wirral. Public transport is simply not an option, regardless of budgetary requirements.

If the proposal of stopping post 16 transport for special schools is implemented, I can foresee a lot of pupils finishing school prematurely, because of an inability to attend.

Keith Martingell
Chair of Governors Foxfield School"

"DIOCESE OF SHREWSBURY EDUCATION SERVICE

DIOCESAN COMMENTARY: CONSULTATION ON PROPOSALS BY WIRRAL BOROUGH COUNCIL FOR CHANGES TO HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

The Diocese of Shrewsbury is very concerned that Wirral Council is once again considering proposals to change its policy of transport support for pupils accessing denominational schools. The Diocese believes the parents choosing such should have transport support to the nearest denominational school in just the same way as those accessing the nearest Community, Academy or Foundation school. As recently as 2008 the Council withdrew proposals to remove transport support based upon oppositions to the proposed policy change and the arguments presented. Those arguments are equally valid in 2013 and there is a strong case against ending the entitlement to support not only legally and in principle but because the proposal runs contrary to nationally and locally agreed policies and lacks clarity.

1. Looking first to both principle and law, the Diocese would identify consideration of the following:

1.1 Assistance with travel costs to denominational schools was enshrined within Section 55 of the 1944 Education Act. It was reinforced in Schedule 19, paragraph 15 of the 1993 Education Act and Section 509 of the 1996 Education Act. The latter states at 509(1) that “A Local Education Authority shall make such arrangements for the provision of transport and otherwise as they consider necessary, or as the Secretary of State may direct, for the purpose of facilitating the attendance of persons receiving education.” Section 509(4) then looks to enlarge on the responsibilities of the Local Authority ... “In considering whether they are required by subsection (1) to make arrangements in relation to a particular person, a Local Education Authority shall have regard (amongst other things) –

(a) to the age of the person and the nature of the route, or alternative routes, which he could reasonably be expected to take; and

(b) to any wish of his parent for him to be provided with education at a school or institution in which the religious education provided is that of the religion or denomination to which his parent adheres.”

This requires any school transport which is provided by a Local Authority because it is ‘necessary’, to be so provided, free of charge. In 2008 the Council determined that the provision of free transport under 509(4)(b) was deemed as necessary in Wirral Borough and financial penalties should not be imposed on parents seeking such an education.

1.2 The 2006 Education and Inspections Bill specifically aimed to reduce the impact of transport as a barrier to parents exercising their education preferences and also improved and extended the offer of free transport originally set out in the 1944 Education Act. As a result the Government is funding Local Authorities to provide secondary age pupils from low-income families with transport to the nearest school preferred on grounds of religion or belief where this is between 2 and 15 miles from the pupil’s home.

1.3 The maintenance of support for transport where it currently exists is also reinforced via conventions developed by the United Nations on Human Rights (1948), Civil and Political Rights (1996) and the Rights of the Child (1989). All three have been ratified by the UK Government in 1951, 1976 and 1991 respectively. The European Convention on Human Rights, incorporated into UK Law in 1998, guarantees that the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms to education shall be secured without discrimination on religious grounds.

1.4 If the proposals are implemented then children accessing their nearest Community school, Controlled C.E. School, Foundation school or Academy will continue with their present support whilst those looking to the nearest Catholic school may well be penalised and so subject to discrimination. Add to this that the parents who will be most heavily hit in Catholic schools are likely to be those just over the income thresholds and may well find expression of their preferences a financial impossibility especially in these difficult economic times. This discriminates against such parents on both religious and socio-economic grounds.

1.5 The ending of transport entitlement will also lead to the Authority disrupting well established practices and arrangements. The Diocese would suggest that withdrawal from these arrangements is not acceptable. This view has been echoed by successive Secretaries of State who have expressed the hope that Authorities will continue to think it right not to disturb well established practices, some of which have been associated with local agreements or understandings about the siting of Catholic schools. Most recently the Authority’s closure of St Benedict’s Catholic

Secondary School with the consent of the Diocese was undertaken on the understanding that transport support would be available to enable pupils to attend alternative Catholic secondary schools.

1.6 The Council's documentation refers to the potential impact of the changes including the educational attainment of students, their life chances, OFSTED inspections and DfE assessments. No evaluation of this impact has been made available but I am certain that all parties concerned would not wish to see changes in school transport which might disrupt the excellent educational standards achieved by pupils in Catholic schools. Any proposals that would lead parents to withdraw their children from or decline to send their children to a Catholic school on the grounds of the cost of transport only to have them transported at the Council's expense to the nearest Community school that may be a similar or further distance away is educationally and economically perverse and discriminatory.

1.7 Conclusion

Restrictions on transport provision to Catholic schools runs contrary to the thrust of legal obligations and the principles therein plus long standing practices in Wirral so the conclusion is that a reasonable Local Authority properly directing itself as to its legal obligations and the principles of public service should find it necessary to continue the relevant free or subsidised transport in order to facilitate attendance at Catholic schools. On an associated legal point it is worth noting the provisions of the Education Act 1996 section 444. Under this section a parent commits an offence if his child, being of compulsory school age and registered at a school, fails to attend regularly at that school. The parent however has a defence to that charge under sub-section (4), if, amongst other things:

- (a) ... the school at which the child is a registered pupil is not within walking distance of the child's home, and
- (b) ... no suitable arrangements have been made by the Local Education Authority for ...
- (c) his transport to and from school.

2. Other Nationally Agreed Policies. The Diocese suggests that the ending of entitlement contradicts:

2.1 The promotion of educational diversity to enhance the range of preferences available to parents. For many of the latter the lack of transport support to Catholic schools will necessarily diminish that range.

2.2 Government policy to generate a modal shift from car to bus. It is estimated that 20% of morning rush hour traffic is attributable to the school run. For children entering denominational schools in the future and lacking transport support to those schools the outcome could be an unacceptable increase in car use, with increased parking problems at schools effectively undermining the Council's environmental objectives. The removal of buses as mass transport alternatives to car use will have a significant impact on CO2 emissions and result in an increase in the carbon footprint of Wirral Council. This runs entirely counter to the Council's carbon reduction aims and its Climate Change Strategy. The Council's own documentation identifies potential increased car usage. This may also be accompanied by increases in the number of children walking longer distances to school resulting in more accidents or safeguarding concerns from parents. No evaluation of the environmental and safety impact of the policy change has been published and no definitive proposals have been presented or costings given for any strategies being

considered by the Council that are intended to secure pupils' safety or minimise the environmental impact of any policy change.

3. Lack of Clarity

3.1 Catholic schools serve individual parishes or groups of parishes so if a Baptised Catholic pupil accesses their designated Parish School as previously agreed between the Council and the Diocesan Authority has that not been defined as their nearest suitable school? The nearest non Catholic schools within the Authority for many Catholic families will not be offering Collective Worship and Religious Education in accordance with the teachings, doctrines, disciplines and norms of the Roman Catholic Church and may not therefore be deemed as the nearest suitable school.

3.2 For admissions in 2014/15 Admissions Authorities completed consultations on March 1st 2013 and had to determine policies by April 15th 2013. These are statutory processes and were in part predicated on the continuing support for transport provision to denominational schools. These processes should not be set aside and any potential changes to that support should wait for their introduction until September 2015.

3.3 The Council document 'TRANSPORT POLICIES FOR CHILDREN AND ADULTS' refers to a budget saving of £2,000,000 over 6 years for home to school transport. Later in the same document the removal of discretionary denominational transport is to save £180,000 phased over six years. It is unclear how the estimated savings on removing denominational transport contribute to the £2,000,000 or whether the estimated saving on £180,000 is the annual saving in year 6. We seek assurances that respondents and elected members will be advised of the relevant sums. Leaving aside for the moment uncertainties as to the savings involved and looking to the options instanced for future denominational transport the proposal is to withdraw support save for students from low income families. Though not apparent in the documentation the Diocese assumes that the Authority will still cover the costs of transport to denominational schools for children deemed as vulnerable and hard to place:

- Pupils permanently excluded from other schools
- Children who have been out of education for longer than one school term and where attempts at 'normal' admission have so far failed
- Children of registered refugees and asylum seekers where previous attempts through 'normal' admissions have failed
- Children of military personnel
- Children returning from secure units or otherwise having serious offending issues.
- Catholic children with a statement of special educational need.

Added to these are pupils for whom a denominational school is their closest school and over the statutory distance from their home. Taken together the cost of exemptions and their administration may well offset any savings, particularly when added to these are those expenses arising from appeals by parents against the decision to withhold transport support. The Local Authority is under a duty to consider each appeal on its facts and therefore cannot fetter its discretion by stating that it has a blanket policy that it will not provide transport in certain cases e.g. to a particular school. In essence the balance of financial advantage may lie with leaving the present arrangements undisturbed.

3.4 The provision of schools by the Diocese of Shrewsbury has saved the Authority millions of pounds and that parents at Catholic schools are still heavily subsidising the public purse by a 10% contribution to building and repair costs in those schools. These same parents, as tax and rate payers, are also contributing to Wirral Borough's school education budget and if additional charges were introduced or financial support was to be withdrawn they will continue to do this and subsidise the transport of pupils to many schools and Academies whilst being denied adequate transport support to their nearest Catholic school. An outcome which is contrary to natural justice and clearly undermines the concept of 'free' Catholic education.

3.5 In reacting to the proposal the Diocese would have expected to see some projections from the Authority as to the likely impact on admissions to Catholic schools within the consultation documentation. The complete lack of such leaves decision makers with limited evidence to proceed even if not already convinced to resist any changes in principle. The impact on Catholic Schools will be very disruptive and destabilising if a number of parents determine that they can no longer afford to send all their Catholic children to the nearest suitable Catholic school. The proposed changes in policy may have the unintended consequence of destabilising very effective educational institutions and disrupting the education of the students they serve.

4. Consultation

4.1 The Council's documents offer an estimate of potential savings following the withdrawal of discretionary travel support but it is not clear if these are 'final' annual savings. Therefore it is not possible for respondents to calculate potential savings with any accuracy if support is withdrawn in respect of denominational education. The letter to parents dated 16 April provides no information in this respect.

4.2 Any action to change transport policy in the way envisaged is a "key decision" as per the regulations under the Local Government Act 2000. Taking the previous points together the Diocese again anticipates that parents would have had the opportunity to question elected members on the proposal previous to any decision on its enactment.

4.3 The consultation exercise makes no reference to the government guidance in respect of changes to home to school travel and transport and the good practice contained therein. The information on appeals procedures is inadequate when compared with this guidance. It is not clear as to whether the statements under the Budget Option document heading 'Can I appeal against the proposed changes?' refer to the policy change itself or the way in which the policy has decided a parental application. If they refer to the latter it is not sufficient to simply state that concerns may be raised with the Director of Children's Services.

4.4 No proposals have been brought forward to introduce charging for subsidised transport and no explanation has been offered as to why this option has not been considered.

4.5 When Wirral Council brought forward proposals to change its school transport policy in 2008 it withdrew them due to the weight of opposition from many sources including Wirral's Admissions Forum. The latter passed without dissent a resolution that "The Admissions Forum contend that the proposals to end transport support to denominational schools are unjust and unacceptable and should be

withdrawn.” If it were possible to consult the Forum it is our belief that a similar resolution would be forthcoming.

4.6 The Council’s 2008 proposals to change school transport policy were opposed by Wirral’s SACRE. Under the chairmanship of Canon Paul Robinson of St Hilary’s Church of England Parish in Wallasey the SACRE listed the following amongst seven objections to the Council’s proposals:

- “SACRE consider the admissions provisions of the 1996 and 2006 Acts are intended to ensure that no child is disadvantaged by transport costs from attending the nearest faith high school of their choice. The proposed policy will create that disadvantage.
- SACRE consider that those parents disadvantaged by any changes to the transport policy would find it difficult for their children to be taught RE as they would wish and that their children would be disadvantaged by being unable to attend Collective Worship according to their faith.

The Diocese believes that had the Council undertaken consultation with SACRE similar arguments and objections to its proposals would have been put forward.

5. Impact on Families

5.1 It is those families with an income just high enough to ensure they are not eligible for the statutory subsidies that will be most badly affected by the withdrawal of support for home to school transport. These are often hardworking families on low incomes, and the prospect of having to find several hundred of pounds in order to enable their children to travel to their school would cripple them financially.

5.2. Families with two or more children attending Catholic schools will be particularly hard hit by the proposed changes. If the proposed policy changes are implemented the Council should exercise the limited discretion it intends to maintain in respect of such families to provide transport.

5.3. Changes to the school transport policy will lead to increased numbers of Catholic Primary School pupils transferring at age 11 to the nearest Community School or Academy due to the lack of affordable transport to enable them to attend the nearest Catholic Secondary School. Increased numbers of pupils from Community or Controlled Primary Schools may transfer at age 11 to local Catholic Secondary Schools. The governing bodies of Catholic Schools will exercise their legal responsibility to determine their holiday dates and may be expected to continue to align their spring term and holiday dates with the Easter period. As a result an increasing number of families will find that their children attending primary and secondary schools in Wirral will have different holiday dates. This is not recognised within the school transport consultation documentation. The Diocese suggests that it behoves the Council to take this factor into account when making its decisions and to alert all parents likely to be affected of the potential disruptive effect on family life if these school transport proposals are implemented.

Conclusion

For the reasons outlined here the Diocese of Shrewsbury and indeed the whole community served by Catholic schools within the Diocese likely to be affected by these proposals ask that the Council withdraws any proposal to penalise parents for seeking places at schools for their children on the grounds of religion or belief. The proposal could put at risk the value of Catholic schools to the diversity, choice and quality of provision in Wirral and the Diocese strongly encourages the Local

Authority not to disturb the existing well established arrangements and not to proceed with changes to its home to school transport policy.

As per its remit the Diocese has largely advanced its arguments on behalf of those schools which fall to the responsibilities of the Bishop of Shrewsbury but equally feels that the case presented applies with the same force to parents seeking places in all denominational schools for their children.

A Scott, May 2013"

4.0 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 It is clear from the consultation questionnaire findings, and the group responses received from various groups, that consultees would prefer transport policies to remain unchanged.