

Extract of Minutes: Internal Scrutiny Committee
Date: 4 November 2010

ISC.264 CALLED IN ITEM – HOME SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

The Chair, Councillor Baum, welcomed Members of the Commission and the public present at the meeting, which had been convened following receipt of a Call-In Notice from Councillors Connolly, Smith, Lewis, Holt, Grimshaw, Walmsley, Cassidy, Boden, Cummings, A Audin, K Audin, Matthews, Rothwell, Quinn and Shori. The Notice related to the decision taken on 11 October 2010 by the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People as set out below:

“To approve consultation on the proposed changes and to receive a further report setting out the outcome of that consultation, with recommendations.”

A copy of the decision report of the Cabinet Member had been submitted to Members of the Committee.

Councillor Connolly outlined the reasons for the Call-In of the decision as follows:

- i. This proposal is a direct attack on Faith Schools and Parents and Carers who choose Faith Schools for their children.
- ii. Clearly clashes and does not support the notion of Parental choice
- iii. Where do these proposals sit with the Council’s Equality and Diversity Policies?
- iv. The costings in the document are vague and not detailed enough – need to provide more accurate costings and savings.
- v. The savings in this report are minimal and do not have a major effect on the savings needed, whilst disadvantaging sections of the community.
- vi. Why have only denominational schools been singled out for savings?

Councillor Connolly explained that he believed that parents sending their children to denominational schools were being unfairly discriminated against as a result of the proposed changes to the policy. Furthermore, in respect of the actual decision taken by the Cabinet Member, Councillor Connolly reported that he did not want the policy to go out to

consultation as he did not support the proposed changes for the reasons he had set out in the Notice of Call In

The Chair, Councillor Baum, invited the Cabinet Member for Children and Young People to answer the points raised in the Call-In Notice and the following responses were given:

- The proposals did not constitute an attack on Faith Schools as under the current policy, entitlement was not available to children attending non denominational schools.
- Proposed revisions to the policy would apply to all parents seeking a place at Faith or Non Faith Schools and redress the current inequality. It was reported that families on low incomes would still continue to benefit from free transport.
- In terms of the savings to be achieved from changing the policy, this would equate to approximately £30,000 in 2011/12 rising to £150,000 in 2015/16.
- The Cabinet Member explained that the proposals within the policy would still mean that the statutory obligations of the Council would be met as only pupils currently attending Faith Schools benefit from the policy as it stands.

Questions and comments were invited from Members of the Committee and the following issues were raised:

- In response to a question from Councillor Cohen in relation to the requirement to consult, the Head of School Organisation reported that in theory the policy could be implemented without consultation but the Council would not want to change a policy without undertaking consultation.
- With regard to the entitlement of free transport for low income families, the Cabinet Member confirmed that this would be unaffected.
- Councillor Rothwell expressed concerns that the proposals within the document were flawed and to go to consultation would be a waste of Council resources and money.
- Councillor Davison highlighted the distinction in the location of Faith and Non Faith Schools and commented that changes to the policy would result in parents choosing to send their children to a Faith School being discriminated against.

- Councillor Walmsley highlighted that parental choice should not be restricted by the cost implications of choosing to send a child to a denominational school.
- Councillor Higgin commented that to stop the issue even going out for consultation would restrict democracy and prevent discussions with parents on the issue.

Following a summary of the issues raised at the meeting, Members of the Committee voted on whether to offer comments to the Cabinet Member on the decision or refer the matter to full Council.

It was agreed:

That the Notice of Call-In, in respect of Home School Transport, be referred to the Council without comment.

(Note: Councillor Cohen requested that his vote against the above course of action be recorded)