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| MEETING | EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE |
| DATE | 6 DECEMBER 2006 |
| PRESENT | COUNCILLORS HALL (CHAIR), BARTLETT, BRADLEY, D'AGORNE, JONES, LIVESLEY (VICE-CHAIR) AND MR J BAILEY (PARENT GOVERNOR REPRESENTATIVE) |
| APOLOGIES | COUNCILLOR KIND |

13. Declarations of Interest

Members were invited to declare at this point in the meeting any personal or prejudicial interest they might have in the business on the agenda. No further interests other than the standing list were declared.

14. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the meeting held on 31 October 2006 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record subject to the addition of Cllr Jones as having submitted his apologies to the meeting.

15. Public Participation

It was reported that there had been no registrations to speak at the meeting under the Council's Public Participation Scheme.

16. Scrutiny Review on Home to School Bus Contracts

Consideration was given to a report which updated Members on progress with their scrutiny topic examining the contract school bus service. Representatives of the Committee had visited Top Line Travel of York on 27 November 2006, an existing contractor for school transport, when Members had discussed the following issues

- a. What are their thoughts about introducing seat belts on all home to school services?
- b. What would be the implications for contractors if this was introduced?
- c. If they have any buses with seatbelts and if so if the children wear them. If they did fit seatbelts on all buses how could it be ensured that the pupils wore them?
- d. Do they have any concerns about the safety of school transport and if so how could this be improved?
- e. Do they CRB check all drivers on home-to-school buses?

- f. What would be the implications for contractors if it became compulsory for all drivers to have a CRB check before they could work on home-to-school buses?
- g. Would extending the contracts to 5 years improve the quality of the service that contractors could offer City of York Council?
- h. Have they seen a deterioration of the behaviour of pupils on buses since they have been a contractor?

Detailed comments received from Peter Dew, Managing Director of Top Deck Travel in relation to all the above issues were circulated to Members at the meeting.

The Chair then welcomed the following representatives who had been invited to attend the meeting to give their views and answer Members questions in relation to the above list of issues

- George Peach, Regional Manager of the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT), Yorkshire Region,
- James Crook-Williamson, Alpha Bus and Coach of Hull (a new contractor for City of York Council),
- Nigel Rowe, East Riding of Yorkshire
- Tom James, K & J Travel.

Arising out of discussion the following points were raised by the representatives

- Generally the CPT supported the use of seat belts by primary school aged children but it was down to individual choice with older children
- The fitting of seat belts was not an issue but ensuring that children wore them was, although a number of services had attendants/conductors which could enforce their use
- No responsibility could be put on drivers morally or through legislation for passengers to wear seatbelts
- The cost of fitting seatbelts to a single decker bus would be in the region of £5000 with ongoing maintenance costs e.g. vandalism
- There was little evidence to suggest that fitting seatbelts in buses made journeys safer, rather the lack of seatbelts was a perceived problem.
- It had however been found that seatbelts did save lives if buses rolled over as they prevented the occupant being thrown out and suffering major injury
- BUSK (Belt Up School Kids) a school transport organisation dedicated to helping reduce injuries and fatalities on school buses had found no evidence to suggest that seatbelts on vehicles made them safer. Independent research had shown that transport by bus was one of the safest forms of transport.
- Buses used for school trips were required to be fitted with seatbelts and teachers accompanying the pupils ensured that belts were worn
- Main problem to safety was the behaviour of pupils on transport and this was exacerbated on double decker buses where drivers had less visibility

- Important that pupils stayed seated on school transport and did not kneel on seats
- CRB checks were generally supported, however different Authorities required differing levels which often caused problems for contractors, so portability between authorities was essential
- Costs associated with CRB checks and time factor in obtaining
- Questioned criteria for CRB checks, this had been agreed by East Riding of Yorkshire Council with Hull City Council (Nigel Rowe confirmed that he would forward a copy of the criteria to the Scrutiny Officer)
- Problems of CRB checks for persons entering the country
- The extension of contracts to 5-7 years would improve the quality of service that contractors could offer the authority to enable contractors them to receive a return on their investment
- Also mentioned that 3 year contract may keep contractors on their toes and ensure keener tenders
- Contractors built up a good rapport with their individual schools and it was felt that continuity was a key factor in helping to control unruly behaviour
- Generally felt that there had been a deterioration in the behaviour of pupils which had previously involved verbal abuse but this had now increased to physical abuse in a minority of cases
- Contractors considered that CCTV was a cheaper option to seatbelts in improving behaviour on school transport
- Suggestion that pump priming of contractors by local authorities would assist them in purchasing CCTV for school transport vehicles which could in turn benefit those authorities
- A number of schools had Transport Managers who addressed any issues raised by contractors and it was pointed out that the attitude of schools was important in controlling pupils behaviour
- Contractors felt that a four way agreement between the school, parents, operators and the Council was the way forward with all signing up and supporting
- Schools did use the deterrent of 3 strikes following which a pupil was no longer able to use school transport
- Reported details of the SAFEMark scheme used by West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive, an award scheme for Secondary School pupils for which schools received benefits, which could be of interest to York.
- Pink bus of shame used by the Isle of Wight local authority for ferrying unruly pupils to school
- Public Service Vehicles were excluded from the new regulations governing the use of car seats introduced in September 2006.

The Chair thanked all the representatives for attending the meeting and expressing their views on this subject.

Members referred to the wealth of information received from representatives at the meeting and, in particular, to the provision of CCTV on school transport and whether it would be more cost effective than seatbelts in controlling pupils behaviour. Mention was also made that standardisation of CRB checks was required and details were to be sought

from the Education Access Team. Members also questioned whether statistics were available of injuries received by pupils on school buses. If this information was available if it was broken down to a level, which showed whether, those involved were wearing lap belts or three point belts. There was also discussion on the need for letters to parents and the provision of publicity on the wearing of seat belts.

Officers confirmed that in order to carry out the review, the formal meeting in January had been cancelled to allow time for a visit to Cheshire County Council on 15 January 2007. This was to view a similar authority that had introduced a dedicated "yellow buses" service. A consultation meeting for staff/parent/governor representatives from the four primary schools, who used home to school transport in York, had also been arranged for 23 January.

Consideration was then given to the workplan, circulated at the meeting, for the Committee's review of home to school transport for submission to SMC.

- RESOLVED:
- i) That Members note the information given by the representatives at the meeting and they be thanked for their assistance with the scrutiny topic.
 - ii) That the Committee confirm their workplan, circulated at the meeting, for the review of home to school transport for submission to SMC subject to the inclusion of today's meeting and the proposed visit to Cheshire County Council on Monday 15 January 2007.

REASON: In order to carry out their responsibilities in managing the Education Scrutiny function in York.

CLLR C HALL

Chair of Scrutiny Committee

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and finished at 6.25 pm.