

| | |
|---------------|---|
| Meeting | Decision Session - Cabinet Member for Education, Children and Young People's Services |
| Date | 15 January 2014 |
| Present | Councillor Looker (Cabinet Member) |
| In Attendance | Councillors Brooks and Gillies |

5. Declarations of Interest

The Cabinet Member was asked to declare any personal interests not included on the Register of Interests, any prejudicial interests or any disclosable pecuniary interests she may have in the business on the agenda. None were declared.

6. Minutes

Resolved: That the minutes of the Decision Session held on 10 July 2013 be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the end time of the meeting being amended to read 4.00pm.

7. Public Participation/Other Speakers

There were thirteen registrations to speak under the Council's Public Participation Scheme and two Members of Council had also requested to speak. All of the registrations related to agenda item 5 (Review of Home to School Transport Policy – Denominational Schools) – minute 9 refers.

Councillor Gillies spoke of the implications for Manor CE Academy if changes to the policy were to be implemented. He stated that his comments were also endorsed by Councillor Watt who served a ward which would also be affected by the proposals. Councillor Gillies questioned the fairness of implementing changes when pupils were part way through their education at the school and suggested that some parents would not be able to afford the costs involved. Councillor Gillies also stated that consultation should take place at an appropriate time

but that it was wrong to impose this burden on parents who already had children attending the school.

Councillor Brooks stated that she had been a member of the scrutiny committee that had considered the issue of home to school transport and that the committee had recommended that the changes be phased in. She drew attention to the timing of the proposals and the difficulties that would arise for pupils who were part way through GCSE courses or who were making decisions regarding options. She stated that some of the journeys to the school were very awkward. Parents had been given an assurance that the arrangements that were in place for children already at the school were safe and the council had a duty to honour this.

Councillor Looker stated that she had also received written representation from Councillor Reid who had chaired the scrutiny committee which had considered this matter.

Ms Jennie Clark stated that she appreciated that the decision that was being made at the meeting was whether or not to instigate consultation but she was unclear as to the proposed length of the consultation. She suggested that the consultation was likely to be time consuming and costly. She gave examples of the impact that the proposals would have on pupils living in Woodthorpe or Hessay. She explained how the proposals would lengthen the school day by 90 minutes and would increase the number of parents who transported their children to school by car. Ms Clark requested that the proposals not be implemented.

Ms Christine Vaughan stated that she had a daughter in Year 8 at Manor CE Academy and she explained the reasons why she had chosen to send her to the school. She stated that her daughter was very worried about the proposals and was concerned about the journey and her safety. The security risk was increased because the school was looking to provide iPads to all pupils. Ms Vaughan stated that she would have to take her daughter to and from school as public transport was not available. She was, however, aware of other parents who did not have transport and who were looking to move a child who was taking their GCSE courses. Ms Vaughan stated that she felt strongly about the retrospective nature of the decision as this was unfair.

Mr Brian Crosby, Principal of Manor CE Academy, stated that he appreciated that the Local Authority had to make savings but that it would not be possible for the school to meet the costs instead of the Local Authority. The cost to the school would be around £100k, which was equivalent to the costs of employing three members of staff. If the proposals were to be introduced there would be an increase in the number of parents who transported their child to school by car and this would increase traffic on the ring road and would be contrary to the city's Green Plan. Mr Crosby stated that faith schools had not been included in the statutory legislation regarding home to school transport but pointed out that the school admitted 45% of pupils on community rather than faith grounds. He stated that pupils within the Priority Action Zone would not receive assistance with home to school transport even though they had not chosen the school on the grounds of faith. When the new school had been built it had been required to contribute £250,000 for a dedicated bus lane which was used by First York. If the proposals were to be implemented it would mean that the school would not have any use of the bus lane for which it had been required to make a financial contribution. Mr Crosby stated that the proposals would have a profound impact on faith schools. The schools had previously worked with the Local Authority to achieve a range of savings but urged that the proposed consultation not proceed and that a compromise be found. Mr Crosby stated that everyone wanted children to have safe travel to school.

Mrs Jane Conway, Headteacher of St Wilfrid's RC Primary School, stated that her school was the only primary school to be affected by the proposals. She stated that she understood the need for the Local Authority to make savings but that parents were being ambushed. Some parents would move their children to another school and this would be detrimental both academically and socially. 44 children currently used the bus service and it was estimated that at least a quarter of these were from families with low income. Mrs Conway stressed the importance of primary education and stated that she was also concerned that, should some parents decide to move their child to another school, other local schools may not have places available. She requested that the proposal not be taken forward.

Dominic Paisley, Chair of Governors of St Wilfrid's RC Primary School, stated that the points that he had wished to make had been covered by Mrs Conway.

Ms Helen Lawrie stated that she had a child who attended Manor CE Academy. She drew attention to the problems that would be created by those who used the M2 route which served the rural villages. She stated that the proposals would result in earlier starts for the children and very difficult journeys involving trains, buses and walking. This would be made more difficult by future cuts to rural transport. Ms Lawrie gave details of an incident that had recently taken place in Beckfield Lane and stated that children should be able to travel to school without stress. She stated that Manor CE Academy was a community school and that if she decided to transfer her child to York High School the Local Authority would be responsible for providing transport. She also drew attention to other factors that should be considered, including the increase in the number of cars on the road and the major problems that the proposals would cause for parents who had work commitments. She stated that she had accepted a place for her child at the school on the basis that there would be transport provided. Ms Lawrie stated that she was also concerned that only a week's notice of the meeting had been provided.

Mrs Abraham-Silas stated that she had two children who attended Manor CE Academy. She explained how the proposals would affect her family, including the longer journey times, issues in respect of safety, the financial implications and the impact that it would have on family life. She stated that parents had peace of mind if their children travelled with their friends on the bus as they knew that their child was safe.

Ms Heather Morris stated that she lived in Woodthorpe and had two children who attended Manor CE Academy. One of the children currently received free transport. When her youngest child started at the school the family had been aware that they would have to pay for transport but had believed that they would be able to pay to use the school bus. To use the public bus service would necessitate walking through Foxwood in the dark. The public bus service was also unreliable and, unlike school buses, the public buses did not have seatbelts. Ms Morris suggested that consideration be given to offering places on the school buses to pupils who lived less than three miles away. By charging them to use the buses, some of the costs involved could be recouped. Ms Morris stated that she would rather pay for such provision as she placed safety above financial considerations.

Mr Brian Williams stated that he had a daughter in Year 9 of Manor CE Academy and that he lived in Dringhouses. He stated that the choice of school had been made on faith grounds and on the basis of the transport that was available to and from the school. He stated that if the proposals were to be implemented there would be no transport to denominational schools but that transport would be provided to community schools such as Tadcaster Grammar School. He gave details of his daughter's current travel arrangements and explained that the removal of the school bus would make it necessary for her to use two different buses and would mean that she was away from home for ten hours each day. She was also expected to carry school equipment. Mr Williams expressed concern that the proposals would cause fatigue and could impact on school attendance and performance. He stated that there was no safe crossing route and that it would be difficult to take his daughter to school by car because of work commitments. The withdrawal of the 3C service would be short-sighted and would pose significant risk to children. He also believed that the proposals were discriminatory as they only affected denominational schools.

Mr Bill Scriven, Headteacher of All Saints RC School, stated that the voluntary schools in York worked closely with the Local Authority and had a good relationship based on trust and integrity. Whilst he appreciated that decisions regarding budget savings were not easy, it was important that the work to achieve this was done in open and transparent way. In the past, changes had been implemented in a phased way to mitigate their impact, for example decisions taken by the Schools Forum. When the changes to home to school transport provision had been implemented it had been agreed to introduce this in a phased manner. The situation had not changed, as it had been known at the time that savings would have to be made. It would not be ethical to renege on the agreement to implement the changes in a phased way. At the time children were baptised as Catholics, parents made a commitment to bring their children up in the Catholic faith; this included educating them at a Catholic school. Mr Scriven stated that it would be damaging to take the proposals to the consultation stage.

Ms Dawn Parker stated that there was only one bus from Skelton and that this only covered a mile of the journey to her child's school. This would mean that her child had a long and

dangerous walk. Ms Parker stated that she did not have a car and also had a child at primary school to take into account. There had been accidents in the past. Ms Parker asked why discrimination was taking place based on faith.

Mr Andrew Robinson stated that he had a son in Year 7 at Manor CE Academy. He stated that the safeguarding of young children was being put at risk by the proposals. Children, equipped with iPads and mobile phones, would have to make the journey into town without being able to use the school bus. Mr Robinson stated that, although he appreciated the need to control costs, the priority had to be children's safety.

Mr David Judson, Vice-Chair of Governors of Manor CE Academy, stated that the proposals had caused a tremendous strength of feeling amongst parents. Understanding and trust between the school and the Local Authority was very important. When the decision had been taken to withdraw home to school transport for Year 7 pupils, the school and parents had been unhappy but had understood that a phased approach was being taken. Had they known that the decision was only the start and that changes would be implemented affecting pupils already attending the school, the reaction would have been very different. Mr Judson stated that the report was deficient in the way it addressed safety. If implemented, the proposals would also be contrary to the Get York Moving strategy. Mr Judson suggested that the savings proposals in the report may also be overstated. He commented that the service bus was already overcrowded and unreliable and that it was unlikely that an additional service bus would be provided. Mr Judson, referring to the income generated from the Lendal Bridge trial, suggested that the outcome of that trial be awaited before decisions were made in respect of home to school transport.

The Cabinet Member thanked the speakers for their contribution and stated that their views would be given due consideration.

8. Review of Home to School/College Transport Policy (16-25 year olds - Post Maintained)

The Cabinet Member considered a report that detailed proposals to consult on changes to the Local Authority's home to school/college post maintained transport policy from September 2014. This was in response to the introduction of

the single Education, Health and Care plan (for ages 0-25) alongside the new 0-25 Special Educational Needs Code of Practice and Children and Families Bill.

Officers advised that the reference to “high needs” should be removed from the report.

It was noted that publication of the revised SEN Code of Practice and accompanying guidance were still awaited. Although it was possible that they could be published in March 2014, this could not be guaranteed.

The Cabinet Member considered the options set out in paragraph 8 of the report. She stated that, in view of the possibility that the revised SEN Code of Practice and accompanying guidance could be published in the near future, she was minded to defer the start of the consultation. However, if the revised SEN Code of Practice had not been published by 1 April 2014, it would be necessary to commence the consultation at that stage.

Resolved: That the commencement of consultation to make changes from September 2014 to the home to school/college transport policy 16-25 post maintained be deferred until the new SEN Code of Practice and guidance had been received. In the event that this had not been received by 1 April 2014, the consultation should commence at that stage.

Reason: To achieve budget saving targets.

9. Review of Home to School Transport Policy (Denominational Schools)

The Cabinet Member considered a report that proposed undertaking consultation on proposals to make further changes to the provision of discretionary denominational transport, currently provided by the local authority without charge, from September 2014.

The Cabinet Member gave consideration to the options set out in paragraphs 4 to 8 of the report.

She stated that the decision had to be taken in the context of the financial pressures facing the council and that savings had to be found.

The Cabinet Member stated that she was mindful of the issues that had been raised under the Public Participation item and the strength of feeling on this issue. The concerns raised had included:

- Perceived unfairness in accelerating the changes to home to school transport provision when it had initially been agreed that there would be a phased implementation.
- Concerns that the proposals targeted faith schools and the impact that this would have on the schools concerned.
- For some parents there would be no alternative provision for them to buy into.
- The impact that the proposals would have on children, including increasing the length of the school day, the emotional and educational disruption that it would cause and concerns regarding safety.

The Cabinet Member also acknowledged concerns that had been raised by schools and parents regarding the lack of advance notice regarding the proposals.

The Cabinet Member stated that she would reflect on the issues that had been made and give further consideration as to how to move forward.

Resolved: That a decision on this item be deferred.

Reason: To enable time for further consideration of the issues raised.

Councillor Looker, Cabinet Member
[The meeting started at 4.30 pm and finished at 6.00 pm].