
MEETING	EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
DATE	31 OCTOBER 2006
PRESENT	COUNCILLORS HALL (CHAIR), BARTLETT, BRADLEY, D'AGORNE, KIND AND LIVESLEY (VICE-CHAIR) DR D SELICK (CHURCH OF ENGLAND REPRESENTATIVE)
APOLOGIES	MR J BAILEY (PARENT GOVERNOR REPRESENTATIVE AND MS C DUFFY (CATHOLIC REPRESENTATIVE)

9. Declarations of Interest

The following Members declared a general personal interest in the business on the agenda and requested their addition to the standing list of declarations for the Committee:

Councillor D'Agorne – Governor of Fishergate School and employee of York College

Councillor Bradley – Son attends Manor C of E School

10. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 19 July 2006 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

11. Public Participation

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

12. Education Scrutiny Work Planning

Consideration was given to a report, which asked Members to consider their programme of work for the rest of the 2006/07 municipal year. The two scrutiny topics registered, which were relevant to the work of the Committee, were:

- a) The role of school governors, registered by Cllr Viv Kind in May 2005 (Topic no 127)
- b) Contract school bus services registered by Cllr Charles Hall in August 2006 (Topic no 141).

Members had met informally on 12 September 2006 to make recommendations as to the work programme and it was recommended that the Committee review the contract school bus services from now until the end of January 2007 in the first instance.

Mark Ellis from the Education Access Team gave Members a presentation on Home to School Transport which detailed the current law, the City of York Council's policies, the numbers of pupils requiring the service and costs. The areas which it was thought required further consideration were:

- Seat belts on buses
- CRB check for all drivers/escorts
- Behaviour on school buses
- Escort/Driver training for SEN Transport
- Pupils on public service routes (use of yellow buses)

Members were updated that the Education and Inspection Bill 2005, which was published earlier in the year, gave more entitlement to transport to those families on low incomes to enable them to have more choice of school and introduced school travel pathfinders.

In answer to questions Officers also confirmed that there were significant year on year increases in home to school transport costs above inflation which was a cause for concern. It was explained that bids for authorities wishing to become School Travel Pathfinders were required by February/March 2007. Pathfinder authorities would start in September 2009 with a formal evaluation in January 2012. Officers stated that, if it was decided that the authority should make a bid, then details of each schools travel plan would be required including an audit of how each child travelled at present and a strategy to influence their future method of travel.

Terry Walker from Transport Planning, City Strategy indicated that, at present, three year contracts had usually been offered to suppliers to enable the authority to adjust capacity as necessary but it was felt that the shorter the contract the less investment in transport would be made by contractors. He acknowledged that more modern vehicles were likely to have more and better safety features built into their design. It was confirmed that, of the 10 suppliers contracted to supply home to school transport services, at least four undertook CRB checks of their drivers. He also pointed out that his department had worked closely with neighbouring authorities over the years and had shared transport services, where appropriate, to obtain best value for money. In answer to questions he stated that yellow buses had been introduced by local authorities in both rural and urban areas around the country, which included West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Authority.

Members raised the following points

- Use of transport for school visits, trips and holiday clubs
- Complex issues when there were 6 suppliers transporting to one school

- Need to examine the possibility of offering longer transport contracts to allow providers with continuity to enable them to consider purchasing newer vehicles
- Questioned ideal length of any new contracts offered to suppliers of transport services
- Whether seat belts were mandatory on school transport vehicles and the need to examine the costs of providing belts for all children using these vehicles
- Noted that some authorities used the dedicated “yellow buses” for school transport but it was recognised that this was not a cheap option and that they were usually underwritten by funding for a particular project.

In answer to questions regarding the scrutiny topic registered on the role of school governors, Officers confirmed that the governance service was a small, tight unit, which still had little capacity for undertaking additional work. It was reported that three new Clerks had only just been appointed, the equivalent of 50% of the workforce, and that the Service Manager was at present off work. Members confirmed that running two topics concurrently would not be ideal.

Councillor Bradley confirmed that information on the role changes for school governors would be presented to a future meeting of the Children’s Services EMAP.

Officers confirmed that the scope of the remit would be amended in line with the Committees resolution.

Following further discussion on how to progress the registered topics it was

- RESOLVED:**
- i) That in the first instance the Committee undertake the registered topic on the contract school bus services registered by Cllr Charles Hall.
 - ii) That representatives from other authorities, including authorities that have introduced dedicated “yellow buses”, be invited to speak to Members to explain how they introduced their contract school bus services, including CRB checks and how they educated children to wear seatbelts.
 - iii) That the remit for topic no 141 – Contract School Bus Service marked as Annex E to the report be approved.
 - iv) That scrutiny topic no 127 on the role of school governors be undertaken by the Committee on the completion of topic no 141, in approximately February 2007.

CLLR C HALL, CHAIR

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and finished at 6.20 pm.