

Home to School Transport Consultation

Barnwell Primary School – Thursday 11th April 2013

LA Officers:
Beverley Scanlon
John Mordy

Summary of Questions, Responses, and Comments

Question – we have 3 Councillors for this ward – why are none here?

Response – JM – Several meetings have been held with Councillors and one had taken place on Monday at which Cllr Speding was present. Cllr Pat Smith (Portfolio Holder) had wanted to attend tonight but was unable to do so.

Follow up comment – We want to record our disappointment that Cllr Mel Speding has not attended or given apologies.

Response – BS – you may wish to contact your Councillors later.

Comment – New Herrington was classified as a Category D village which meant no new development or repairs to School buildings. When the school closed Barnwell School was built for Herrington pupils.

Response – The Chair of Governors clarified that Barnwell School was built for a pupils from a range of areas.

Question – what other schools are there in Sunderland where pupils are travelling more than 2 miles to school?

Response – there will be many examples across the City of pupils facing long journeys to school through choice or otherwise. Remember that Barnwell does not fall outside the 2 mile radius for New Herrington pupils.

Question – There are only 2 Primary Schools affected by this proposal and 4 Secondary Schools where the cost savings are greater. Why not just keep the busses on for the younger children?

Response – there are 84 Primaries in the City and the other 82 don't benefit from transport. Parents will ask why should Barnwell and St Michael's benefit when we don't.

Comment – If the bus is taken off then more children will be walking and an extra lollipop lady would be required.

Response – This is an example of alternative suggestions that would be considered

Comment – It takes 3 busses to get to school by public transport and the walk is treacherous in winter

Comment – It has taken me 25 minutes to walk here tonight and this would take longer with small children

Question – When the Council route walker tests the route could a parent walk with him?

Response – JM – I will look into this, however on data we hold no children travelling on the bus meet national guidance for the council to provide transport by law. IE all would be walking less than two miles

Comment – There is a wider issue in that pupils from Herrington are not getting into the school as it is full.

Comment – When appeals are turned down we don't know the reasons

Comment – The Herrington community feels Barnwell is their school but the children can't get in and are spread across other schools as East Herrington is also full

Response – JM – these issues are related to Admissions rather than the transport question. The views expressed will be fed back to the Admissions Team and we will see if someone would be available to address the issues raised.

Comment – What happens if I have one child at one school and one at another? Without the bus getting both to school will be impossible.

Response – this is again linked to Admissions but is not an uncommon problem faced by other parents across the City.

Question – Could parents subsidise the bus?

Response – The cost is more than £1,000 per child and it is not practical to ask parents for this level of contribution.

Question – the company building houses across near the school has to contribute to a Community Trust. Could the school bid for funds?

Response – This only benefits a small number of pupils. Individuals could explore this option further if they wished.

Question – Has the school considered buying a minibus?

Response – This would be very expensive and there is also the issue of covering ongoing running costs.

Question – Has the government told the Council specifically to look at these transport costs?

Response – The government has told the Council it needs to save £100 million and many areas of spend are being looked at to see what the council must provide in law and what is discretionary.

Comment – If the bus is withdrawn then more people will drive and this will impact on car parking outside the school.

Response – This is a constant problem at this and many other schools.

Comment – would car sharing be an option?

Response – this is an arrangement that parents could come to although it is recognised that there are practical difficulties.

JM Thanked everyone for attendance and reminded people to complete forms which would be fed into the process

Minutes of Sunderland City Council Transport meeting held on: Wednesday 10th April 2013 at 7.00 pm

Present: **John Mordy, Commissioning Lead Childrens Services**
Paul Tomlin, Transport Commissioning Officer
Beverley Scanlon, Head of Commissioning and Change Management
Tony Cunningham, Headteacher of Oxclose Academy

In Attendance: **Lisa Hutchinson, Specialist Minute Taking Team, SCC**

Sunderland Transport Meeting – Oxclose Academy		
1.	<p>Welcome and Introductions</p> <p>Mrs Scanlon welcomed the meeting, informal introductions were made.</p> <p>Mr Mordy reminded attendees that there was an attendance sign in sheet at the front desk for all to sign.</p> <p>Mr Mordy highlighted the fire exists of the School should there be an alarm.</p>	
2.	<p>Proposed Changes to Home to School Discretionary Transport</p> <p>Mr Mordy guided the meeting through a power point presentation regarding the proposed changes to Home to School Discretionary Transport.</p> <p>Mr Mordy confirmed that this meeting was one of the first meetings to be held and that further meetings were taking place across the City over the next fortnight.</p> <p>Mr Mordy briefed the meeting on the statutory obligation that Sunderland City Council has in providing transport, however highlighted that it was generally the parents/carers responsibility to ensure that their child arrives at School.</p> <p>Sunderland City Council spends approximately £2,000,000 on transport on an annual basis and it was noted that the Local Authority must make cuts and potential savings within the next 3 years, Sunderland City Council were looking into what it provides on a discretionary basis and what it must provide in line with Government legislation.</p> <p>Legalities around providing transportation includes children living 2 miles away from the nearest suitable Primary School and 3 miles away from the nearest suitable Secondary School.</p>	

	<p>Mr Mordy recapped on the letters issued to parents and highlighted the meaning of statutory and discretionary transport. A variety of discretionary is provided and has been provided as a result of boundary changes, school closure or on the grounds of faith. Sunderland City Council pays over £50000 per annum to accommodate home to school transport for Oxclose pupils based on current discretionary arrangements.</p> <p>676 students across the City of Sunderland are in receipt of discretionary transport, 124 of 676 are students from Oxclose Academy. Overall there are over 36,000 children across the City and majority of which are not gaining access to transport and do not meet the criteria of low income.</p> <p>Mr Mordy discussed Faith Schools and confirmed that meetings are scheduled to take place next week.</p> <p>.</p> <p>Mr Mordy confirmed that he had already received telephone calls from concerned parents in response to the recent letter. Mr Mordy highlighted that he had empathy towards the issues and arguments and understood their feelings.</p> <p>Sunderland City Council would like all parents to present their view on the feedback form to explore alternative options and potential proposals. All feedback would be looked at by Executives and Cabinet Members within the LA.</p> <p>Mr Mordy confirmed that a meeting was held in the Council Chambers whereby Cllr Linda Williams was in attendance and suggested that the City Council liaise with Nexus regarding bus routes within the Oxclose area. The City Council will look at this in liaison with the School.</p>	
3.	<p>Questions and Comments</p> <p>Mr Mordy welcomed questions/comments from the meeting. The following questions/comments were captured:</p> <p>Q: We have observed that certain buses can drive past children waiting at a bus stop. They do not stop for the children. Can a bus be provided for the children.</p> <p>A: The number of children differs year upon year. We will discuss options with Nexus however due to efficiencies and cost private hire buses are not sustainable.</p> <p>City of Sunderland Council liaises with Nexus and can raise issues and act as a go between. If anyone observes an individual bus not stopping for children we need to know about this. This must be reported so we can discuss this with Nexus who are always interested in such issues. We have a meeting on</p>	

	<p>Friday 12th April 2013 and will present this concern to them.</p> <p>If there is a demand from an area for transport with inefficiencies we would liaise with Nexus to examine the bus route to consider alternative options.</p> <p>30 children from Oxclose Academy get permits. The cost of a permit is £190 per annum. Sunderland City Council can provide funding to those who meet criteria. The alternative is a parent to pay £190 per annum. A lot of parents choose to buy the permit for their child.</p> <p>An initial discussion with Nexus claimed that there were buses available for the routes within Oxclose; this work was conducted approximately 8 months ago.</p> <p>Mr Mordy highlighted that he had received a concern raised by a parent that their child got two buses to School.</p> <p>A discussion around two bus routes within the area took place and it was noted that if a person got on the wrong bus would cause potential delays in getting to the destination.</p> <p>Q: George Washington is a feeder Primary School to Oxclose and this was well promoted. Are you saying we should move our children to a nearer School such as Washington Comprehensive. I have concerns over my child walking to School, having motorways to cross and the dark nights are a particular concern.</p> <p>Oxclose was promoted from George Washington and because the rules change this isn't the nearest School. I don't want to change my child's education.</p> <p>A: If this was the case you need to fill in the feedback form to relay your message. Alternative options would be looked at.</p> <p>Q: Can the transport procedure remain with children already in the School and cease for all new entrants.</p> <p>A: This has been looked into and was considered to be a complex option however if parents feel that a phased option is required they were encouraged to put this formally in feedback.</p> <p>Mr Cunningham discussed the two proposals to withdraw in September 2013 or September 2014 but reiterated that if an alternative source was an option Cabinet would consider. It was important to be aware of all people's views and circumstances, for example the feeder school issue. This needs to be highlighted in the feedback.</p> <p>Q: Are we expected to agree to the proposals before other ideas are explored.</p>	
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	<p>A: You do not have to agree to either proposal and there is a space to provide all suggestions.</p> <p>Q: Public transport costs are out of my remit I simply couldn't afford this. Living costs have gone up; I am just about keeping a roof over my head and for my family. I don't have £25 a week to get my daughter to School. I was promoted this School from the feeder Primary School. There is a School at the bottom of my street but went with the recommendations of sending my child here. I have concerns over the underpasses and dark nights and I am not comfortable with my child getting two buses to School.</p> <p>A: Mr Cunningham expressed that there were 48 children to join the School in September 2014 and highlighted that preference of Schools and the understanding of transport being provided at that time. Mr Cunningham urged parents to highlight this on their feedback forms. The School will also be highlighting their views and concerns in the feedback forms.</p> <p>Q: I have a child attending this School, another child due to join. I am on a low income but do not meet the criteria. My child does not get FSM and I pay for School Dinners. This doesn't even cover what I get in Child Benefit. Expenses are going up and my husband hasn't had a pay rise in 4 years.</p> <p>A: I note your concerns around choice and preference under the historical understanding that transport was considered at that time. A lot of families will fall in the same category being just above low income thresholds and not qualifying for support. I understand the expenses rising but to put this into context this is the same position for many families across Sunderland who are just above low income thresholds. I recommend you to record your comments on the feedback form to list the historical facts around preference from the feeder Primary School.</p> <p>Q: The Council will not gain anything because if I have to cut my hours I will receive more benefits, this will accumulate different costs within the Government.</p> <p>Q: I give my son £1.40 a day lunch money and cannot claim FSM. I cannot afford to pay for a bus also. Washington is the nearest School to my home but I have concerns as they were in Special Measures.</p> <p>A: Washington School were in Special Measures but are doing really well now. I understand and have empathy for everyone and their concerns. The current climate is a difficult time for everyone.</p> <p>C: We don't want to send our children to a School to receive a lower education.</p> <p>Q: If I send my child to St Roberts would they be able to get a bus pass.</p> <p>A: The City of Sunderland Council is also looking into the Faith Schools transport and removal of discretionary transport is being proposed for them as</p>	
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well.

Q: A lot of families rely on friends and family members to pick their children up. I don't want to reduce my hours to take my child to School. This will cost the Council more money in benefit claims.

A: I understand your predicament. Please fill in the feedback form for your concerns to be listened to. I have empathy for your concerns but this is a similar position to other families and parents across the city who are not benefitting from discretionary transport.

Q: When will the decision be made.

A: Cabinet will decide on 18th June 2013.

Q: If you're planning to stop this resource in September 2013 is that not a little short for us to make alternative arrangements.

A: Mr Cunningham highlighted that decision would be made by Cabinet members within the Local Authority. Mr Cunningham also stipulated that he would provide a formal response and get involved in any discussion over Oxclose and Washington Schools.

Mr Cunningham reiterated that parents should fill in the feedback form to list their concerns and opinions to be heard at cabinet.

Mr Cunningham recapped on the fantastic relationship with George Washington Primary School and that he was proud of all the children that fed into Oxclose. Mr Cunningham confirmed that he was committed to do everything he possible could to maintain the relationship with George Washington Primary School and that the School would be recording their strong objection to the proposals. Mr Cunningham noted that a promise had been broken to the George Washington community.

Mr Cunningham confirmed that the School were an Academy and is able to make decisions on their own. Solutions would be looked into to minimise the impact upon families and pursue all avenues of transport in some shape or form. It was important to continue the preferred option to send children to a School of preference.

The Trust Board within the Academy are aware of the implications of the proposals.

Q: If everyone chose the nearest School would there be a space available.

A: Admissions would deal with this. Finance is given to Schools based on pupil roll number.

Q: How can the Council take away transport from children when money had been identified for improvements to the leisure centre. The council are

	<p>wasting money to move the skate park, they are moving it to another side of the park and it is costing £300,000. Is that a necessary spend.</p> <p>A: I cannot respond to the funding for this. Please highlight your concerns so we can collaborate ideas to put forward alternative ideas.</p>	
4.	<p>AOB</p> <p>Mr Mordy informed the meeting that he would be writing out to parents again shortly as there had been a clash of meetings today, the other meeting was State of the Area Washington debate, therefore considered it best practice to hold a duplicate meeting to ensure all parents had the opportunity to attend the Sunderland Transport Meeting.</p> <p>Mr Mordy also highlighted that he had discussed the scheduled meetings with the Headteacher at George Washington Primary School, feeder School to Oxclose Academy. The Headteacher expressed concerns around not giving sufficient time for parents to attend and respond from when the letters had been issued. A further meeting to accommodate the Primary School would also be scheduled.</p>	
5.	<p>Meeting closure and expression of thanks.</p> <p>Mr Mordy declared the meeting closed and expressed his thanks to all participants for attending.</p> <p>Mr Mordy reiterated that it was imperative for parents to complete the feedback form accompanied with the letter or via the City of Sunderland Website.</p>	

**MINUTES OF SCC TRANSPORT CONSULTATION MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 30
APRIL 2013 AT 3.45PM AT GEORGE WASHINGTON PRIMARY SCHOOL**

Present:

John Mordy, Commissioning Lead, SCC
 Paul Tomlin, Transport Commissioning Officer, SCC
 Beverley Scanlon, Head of Commissioning and Change Management, SCC
 Tony Cunningham, Headteacher, Oxclose Community Academy
 S Palmer, Headteacher, George Washington Primary
 E Quinn, Chair of Governors at George Washington Primary
 Cllr Linda Williams, SCC
 Jennifer and Mark Hill – Badger Minibus Hire Ltd ?

In attendance:

Susan Snaith, Specialist Minute Taking Team, SCC

1.	<p>Welcome and Introductions</p> <p>John welcomed and thanked everyone for attending the meeting.</p>	
2.	<p>Proposed Changes to Home to School Discretionary Transport</p> <p>JM guided the meeting through the above power point presentation and advised the LA were meeting with all Schools that were potentially affected by discretionary transport. It was confirmed that Sunderland were working in line with national policy guidance and the position in the law stipulates it is generally a parent's responsibility to make travel arrangements to and from school.</p> <p>It was explained a report would be going to Committee on 19 June 2013 to decide what the next step would be and in the meantime the council wanted to work with parents to see what other alternative arrangements could be provided. The Consultation would end on 24 May 2013.</p>	
3.	<p>Questions and Comments</p> <p>JM advised he would take questions individually at the end of the meeting for those who did not want to raise their questions within the meeting.</p> <p>Q: What alternatives are you proposing if the current bus service goes? I personally don't feel I can put anything on the feedback form until I know what's going to be on offer for my children.</p> <p>JM: The cost to a family for a bus permit annually would be £190 and will be in the region of £196 next year. Low income families would not be affected, (IE Families</p>	

meeting Free school meals/ Higher Working Tax credit criteria). From discussions with various people in Oxclose and others re bus routes and related issues - I've had 2 quite successful meetings with Nexus (who are not promising anything yet) but are looking at what buses there are / what gaps there are and are doing a mapping exercise with the various schools to consider what can be provided if there are sufficient numbers.

Comment: One bus will not be enough. There is currently only the W5 and W6 and they don't run from this bus stop but from the top of the village and along the road and run every 2 minutes.

JM: This is one of the things that has been highlighted with Nexus and they've been asked to look at this as an issue.

Q: How long before the bus drivers start to refuse the kids access to the buses?

Comment: I get on the bus after work on Friday at 3.00pm (after Oxclose) and coming into Concord there are many times when I cannot get on the W5 as it's full of school children.

JM: We are having regular meetings with Nexus and they have 1 person who is currently looking at route planning / capacity and their public relations officer is working with communities to see if there is sufficient cover for the area. Nothing can be promised at the moment but dialogue for coverage is taking place. The other thing that could happen is for parents and groups of parents to work with other bus providers to see what could be provided.

Comment: Why should parents have to do this when you are the ones who are withdrawing the service. I appreciate it's discretionary but given that a lot of parents work full time and have other things to do – where do we get the time for our other commitments.

JM: I completely empathise with your point of view but the vast majority of parents in Sunderland are not benefiting from any discretionary transport. We need to feedback to councillors views such as this one – but by law it is a parent's duty to get a child from home to school (except in the circumstances outlined earlier).

Q: Have you considered the social impact on the local community of getting parents to walk through local housing estates and the kinds of issues that could occur – there could be risks involved in them getting to school and would they actually get there?

JM: Again this is no different to what children are having to do across the city. We need to look at things such as safe walking routes.

Comment: We would certainly need a safe walking route because I would not be walking with my kids (even in a group) through some of the subways and could not go on roads because they are so busy.

Comment: I would not want my daughter to walk through these areas – especially

in winter.

Comment: Walking through subways in Washington is frightening and some subways in Blackfell and near Oxclose are notorious.

Comment: There have been 2 murders in these subways in the last 2 years, as well as drug use – it's very dangerous.

Comment: My daughter is in Year 6 and I chose Oxclose based on fact that transport was available
– It would be safer for me now to send her to Washington.

JM: It is vital you put these things on your feedback form so that when the Cabinet meet they are aware of your views and ideas

Comment: If you had come along with a couple of proposals (having already spoken to private bus companies (with costs for us) or some commitment from the public bus service and a proposed bus route with assurances that our children could get a bus from outside the school – you might have got a better response – rather than coming without those and expecting us to do it ourselves.

Comment: One of the issues which had been recently discussed was that children from this area would not go short in terms of getting to and from school.

JM: Some time has elapsed since then and I empathise with your point, but this is something to put onto your forms for members to consider. None of the elected members take this issue lightly – it's a difficult decision. In hindsight – it perhaps would have been better to have come along offering various options.

CIlr: There is still another month to go before Consultation – not all the options are there yet in black and white.

JM: It is national policy that we are responding to. The national policy informs the council what it has to do and also says it has to provide something for certain groups.

Comment: Well we might as well use the same bus.

Comment: Even using travel permits – there have been issues – sometimes Nexus question why my children are using transport at certain times of the day.

JM: We have assurances from the public relations officer at Nexus that they want to know about these things. If I was a parent I would want to buy the Pop Card rather than the Travel Permit as children can use it afterwards and it works out cheaper.

JM: Whatever you think is important please put this down on your forms and we will put this towards the wider discussion.

Comment: If you take that bus off the children - the other bus is chocca to start

with and that's without the extra children.

JM: We have had discussions with Nexus (and before us Cllr Williams) and we are supplying Nexus with data and post codes of affected areas. They are trying to do an exercise to see if an arrangement can be provided via Nexus, private hire or via other arrangements.

Comment: Currently I am happy to go to work knowing my children will arrive safely at school but if there is no bus it will be difficult – I do not earn a lot of money.

JM: In my feedback I will encourage people to look at timescales and if you think more time is needed – we might have to address that.

Mr Cunningham: we are determined to try to find a solution which will give you the choices that you currently have – with or without the council. We want to try to ensure that you are not left high and dry.

Comment: Well at the moment that's how we feel.

Comment: If they are going to take this bus off we would need to ask for more public transport solutions.

Comment: It would cost me £2 a day and there would be no guarantee the children would get to school safely. Some of the language of the older ones can be very intimidating.

JM: Some parents are prepared to contribute to private hire – but if you look at the current cost (£54,000) the cost for each child appears to be in the region of £500 per student per year.

Q: Would the council think about subsidising the cost?

JM: Subsidising would not be equitable to other parents and families not benefitting to discretionary transport. There are many families across Sunderland who would fall into income brackets just above the low income thresholds

Q: What about if the council pay half and parent pay half?

JM: There would still be an issue as there are many children who travel further who are not receiving any subsidy.

Comment: But they are not receiving help currently – there are ways to try to keep the cost down.

Comment: There are now a lot of children at the bus link on a morning – sometimes you can't see the pavement – there are so many children.

JM: This is not the end of it – We want to continue to support discussions as best we can and to look to support communities to develop alternatives

Tony Cunningham – Headteacher – Oxclose Academy urged all present to make their views / alternative suggestions (which would reduce the cost to the local authority) known via the consultation process and to councillors personally. The

	<p>Academy would be liaising with a number of different bodies as well as the local authority. The Academy would also be talking to Nexus re alternative bus routes and how transport could be made safer and more accessible to ensure there was some kind of protection around parents having a sound means of getting their children to Oxclose Academy. The Academy needed to talk to parents and understood the strong relationship parents had with the school. There was also the option of talking to current providers about how current transport arrangements might be maintained in some way. The real issue was about when the decision would be made and if this was September 2013 rather than 2014 there was more urgency. The Academy would seek to make decisions on parents' behalf to try to ensure parents could continue to make choices (re their preferred choice of school) for their children.</p> <p>Bev Scanlon advised she had been involved with schools now for a considerable time and often in the past when people had come along with a pre-conceived plan this had been shot down instantly. It was advised the council were genuinely financially pressed and the support of parents at George Washington Primary was really needed to make things work. When Usworth School closed clustering arrangements had been restructured. As an Academy there was a need to keep the link strong / look at what could be done to support that and discussion as well as a 1 to 1 discussion was needed. It was important children received the best education possible. The situation was difficult but the more views we have the better equipped we would be to provide a solution.</p> <p>JM issued forms and advised these were also on line.</p>	
4.	<p>Meeting closure and expression of thanks.</p> <p>John Mordy thanked all for attending and encouraged all to complete and send in their forms which would be considered in the final decision making process. All participants would be kept informed / updated as the process progressed.</p>	

Title: TRANSPORT CONSULTATION – ST AIDAN'S RC SCHOOL

Minutes of meeting held on: Tuesday 16th April 2013

Present on behalf of the Local Authority:

Beverley Scanlon (BS) Head of Commissioning and Change Management
John Mordy (JM) Commissioning Lead

		Action
1.	<p>Welcome and introductions</p> <p>Beverley Scanlon introduced herself to the meeting and explained the background and reasons behind the proposals being outlined. The consultation will end in May and be presented to cabinet in June. John Mordy welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained his role within the council. He advised that the council have been tasked with making 100 million pounds worth of savings and are looking at all areas to identify those savings. John went through a presentation that explained the council's proposals for home to school discretionary transport.</p> <p>The presentation explained that in law it is a parents' responsibility to get their children to school. It stated the difference between statutory and discretionary transport. John explained that it is a common misconception that transport to faith schools is a statutory requirement but this isn't the case. Only children on free school meals or where parents qualify for higher level tax credits would continue to qualify for a travel pass. The council can make savings of £195k by ending the discretionary element of the spend. John stressed that the current buses provided for faith schools will continue to run however the council are looking at ways to recover the costs from parents. The purpose of the meeting is to gather parents and carers views to be fed back into the consultation process. It was stated that many local authorities are considering similar proposals and one local council is planning to stop all discretionary transport from September 2014 without holding events in the way Sunderland are. The £195k of spending was broken down by school with St Aidan's proportion being at £24k and St Anthony's £26.5</p>	
2.	<p>Consultation – Question & Answer session</p> <p>Q. Have the Local Authority tried to negotiate with the bus companies to reduce the costs.</p> <p>A. JM explained that he has had many meetings with Nexus and their counterparts but compared to similar urban areas what Nexus are providing highly competitive rates. The best deal is sought year on year as part of the council's procurement processes. Nexus are aware that there is a possibility that</p>	JM to discuss the possible

	<p>they will lose funding from the LA should the discretionary transport costs be passed onto parents. JM explained that parents can save the on costs by purchasing a POP card and paying the £1.10 per day. Parents responded that these costs will be excessive if they have more than one child in school. One parent stated that the LA should be informing parents of the meetings with Nexus and the outcomes of those meetings. Both JM and BS explained that the LA have no obligation to inform parents of any negotiations with suppliers however parents and parents' groups can contact Nexus to lobby for a reduction of the cost of travel permits. JM stressed that many parents in schools that do not have access to discretionary transport passes must meet the travel cost for their children to attend their preferred school.</p> <p>Q. A parent stated that he is concerned that faith schools will be affected by the proposals with parents deciding to send their children to the local school and there will be a great loss of the catholic ethos.</p> <p>A. JM encouraged parents to state this on their feedback forms. JM explained that this does not only affect faith schools but also schools that were historically affected by boundary changes for example Barnwell Primary.</p> <p>Q. A parent was concerned that they were unaware of this meeting or the proposal to withdraw discretionary transport funding as they are from feeder primary schools. Had they had the information before now they may have made different decisions as to where to send their child. They asked at what point in time the council knew that these changes were going to happen and why was it not communicated before now.</p> <p>A. JM explained that a report was written and went to cabinet in March; these decisions were taken as part of the budget proposals for this year and next therefore were initially discussed in January/February of this year which was after parents had chosen their options. A recommendation was made to withdraw from transport in September 2014. In some authorities they intend to have a phased option. In the admissions literature that goes out for September 2014 the withdrawal of funding for discretionary transport will be stipulated. JM advised that feeder primary schools were informed by letter of the proposals and it was expected that they would inform parents. Letters went to parents of all secondary school children but to keep costs down it was felt that the cost of sending letters to the parents/carers of all primary school children would be too high. The very low turnout was a disappointment to the parents in attendance and LA officers. JM will discuss the feeder school issue with officers and will take this forward with them. It was stressed</p>	<p>extension of the free POP card scheme that had been running with Nexus or negotiate a reduction in its cost</p> <p>JM/BS to further discuss the issue of feeder primary schools</p>
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	<p>that letters to those schools went out long after parents would have chosen their preferred school options. The issues around Nexus will also be taken forward.</p> <p>Q. A lady stated that there is an emotional element to this in that children may be withdrawn from their faith school and many parents felt that this is an attack on catholic families and affects the human rights of those children. She asked if children already within the secondary schools that receive a bus pass continue to do so.</p> <p>A. BS asked parents to state this on their consultation form.</p> <p>Q. Can local schools cope with the extra influx of students if parents do not send their children to faith schools?</p> <p>A. BS confirmed that most secondary schools have spare places and can cope with increased numbers.</p> <p>Q. Many parents feel this is a backhanded way of getting rid of faith schools. Those at the meeting feel that the effect of the current economic climate will stop parents from being able to pay to send their children to their preferred faith school. There was a very strong feeling within the group that this is a direct attack on the catholic faith and faith schools. They asked if the diocese was consulted.</p> <p>A. BS informed that the council have regular meeting with Joe Hughes from the Diocese and they have written to him for his views on the proposals.</p> <p>Q. Can the council not look at making savings elsewhere as the amount involved is a drop in the ocean. One lady raised the point of the discrimination against Catholics and stated that it is a shameful example of sectarianism. Another stated that the cost would be the equivalent to the salaries of two council employees or an executive officer.</p> <p>A. JM advised that the council are looking across a range of areas to achieve savings</p> <p>Q. Effective engagement with parents is required and although this will be included in next year's literature, there needs to be meaningful consultation and communication with the parents/carers of primary school children but this hasn't happened. The consultation process is therefore flawed.</p> <p>A. JM stated that articles have appeared in the local press (not paid for) and on the council website. The Local Authority has been in touch with all catholic primary schools. He stressed that all parents need to take part in the consultation process and to ensure they return their forms or take part in online consultation. BS agreed that these proposals did come about</p>	
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	<p>after parents had made their choices of secondary school.</p> <p>Q. A parent stated that she made the decision to send her daughter to a faith school based on transport being available. She may be faced with removing her daughter at the end of Year 7 to move to a closer school.</p> <p>A. JM reiterated that the buses to faith schools will still run and urged parents to complete and return their feedback forms JM again explained the breakdown of numbers to the group.</p> <p>Q. There were concerns for those parents who are just above the threshold for receipt of benefits but still being expected to pay for their child to travel to school – what are the LA doing about this.</p> <p>A. JM explained that there are 34000 families in Sunderland who don't qualify for discretionary transport and travel passes but many still have to pay for their child to travel to school by bus. The LA is aware of these issues and reiterated the need for parents to feedback to the LA as part of the consultation.</p> <p>Q. A parent stated that the profile of families just above the threshold is stereotypical of families within catholic schools and they will not apply for free school meals which excludes them from free travel.</p> <p>A. JM stated that difficult decisions are being made by the council in the current climate and again encouraged parents to complete the consultation forms in order for their views to be considered.</p> <p>Q. This is the second tranche of cuts made; at which point will Sunderland Council grow a spine and stand up to the government.</p> <p>A. JM advised that the LA negotiates with the government all the time but that this was a very political question that can't be addressed in this forum.</p>	
	The meeting was closed and John thanked all for attending.	

Minutes of Sunderland City Council Transport meeting held on:
Thursday 18th April 2013 at 7.00pm

Present: Paul Tomlin, Transport Commissioning Officer, SCC
Beverley Scanlon, Head of Commissioning and Change Management, SCC

In Attendance: Lisa Hutchinson, Specialist Minute Taking Team, SCC

Sunderland Transport Meeting – St Michaels RC Primary School		
1.	<p>Welcome and Introductions</p> <p>Mrs Scanlon welcomed the meeting and thanked everyone for attending, informal introductions were made.</p> <p>Mrs Scanlon went through the Schools general housekeeping procedures for the benefit of the meeting.</p>	
2.	<p>Proposed Changes to Home to School Discretionary Transport</p> <p>Mrs Scanlon guided the meeting through a power point presentation regarding the proposed changes to Home to School Discretionary Transport.</p> <p>Mrs Scanlon confirmed that the LA had met with all Schools that are potentially affected by discretionary transport. Mrs Scanlon confirmed that this was a national decision and that the current position in the law stipulates it is the parent's responsibility to make arrangements to ensure that their child arrives to School.</p> <p>Mrs Scanlon discussed how the LA was scrutinising areas and had to save another £100 Million within the next 3 years. Mrs Scanlon confirmed that the LA have managed to save front line services but were looking closely at every area.</p> <p>At present the LA pay £1.8 Million to fund statutory transport e.g. minibuses etc for those who cannot get to School safely and for those eligible that meet the criteria e.g. FSM, SEN, not independent to travel by themselves, low income families.</p> <p>Mrs Scanlon discussed the legal obligation the LA has in providing transport to those children who live more than 2 miles away from their nearest Primary School and 3 miles away from their nearest Secondary School.</p>	

	<p>Mrs Scanlon highlighted that the LA have a Safer Routes to Schools Team who review routes regularly to ensure safety.</p> <p>Mrs Scanlon recapped on the meetings held at St Anthony's and St Aidans and that a further meeting at St Roberts was being held tonight. Mrs Scanlon confirmed that the Schools had also been told that the LA can no longer financially support the current plans of transport and reiterated it was a national decision.</p> <p>In perspective 770 young people use discretionary free transport and that no other schools in City are provided with this other than those listed in the consultation information letter. There are 36,400 children between 4 – 16 years of age and 770 benefit from this. There is a counter argument that the vast majority are not receiving free transport and parents have indicated this previously.</p> <p>Mrs Scanlon expressed that she was aware some parents had made choices linked to transport being available due to historical closure of a School within the area.</p> <p>Mrs Scanlon stipulated that a decision had not been made and would be made by Cabinet in June 2013. Mrs Scanlon urged parents to write their comments in the space provided in the letter or via website.</p>	
3.	<p>Questions and Comments</p> <p>Mrs Scanlon welcomed questions/comments from the meeting. The following questions/comments were captured:</p> <p>Q: How to you intend to save resources, I am a Catholic tax payer who chooses to send my child to a Catholic School and want my child to be taught under the faith. I have a human right to send my child to a Catholic School and the nearest Faith School, St Mary's, Easington Lane was closed in 1983. Parents were under the impression a bus would be provided and you are breaking that part of the deal. How much will it cost if groups of parents got together and petitioned for a Catholic School to be opened in Easington Lane. You're throwing money from one hand to another.</p> <p>I understand it is not you personally and that you are only cascading the message but I am highly annoyed. Your documents are lovely but you haven't put the source, we can do research via the internet and appeal against the decision.</p> <p>A: The Source is listed on the DfE website under transport policy. The guidelines were reviewed in March 2013.</p> <p>Q: It would have been nice to have this on paper as well.</p> <p>A: The LA tries to provide clear concise information when cascading information to parents and the community.</p>	

	<p>Q: It is within my human right to allow my child to be taught at a Catholic School. The Conservative Government can at least make you spend money and parents can take you to the European Court regarding our human rights.</p> <p>Q: Why haven't you put another option to keep the discretionary bus, this has already decided has it not. I understand the LA make the cuts but the safety of our children is a priority. I vote to have another option to keep discretionary transport.</p> <p>A: There is a space provided for alternative suggestions. The decision has not been made and will be made via Cabinet in June 2013. The LA has a Safer Routes to Schools Team to assess routes on a regular basis.</p> <p>C: I suggest you all talk to your local Councillors as I have experience of consultations and Councillors do not read the reports put in front of them. They did the same thing at Hetton when they closed Schools within that area.</p> <p>A: I can confirm all Councillors met prior to the Consultations at a briefing in the Council Chamber and they are aware of the proposals and consultation process.</p> <p>Q: You're saying 2 miles away from nearest School meets criteria. I live 2.8 miles away and it would take 40 minutes to walk alone never mind walking with two grandchildren that would take longer. There is no public transport to this School from Fence Houses.</p> <p>This is my nearest Faith School. I want my grandchildren brought up within a Catholic School. Look at the Secondary choices for Catholic Schools, there are three in Sunderland. You are taking choices away from us.</p> <p>All of my family work and there are people who don't work getting more money than my son and daughter in law.</p> <p>A: We are in regular contact with Nexus and discuss transport options for the City.</p> <p>C: The nearest bus stop is up the road from the School and they are not going to create one here just for St Michaels. I feel as if the consultation process has already been decided.</p> <p>C: The buses drop off on the main road, at the original St Michaels there was a lollipop lady.</p> <p>C: It is the safety of children that are my concern, a lot of fighting was carried out within the Houghton area when I was at school. Is the Scholars bus to St Roberts provided by the LA or Nexus.</p> <p>A: Nexus provides the Scholars bus to St Roberts. A CAT (Child All day Ticket) costs £1.10 per day. A Pop Card (Under 16 identification) costs £5.00.</p>	
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	<p>Q: How much does the Council pay for a pass,</p> <p>A: £190 per year however it will increase to £196 next year.</p> <p>Q: I feel we are being discriminated against for being Catholic. You can Google the information on schools transport services that the rest of country is providing for children.</p> <p>A: Similar reviews are taking part in other parts of the regions and elsewhere in the country. One neighbouring Local Authority has decided to cease discretionary transport from September 2014 and did not hold a consultation.</p> <p>Q: I don't know where the LA gets the nerve; they waste money on things such as the bridge.</p> <p>A: I cannot comment on this however I am informed Cabinet Money is different from Revenue Money.</p> <p>C: I will have to change my working pattern to get my child to school. I am not saying the Council should fund me because I choose to work.</p> <p>C: My employer won't let me leave early or come in later; I will have to consider giving up work in order to take my child to School.</p> <p>A: School's can look at other options with parents, potentially investigating private funding for a school bus.</p> <p>C: I have three children so that's 3 passes and one adult for me to accompany my children on the bus, this is expensive. Are you saying we have to change Schools.</p> <p>A: We have empathy for all the financial hardship, working patterns and parents getting back into work. We were able to make cuts within the LA without impacting on people's lives and maintaining front line services for the first £100m efficiencies.</p> <p>C: I consider my child travelling to St Michaels as a good learning good route/experience. For example independent travelling and confidence building.</p> <p>Q: Are you saying that there will be Children picked up by a bus who are eligible due to low income, would a bus drive past my child who is not eligible.</p> <p>A: An eligible child would receive a free travel permit.</p> <p>Q: I am concerned about the children getting on a Nexus Bus; what if they get off at the wrong stop, the bus driver isn't going to worry about them. The bus used now has a driver that will not let a child off until it reaches its destination. You're taking the safety away from us; a child could get lost.</p>	
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	<p>Q: What is the cost of a taxi per child?</p> <p>A: This depends on the distance and the taxi firm. Some firms will not allow children of a certain age to travel without an adult.</p> <p>Q: What about kids getting taxis to Thorney Close that I have seen.</p> <p>A: These children are SEN children and are not capable of travelling alone.</p> <p>C: I understand the costs as my child used to get a taxi. He got the taxi alone and I always thought it was a waste of money.</p> <p>C: If you look on the Council website, it shows a breakdown of what they pay. It took my breath away.</p> <p>C: You're going about it the wrong way, you need to consider child safety, you will end up in Court if one child gets hurt. I understand you have got to do this and I am not getting at you personally and I understand you are the messenger.</p> <p>C: People are driving round schools looking for children to take. Within this area there is nothing along this road. It would be a tragedy waiting to happen.</p> <p>C: We are going to end up having children with keys around their necks like when I was a child and both my parents worked. We were known as the key kids.</p> <p>C: My child started here 3 weeks after their 4th birthday can you imagine putting your child on nexus bus this young.</p> <p>Q; Will you publicise the minutes.</p> <p>A: The Report to Cabinet will be very bulky and detailed. It will be published 10 days before the Cabinet meeting. Copies will be available here in School and via the LA Website.</p> <p>Q: Who collates the information from the consultations.</p> <p>A: A Team of Officers.</p>	
4.	<p>Meeting closure and expression of thanks.</p> <p>Mrs Scanlon declared the meeting closed and expressed her thanks to all participants for attending. Mrs Scanlon reiterated that the consultation was not an attack of faith and that other Schools in the City were also affected.</p> <p>Mrs Scanlon thanked participants for being polite. A parent precipitated the comments and thanked Mrs Scanlon.</p>	

TRANSPORT CONSULTATION

Venue: St Robert of Newminster Catholic School

Minutes of meeting held Thursday 18th April 2013 at 6.30pm

Council Officers: John Mordy (Commissioning Lead), Sandra Mitchell (Head of Finance), Jane Lancaster (minute taker)

1.	<p>Welcome and Introductions;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ JM welcomed everyone to the Transport Consultation and introduced Sandra Mitchell and Jane Lancaster. ➤ Attendees were advised on the housekeeping. ➤ JM explained the purpose of the meeting advised if anyone wanted to ask any questions but not part of the main group discussion, to speak to him at the end of the session.
2.	<p>Proposed Changes to Home to School Discretionary Transport</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ JM guided the meeting through a Power Point presentation regarding the proposed changes from Home to School Discretionary Transport. ➤ JM explained the National Policy and that it was not statutory for Sunderland City Council to provide transport for children. ➤ Sunderland City Council had been forced to look at spend which included aspects of school transport. ➤ Bus provision to and from St Robert's would not be altered. ➤ The Local Authority were currently looking at significant saving of £195K per year and highlighted that a number of Authority's nationally have ended all discretionary transport from 2014. ➤ The Local Authority spends approximately £2M on transport on an annual basis mainly around children with special educational needs who normally have a distance to travel. ➤ JM advised that a number of pupils would be provided with home to school transport whose parents were on a low income, FSM or high tax credits. ➤ The Central Government does not allow the faith element but considers the nearest suitable school. ➤ St Robert of Newminster School had a substantial bill of £47K/year. There were 284 students who were in receipt of a travel permit but only 34 pupils qualified for a permit under the statutory guidance. ➤ Sunderland City Council permits cost £190 and an annual permit from Nexus would cost £196. ➤ JM highlighted the Pop Cards which cost £5, then £1.10/day which can be used on multiple journeys throughout the day. ➤ JM highlighted the two proposals. ➤ JM encouraged parents to send any suggestions to the Local Authority. ➤ The Consultation formally ends 24th May, 2013. ➤ Results will be sent to Members proposals to be ratified or to consider any other suggestions. ➤ JM advised attendees that he will feedback their views and any questions.

3.	<p>Open Question Session</p> <p>➤ Question: Were Nexus day tickets transferable to a Kingsley bus which was used from Seaburn and was a scholar bus?</p> <p>Reply: JM replied if it was a Scholars bus, the Nexus permit can be used but would confirm that the 'Pop card' could be used on the Kingsley buses.</p> <p>➤ Question: Can parents buy a weekly bus pass?</p> <p>Reply: JM was not aware if the 'Pop Card' could be bought weekly and advised attendees to visit the Nexus website.</p> <p>➤ Question: If the permit was lost, would the full amount have to be paid again?</p> <p>Reply: It was thought that a £5 fee was charged to replace a lost permit, but this was to be confirmed.</p> <p>➤ Question: Can permits be bought now?</p> <p>Reply: Any parent throughout the City can purchase a 'Pop card'. There are 36,319 pupils aged 4-16, only 770 benefiting from discretionary transport, and of those 96 pupils that qualify for statutory transport. The vast majority of parents pay for their child's transport, either purchasing either an annual or termly permit from Nexus.</p> <p>➤ Comment: Children that are not at an age to travel on their own, families are looking at a cost of £40 per month.</p> <p>Reply: JM had empathy for parents but the vast majority of parents in Sunderland pay for their children's transport costs.</p> <p>➤ Comments: Parents chose faith schools for their children and there are less Catholic Senior Schools in Sunderland therefore have to travel.</p> <p>Reply: JM advised that the National Guidelines do not allow for faith schools and the current Local Policy would pay for all schools but in this financial climate tough decision had to be made on how money was spent.</p> <p>➤ Comment: Attendees felt that they were being penalised for choosing a faith school.</p> <p>➤ Question: Why have parents not been given more notice for timescales?</p> <p>Reply: JM agreed that the timescales were tight, one proposal for 2013 and the other for 2014 and suggested that parents highlighted this issue in their feedback. The initial proposal was taken to Cabinet in March 2013 and had only been agreed recently.</p>
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- **Question:** When applying place for the school, a parent had contacted the bus company who stated that they would honour travel payments.
- **Reply:** JM advised that the bus company can guarantee a bus route but could not guarantee funding.
- **Question:** Was the Council not in breach of contract as when a child was placed at the school, transport was available?
- Reply:** JM advised that transport was available but parents would be paying for their child's transport.
- **Comment:** Safeguarding affects every child in school and it feels that families on low income are the only one that matter. Children from families just above the threshold are at risk of being knocked over when they walk to school as parents can not afford to pay for transport.
- Reply:** JM advised that walking routes would be considered whether they are safe for children.
- **Question:** Kingsley buses do not accept 'Pop Cards' as her daughter had to pay when travelling to school.
- Reply:** JM advised that this issue would be highlighted if individual drivers are making incorrect choices.
- **Comment:** Parents were concerned with the increase in congestion around St Robert's as it had a wide catchment area as they felt some parents would rather drive than pay for the bus.
- **Question:** At what stage will buses stop running if they are not economically viable?
- Reply:** JM advised that school roll would be considered and the Diocese may need to look at that issue if it occurred but realistically could not see buses not continuing to run.
- **Comment:** If St Robert's was a non Catholic School, it would get help.
- Reply:** JM advised that non Catholic Schools were not getting any help and as an Officer of the Council would feedback parents concerns regarding safeguarding, buses etc but encouraged people to put their views forward.
- **Comment:** Parents are asked to consider the two proposals and suggest a way to save costs but the Council have wasted £300K on 'Roker Pods'.
- Reply:** SM highlighted that there was significant grant funding which could only be used in particular areas. Comments would be fed back to Members.
- **Question:** It appears that cuts are all around young people, why?

Reply: SM advised that the Local Authority had to save £100million over 3 years and have to save similar over the next 3 years. The Local Authority has tried to protect frontline services but need to look at all other areas.

- **Question:** The Local Authority was asking for parents to put forward proposals, however, this was the first breakdown parents' had been presented. How do you know who was entitled to bus transport?

Reply: SM replied that the information was received through the Benefits system which was the basis of the calculation.

- **Question:** If those students entitled to transport, bus companies stop running buses to cost implication, those children are entitled to transport one way or another, how much in monetary terms would this save?

Reply: JM advised that each are would be considered individually and would not replace anything that was more expensive. The Local Authority would not provide chaperones and it was a parent's duty by Law to get their child to school.

- **Question:** What about disabled children?

Reply: Disabled children are not affected by any of the transport changes.

- **Question:** I live in East Herrington and the nearest mixed Catholic school was St Roberts, do you want my child to walk to school?

Reply: This and similar comments would be notified to members via Comments section of the feedback form.

- **Comment:** Parents send their children to St Roberts as it was an excellent school.

Reply: Legislation states that nearest school not faith school.

- **Comment:** Bus companies may chose to remove routes as not practical leaving parents to make 2 or more journeys to get to school.

- **Question:** Have the bus companies been consulted?

Reply: JM replied that the bus company had been consulted and had stated that they would not be removing any buses. Nexus permits were good value for money compared to other areas around the Country. The Local Authority were also working to drive the cost of Annual Permits down as they were the biggest purchaser of permits.

- **Question:** Could the Local Authority subsidise permits?

Reply: JM advised that other parents did not benefit from subsidised permits but this suggestion could be put forward.

- **Comment:** There was concern regarding the withdrawal of bus services and concern around the change of routes if not many children get on a bus at a certain

bus stop. As a parent, I sent my child to St Roberts because of available transport.

- **Question:** On the application form parents state why their child requires a permit but do not ask to provide evidence whether a Catholic?

Reply: A child should not be receiving a permit under false pretences.

- **Question:** Will the Members Meeting be an Open Meeting?

Reply: Cabinet Meetings are not open meetings but the papers and report with questions are public information.

- **Comment:** It was felt that this was a 'done deal' and going to happen due to the tight timescales.

Reply: SM advised parents to put forward the proposal for 2014.

- **Question:** Would it be possible for the withdrawal be phased over a longer period?

Reply: That could be suggested as part of the consultations.

- **Comment:** This would have a huge financial impact on hundred's children and families in Sunderland.

JM stated that it was essential that parents fed back the comments and suggestions for Members to consider.

The Headteacher thanked parents for attending and asked them to devote some quality time to respond as fully as possible on the feedback sheets and that the school would play their part as fully as they could. He thanked parents for their robust questions and it was in their court collectively to feedback.

Meeting ended at 8.10pm