



Notice of meeting of

Education Scrutiny Committee

To: Councillors Hall (Chair), Bartlett, Bradley, D'Agorne,
Jones, Kind and Livesley (Vice-Chair)

Co-opted Statutory Members:

Mr John Bailey (Parent Governor Representative),
Mr Andy Lawton (Parent Governor Representative),
Dr David Sellick (Church of England Representative) and
Miss C Duffy (Catholic Representative)

Date: Wednesday, 28 March 2007

Time: 5.00 pm

Venue: The Guildhall, York

AGENDA

1. **Declarations of Interest** (Pages 1 - 2)

At this point Members are asked to declare any personal or prejudicial interests they may have in the business on this agenda. A list of general personal interests previously declared are attached.

2. **Minutes** (Pages 3 - 4)

To approve and sign the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 27 February 2007.

3. **Public Participation**

At this point in the meeting members of the public who have registered their wish to speak regarding an item on the agenda or an issue within the Committees remit can do so. Anyone who wishes to register or requires further information is requested to contact the Democracy Officer on the contact details listed at the foot of this agenda. The deadline for registering is Tuesday 27 March 2007 at 5.00pm.

4. Home to School Transport Services - Final Report (Pages 5 - 42)

To give further consideration to the final report and recommendations on Home to School Transport Services approved at the Committees meeting held on 27 February 2007. Any additional comments made at the Scrutiny Management Committee on 26 March will be reported at the meeting.

5. Urgent Business

Any other business which the Chair considers urgent under the Local Government Act 1972.

Democracy Officer:

Name: Jill Pickering

Contact details:

- Telephone – (01904) 552062
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For more information about any of the following please contact the Democracy Officer responsible for servicing this meeting

- Registering to speak
- Business of the meeting
- Any special arrangements
- Copies of reports

Contact details are set out above.

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Agenda item I: Declarations of interest.

Please state any amendments you have to your declarations of interest:

Councillor Aspden – Governor Knavesmire Primary School, member of the National Union of Teachers and employee of Norton College.

Councillor Bartlett – Governor of Millthorpe and St Paul’s CE Primary School
Councillor Blanchard – Chair of Young Enterprise
Councillor Bradley – Governor of Poppleton Ousebank School and son attends Manor CE School

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

Councillor Kind – Governor of Burnholme Community College; Haxby Road Primary School

Councillor Livesley – Governor of Bishopthorpe Infant School.

Co-opted statutory members

Dr D Sellick – Governor of Derwent Infant and Junior School
Mr A Lawton – Governor of Canon Lee School
Mr J Bailey – Governor of Huntington School

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City of York Council

Minutes

 MEETING EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE 27 FEBRUARY 2007

PRESENT COUNCILLORS HALL (CHAIR), BARTLETT, BRADLEY, KIND*, LIVESLEY (VICE-CHAIR), MR J BAILEY (PARENT GOVERNOR REPRESENTATIVE) AND DR D SELICK (CHURCH OF ENGLAND REPRESENTATIVE)

**Attended towards the end of the meeting so did not participate in the decisions.*

 APOLOGIES COUNCILLORS D'AGORNE AND JONES

17. Declarations of Interest

The Chair invited Members to declare at this point any personal or prejudicial interests they might have in the business on the agenda. No interests were declared in addition to the standing list of general personal interests attached to the agenda.

18. Minutes

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 December 2006 be approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

19. Public Participation

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

20. Draft Final Report on Home to School Transport Contracts in York

Members received a report which asked them to consider a draft report arising from the Committee's scrutiny review into home to school transport contracts in York. Subject to any amendments they might wish to make, the report would then go forward to the Scrutiny Management Committee (SMC) as the final report of the Education Scrutiny Committee on this topic.

After discussing in detail the draft report attached at Annex A and seeking further information from the Principal Education Officer, Access Team, Members agreed the following amendments:

Paragraph 5 – after the words 'important issues are', insert a colon and split the rest of the sentence into two sub-paragraphs, covering a) pupil behaviour and b) problems in ensuring pupils wear seatbelts.

Paragraph 11 – after the first sub-paragraph, include an additional paragraph on the petition presented at Council by Cllr Bradley (wording to be supplied to the Scrutiny Officer by the Chair).

Recommendation 1 – in financial implications, include a paragraph indicating that the current contractor is willing to install lap seatbelts at a cost of £4k to £5k but would be seeking a negotiable one-off contribution from the Council towards these costs.

Recommendation 2 – insert the words ‘and functioning at all times’ after ‘installed’ in sub-paragraph b). In financial implications, refer to the potential 25% cost increase if lap seatbelts are fitted immediately to all vehicles.

Recommendation 3 – in the financial implications, refer to the potential for reduced costs if longer contracts can be offered.

Recommendation 4 – at the word ‘contracts’ in the third line, add a footnote making reference to the description of good behaviour contracts in paragraph 14 of the report.

Recommendation 5 – insert the word ‘high’ after ‘same’ in the first line.

The Chair thanked the Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of the Committee, for a clear and concise report. Thanks were also offered to those people from outside the Council who had been involved in gathering information for the report, particularly parents of school students. They would be kept involved of the progress of the report to Executive and copies of the final version would be circulated to them.

RESOLVED: That, subject to the above amendments, the report be approved for submission to Scrutiny Management Committee as the final report of the Education Scrutiny Committee on home to school transport.

REASON: So that the final report reflects Members’ views and to enable the Committee’s recommendations to be referred to the Executive, via SMC.

CLLR C HALL
Chair

[The meeting started at 5.00 pm and finished at 5.50 pm.]



Scrutiny Management Committee
Education Scrutiny Committee

26 March 2007

28 March 2007

Home to School Transport Services – Final Report

Background

1. In August 2006 Cllr Charles Hall registered a Scrutiny Topic which asked members to investigate the contracts for home to school transport and to consider if it would be possible to introduce higher quality buses and also to improve safety. The Topic Registration Form can be seen at Annex A.
2. Local authorities are required by the government to provide transport to enable children to attend school. This transport will be free of charge if the child attends the nearest suitable school which is within two miles walking distance of home for those up to eight years of age and three miles for pupils between the ages of eight and 16. At present City of York also provides transport if a child attends a school for religious reasons provided that the school is the closest school of the preferred denomination and is beyond the appropriate walking distance for the pupil's age.
3. Pupils with special educational needs or disabilities who could not be expected to walk to school may also be provided with free transport, however they are not the subject of this review.
4. The Education and Inspection Bill which is currently before Parliament will require local authorities to provide free transport for pupils from low income families to three suitable secondary schools between two and six miles away from home and to the nearest primary school over two miles from home.
5. Important issues are: a) pupil behaviour whilst on buses, operators have reported increased incidents of vandalism and unruly behaviour and b) on buses where seatbelts are provided it can be a problem ensuring that pupils wear them.
6. The recommendations in this report were approved at the meeting of this Committee of 27 February 2007. On 1 March 2007 Cllr David Scott submitted some amendments to the report (see annex H). Members considered these suggestions informally and the consensus of opinion was that Cllr Scott's amendments should not be used to alter the recommendations.
7. Members were of the opinion that Cllr Scott made good points but that they did not add anything new to the recommendations except for the inclusion of

secondary school transport. As the remit for this scrutiny topic specifically refers to primary schools members did not consider it appropriate to make comments about secondary schools when no evidence gathering has been undertaken. It would not be advisable for the Scrutiny committee to make recommendations to the Executive for which they have sought no evidence nor investigated the implications. However if the Executive decides to approve the recommendations and then apply them to secondary schools as well then that will be a beneficial outcome from this report.

8. It is expected that this report will have been considered by Scrutiny Management Committee on 26 March 2007. SMC may have added some comments, if so these will be tabled at the meeting.

Corporate Priorities

9. In keeping with Corporate Priority 2 – Increase the use of public and other environmentally friendly modes of transport.

Options

10. Members can support all, some or none of the recommendations proposed as a result of this review, taking into account Cllr Scott's suggestions, bearing in mind that they approved the recommendations at the meeting on 27 February. Members are also asked to note the amended financial implications to the recommendations.

Remit

11. Members of the Education Scrutiny committee met informally on 12 September 2006 to consider their programme of work, and on 31 October 2006 it was formally agreed that members would undertake this topic with the following remit:
 - To investigate if improvements can be made to the safety of buses transporting school pupils to primary schools.
 - To consider the contract that is negotiated by the council for the provision of school transport services.
 - To make enquiries as to the school transport that is provided in other local authorities including the use of dedicated "yellow buses".
 - To investigate the implications of installing seat belts in all buses contracted to carry primary school pupils.

Consultation

12. The following people contributed to this review as a participant or witness:

Members of the Board

Cllr Charles Hall (Chairman)
Cllr Martin Bartlett
Cllr Glen Bradley
Cllr Andy D'Agorne
Cllr Alan Jones
Cllr Viv Kind
Cllr David Livesley

Co-opted Members

John Bailey
Andy Lawton
Dr David Sellick

City of York Council Officers

Barbara Boyce – Scrutiny Services
Mark Ellis – Education Access Team
Terry Walker – Transport Planning

Representatives of Other Organisations and Members of the Public

James Crook-Williamson, Alpha Bus and Coach, Hull
Peter Dew – Top Line Travel, York
Colm Flanagan, Head of St Wildrid's Primary School
Mark Hallett – Cheshire County Council
Cllr Janet Hopton, Rt Hon Lord Mayor of York
Tom James - K and J Travel, York
John Norton – Kendric Ash, Public Sector "corporate transformation partner"
George Peach – Regional Manager of the Confederation of Passenger Transport, Yorkshire Region
Nigel Rowe – East Riding of Yorkshire Council
Tim Wilkinson, Head Teacher of Poppleton Ousebank Primary School
Parents and Governors from St Mary's, St Wilfrid's, Poppleton Ousebank and Archbishops of York's schools.

Information Gathered

10 Members undertook the following activities in order to inform their deliberations:

31 October 2006

Members held discussions about the current service provision with officers from the Education Access Team and Transport Planning Services.

27 November 2006

Members visited Top Line Travel of York and held discussions with the Managing Director regarding their views as a provider of home to school transport.

6 December 2006

Members met representatives of other transport providers and heard their views about issues to do with home to school transport contracts.

15 January 2007

Members visited Cheshire County Council who provide a dedicated school bus service with vehicles belonging to the local authority.

23 January 2007

Members met with staff, governors and parents from all the primary schools who use the home to school transport service and heard their concerns about the safety and reliability of the vehicles used for home to school transport.

9 February 2007

Members had further discussions with colleagues from the Education Access Team and Transport Planning Services as well as representative from Kendric Ash. Kendric Ash are a firm of consultants who have undertaken an initial review of passenger transport services across the City of York and East Riding in terms of working in a more collaborative way. They are now working directly for York until the end of March providing a more in-depth analysis and offering potential improvements in procuring external transport and greater utilisation of the internal fleet. The Council are also considering tendering for a longer term Performance Partner to fully realise cost effective improvements to passenger transport.

Issues

11 Parents, teachers and governors from primary schools using contractors' vehicles

In March 2006 certain parents of pupils at St Mary's Primary School wrote to the CYC's Transport Planning service expressing their concerns that the school bus from Askham Bryan to St Mary's is not equipped with seat belts (see annex B). They claimed that some parents will not allow their children to use the bus because it has no seatbelts and prefer to take the children to school in their cars, thus adding to the congestion and pollution in Askham Richard. Cllr Janet Hopton has been in contact with parents from this school and informed the Committee of her support for their views. Cllr Glen Bradley has also been in contact with parents from St Mary's and spoke in support of their concerns at the Council meeting of 25 January 2007

where he presented a petition requesting the provision of seatbelts on the school bus which had been signed by 19 parents from the school.

These views were reiterated at the consultation meeting with the primary schools held on 23 January 2007.

Poppleton Ousebank school's main concern was about the regularity of the service rather than the condition of the buses, which they felt had improved. It was perceived that pupils were often late for school due to the late arrival of the buses. This issue is not pertinent to the remit of this review, but has instead been referred to the Education Access Team to deal with.

The head teacher of St Wilfrid's school informed members that their children travel to school on a service bus which is shared by fare-paying passengers. Some of their parents do not want their children to have to travel on the same bus as members of the public. After investigation members were informed that the pupils from St Wilfrid's were not generally entitled to free transport, but that a free pass for a parent to accompany them had been issued as a goodwill gesture.

Archbishop of York's school are very happy with the bus service to their school. In December 2006 they carried out a review of the service and the parents of all users responded that they were pleased with the service that is given (see annex C).

Members recognised that these views were somewhat conflicting, although they realised that the schools will have different experiences of school transport as different contractors will operate their services. Also the type of vehicle supplied by the contractor will vary, and may be different from day to day. For example, at Archbishop of York's school there are less than 16 pupils requiring the bus service, so a mini-bus (which has seatbelts) is provided.

12 City of York Council services

There have been significant year on year increases in home to school transport costs above inflation, which have been a cause for concern to members and officers. There are presently 10 contractors supplying this service, the contracts are usually let for three years. Contracts to secondary school are normally re-let one per year as they come to an end. There are four contracts serving primary schools, these are:

Archbishop of York's C of E Primary, Bishopthorpe
Poppleton Ousebank Primary, Upper Poppleton
St Mary's C of E Primary, Askham Richard
St Wilfrid's RC Primary, Monkgate

The contracts for Poppleton Ousebank, St Wilfrid's and Archbishop of York's are due to end in 2008, and the one for St Mary's ends in 2011.

At present seatbelts are not a requirement of contracts. If a bus with seatbelts is provided on any occasion it will be as a result of the contractor's vehicle availability on that day. CYC officers are aware that operators would be unable to invest in

more modern vehicles unless they had the security of a longer contract. It is recognised that newer vehicles are likely to have more and better safety features built into their design.

Contracts can be terminated before their end date if the provider is given six months notice of this. As contracts end they will be re-let under European Union procurement processes, which require a mix of price and quality to be taken into account when offering contracts. In these circumstances the provision of seatbelts on buses could be stipulated under the contract terms or could be a criteria given preference when assessing quality of the service offered.

At present the contracts do not insist that drivers of buses have a Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) check. The drivers are not the employees of City of York Council and officers have expressed doubts over their authority to check the credentials of the employees of other companies (i.e. the contractors). However, officers of East Riding of Yorkshire Council informed members that they had been assured by the CRB that it was reasonable to require contractors' drivers to sign data protection consent to allow information on them to be shared with the Council. They apply guidelines for deciding on eligibility for employment of drivers if the CRB check reveals details of any offence (see Annex D). It is known that four operators running school contracts in York do CRB checks on all their drivers.

Advice from the Department for Education and Skills (DfES) is that drivers' CRBs should be checked periodically. This could be specified as a minimum standard when re-letting contracts.

Kendric Ash are a firm of Public Sector Consultants who are currently examining all transport used by City of York Council as well as aspects of transport that could be collaborative with other organisations. Kendric Ash reported to the Executive Member for Corporate Services Advisory Panel on 12 December 2006 regarding the first phase of their work (a summary of this report can be found at Annex E). This had researched existing transport operations within CYC and made recommendations as to how the quality of services could be made better quality and more efficient as well as reducing costs. The areas covered were Social Services, special educational needs, fleet management and pool cars as well as home to school transport. In total the council spends over £3m per year on these services.

On some home to school routes pupils who are not entitled to free transport are allowed to use the bus if they pay a fare. DfES advice states that if there are any paying passengers then the vehicle is classed as a service bus, and contracts for these cannot be let for any longer than five years. This could create a problem if higher quality vehicles depend on longer contracts being offered to operators.

13 Home to school transport contractors

Members of the Committee met with representatives of bus and coach companies who are contractors to CYC on 6 December 2006. The Managing Director of the Confederation of Passenger Transport, Yorkshire Region also attended to make representations. Representatives of the Committee visited another operator on 27 November 2006, who provided some written answers to members' questions (see Annex F)

Contractors agreed that they tend to use older vehicles on school runs because the competition for contracts keeps prices down to a level where the cost of newer vehicles cannot be justified. If contracts were extended to 5 – 7 years then they felt they would be able to invest in newer vehicles as they would then be more likely to receive a return on their investment.

Newer vehicles would be more likely to be equipped with seat belts. The cost of equipping seatbelts to a single decker bus that does not already have them can be in the region of £5000, which is not economically viable for older vehicles. Speakers were all of the opinion that one of the main problems with seatbelts on buses was ensuring that the passengers wear them. Although this is not normally a problem with primary school pupils, those from secondary schools often have a great reluctance to put them on – the wearing of seatbelts being seen as distinctly “uncool”. Although buses used for school trips are required to be fitted with seatbelts, there are always teachers accompanying pupils to ensure the belts are worn.

One of the big issues for all operators was the behaviour of children on the buses. This is a particular problem on double decker buses where the driver has less visibility. It was generally felt that there had been a deterioration in behaviour, which had previously involved verbal abuse but this had increased to physical abuse in a minority of cases. Vandalism is also a problem, both the expense of repairs, and the temporary loss of a vehicle, which has to be taken off the road, if, for example, a seatbelt is damaged.

Contractors were of the opinion that the fitting of CCTV to school buses greatly improves pupil behaviour as evidence of the perpetrators of vandalism or unruly behaviour can be given to the schools. The bus operators generally have good relationships with the schools they serve, which have varying methods of trying to ensure responsible behaviour. This might mean employing a school transport manager, using sixth-formers as bus-monitors or removing the right to travel on the bus after being warned about behaviour.

CRB checks were generally supported, although it was recognised that different local authorities required different information, so a check might not be acceptable to all clients. It would be useful if there was some standardisation across authorities.

14 Dedicated school buses

Members were interested in the idea of dedicated school buses being introduced (as in the yellow buses used in the USA). They recognised that where these have been introduced it is often as a result of government funding for a particular project and over several local authorities, for example the £18.7m obtained by West Yorkshire Passenger Transport Executive to supply bus services to 300 schools in West Yorkshire.

On 15 January 2007 representatives of this Committee visited Cheshire County Council, a local authority which has invested in dedicated school buses for their own use.

Cheshire have purchased eight dedicated School buses. Three have 68 seats and five have 60 seats, all with seatbelts and CCTV. Seven operate at one time, one is a spare in case any are off the road for any reason.

These buses cost approx £115k each. A secure parking area is needed at night. It is expected that each will have a ten-year lifespan, but will require refurbishment to keep in good condition – this discourages bad behaviour by pupils. Seatbelts are specified that require minimum maintenance as this can be costly if they are damaged. Obtaining vehicle parts can also be difficult be an issue with some models.

The buses serve three secondary schools. They can be hired out to schools for events between home-to-school runs, it is this that makes the service financially viable.

The buses belong to Council, they were purchased as a result of spiralling contract prices. They are part of the Council's fleet of vehicles for Social Services and other purposes. The drivers are employed by council and they also work as Social Services driver/attendants if necessary. All drivers are CRB checked by council and the vehicles have to operate tachographs in order to comply with EU regulations.

One contractor has dedicated school bus in the Council's livery, they have a contract for five years. Contractors have stated that they would prefer an eight to ten year contract. Many other contractors are hired and they often use older double-decker buses. The Council considered that the contract offering the new bus with seatbelts, CCTV, 68 seats and wheelchair access offered the best value.

Pupils travelling on the school buses and their parents are required to agree a good behaviour contract before being offered a place. In this they have to agree to wear their seatbelts at all times and to refrain from eating and drinking on the bus. Each has an allocated seat, the driver marks them on a register when they get on the bus, and this is checked by a representative of the school on arrival.

Recommendation 1

Council officers will attempt to negotiate with the transport provider for St Mary's School, Askham Richard in order for seat belts to be provided on all vehicles. If this is not possible at a reasonable cost then they will re-let the contract from September 2007.

Implications of Recommendation 1

- **Financial** *The current contractor is willing to install lap seatbelts on his vehicle. This would involve a cost of £9742 + VAT - the breakdown of costs are parts (including new seats) £5867 and labour £3875. The contractor would be seeking a negotiable one off contribution from the Council as a contribution towards these costs.*
- **Human Resources** *none*
- **Equalities** *none*
- **Legal** *none*
- **Other**

Recommendation 2

The Council will ensure that minimum standards for all future home to school transport buses include:

- a) Lap seatbelts to be fitted to all vehicles, with the long term aim of these being 3 point seatbelts.
- b) CCTV to be installed in all vehicles and functioning at all times
- c) Contractors to ensure that all drivers have had a CRB check no later than 3 years before commencing this work and thereafter at 5 year intervals
- d) EU2 emission standards or greater to be required on all contract vehicles

Implications of Recommendation 2

- **Financial** *Preliminary investigations indicate that the requirement to fit seatbelts and CCTV immediately could increase the price of transport contracts by 25%, at an estimated total cost of around £250k p.a. The requirement that all contract vehicles meet EU2 emission standards may further increase costs as a number of the vehicles currently used are EU1 vehicles. The Home to School Transport Service cannot fund this increased cost from within existing resources and substantial growth will be required.*
Phasing in the requirements of this recommendation over a number of years to allow contractors time to convert existing vehicles and invest in newer vehicles should reduce the cost incurred. Further work is needed to provide a realistic estimate of total costs in this case..
- **Human Resources (HR)** *None*
- **Equalities** *Need to ensure that seatbelts or equivalent are also available for any accessible seating or wheelchair spaces on the bus.*
- **Legal** *None*
- **Other**

Recommendation 3

The council will ensure that where possible contracts are to be let for more than 5 years, ideally 8 - 10 years in order to allow contractors to invest in higher quality vehicles

Implications of Recommendation 3

- **Financial** *There is the potential for savings if longer contracts can be offered to operators, or if a smaller number of individual contracts are let. The Education and Inspection Bill may allow for some extension to contracts which also carry some fare-paying passengers.*
- **Human Resources** *None*
- **Equalities** *None*
- **Legal** *None*
- **Other**

Recommendation 4

The council will recognise good practice in other local authorities and encourage schools and contractors to use measures such as good behaviour contracts (see para 14), designated seats and the use of bus prefects to discourage unruly behaviour by pupils.

Implications of Recommendation 4

- **Financial** *There are no immediate financial implications associated with this recommendation*
- **Human Resources** *None*
- **Equalities** *None*
- **Legal** *None*
- **Other**

Recommendation 5

The Council will endeavour to ensure that the same high standards are in place for bus contracts covering all educational establishments wherever possible

Implications of Recommendation 5

- **Financial** *There are no immediate financial implications associated with this recommendation*
- **Human Resources (HR)** *None*
- **Equalities** *None*
- **Legal** *None*
- **Other**

Contact Details

Author:
Barbara Boyce
Scrutiny Officer
01904 551714

Chief Officer Responsible for the report:
Suzan Hemingway
Head of Civic, Democratic and Legal Services

Final Draft Report
Approved

Date 20/03/07

Wards Affected: *List wards or tick box to indicate all*

All

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

None

Annexes

Annex A – Scrutiny Topic Registration form

Annex B – Letter from Edna Hughes dated 25 March 2006

Annex C – Survey of users of school transport service at Archbishops of York's Primary School dated December 2006

Annex D – East Riding of Yorkshire Council's guidelines for employment of drivers after CRB check

Annex E – Report of Kendric Ash to Executive Member for Corporate Services Advisory Panel on 12 December 2006

Annex F – Comments on safety issues form Top Line Travel of York dated 27 November 2006

Annex G – Chairman's foreword

Annex H – Suggested amendments from Cllr David Scott

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Annex A



SCRUTINY TOPIC REGISTRATION FORM

Dear Reader

Scrutiny Members examine the decisions, policies and performance of the Council and make recommendations where they feel things could be improved for the citizens of York.

This non-Executive Member cross-party role was created by the Local Government Act 2000 which is all about modernising local government and creating better ways for citizens to be more involved in local decision making.

The scrutiny boards will consider possible suggestions about issues to look at from anyone, so long as these are not specific issues of an individual nature which should be taken up with a local Councillor or addressed through the Corporate Complaints system.

Scrutiny at York has already investigated things as diverse as the response to the 2000 floods, affordable housing, provision for young people in York, rail-side safety and street cleaning.

If you have a suggestion for something the scrutiny boards might consider, then please fill in this registration form and return it to us, either by post or by e-mail.

Madeleine Kirk

Cllr Madeleine Kirk
Chair, Scrutiny Management Committee



SCRUTINY TOPIC REGISTRATION FORM

SUGGESTED TITLE OF TOPIC Contract School Bus Service	
ABOUT YOU Please fill in as many of the details as you are able to.	
Title (delete as applicable): Mr Mrs Miss Ms Other please state Cllr	
First Name: Charles	Surname: Hall
Address: 104 Oaken Grove Haxby YO32 3QZ	Daytime Phone: 01904 760618 Evening Phone: Email: cllr.chall@york.gov.uk
Are You (delete as applicable) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Resident of York • A Visitor • A City of York Councillor • A City of York Council Employee • A Representative of a Voluntary Organisation or Charitable Trust (if YES please tell us the organisations title and your relationship to the organisation below) • Other (please comment) 	YES NO YES NO NO

ABOUT YOUR PROPOSED TOPIC

Please write your responses to as many of the questions below as you are able to.

WHY DO YOU THINK THIS TOPIC IS IMPORTANT?

I understand that some pupils are transported to and from schools on contract buses that do not have seat belts.

In some local authority areas dedicated school buses are used for pupil school transport i.e. "yellow buses".

It should be a priority for this authority to ensure the safest possible transport for all pupils.

DO YOU KNOW IF THIS TOPIC IS IMPORTANT TO OTHER PEOPLE? IF SO, WHO AND WHY?

To pupils and parents.

WHAT DO YOU THINK SCRUTINY OF THIS TOPIC MIGHT CHANGE, DO OR ACHIEVE?

Provide safer transport to and from schools for pupils.

Improve the quality of school buses.

It could possibly change the form of contract currently negotiated by the council for the provision of bus services.

DO YOU HAVE IDEAS ABOUT THE APPROACH SCRUTINY MEMBERS MIGHT TAKE TO YOUR SUGGESTED TOPIC?

Approach other similar local authorities that have introduced dedicated "yellow buses" to obtain information regarding costs, safety features, staffing and pupil/parent response.

WOULD YOU BE HAPPY TO TALK TO SCRUTINY MEMBERS ABOUT YOUR PROPOSED TOPIC AT FORMAL MEETINGS?

Yes

PLEASE ENCLOSE ANY SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS OR OTHER INFORMATION YOU FEEL MIGHT BE USEFUL BACKGROUND TO THE SUBMISSION OF THIS TOPIC FOR CONSIDERATION.

OUR COMMITMENT TO YOU

Thank you for proposing a new scrutiny topic. As Members of the Scrutiny Management Committee and Scrutiny Boards we promise the following things;

- To advise you of any meetings where a decision will be taken as to whether to progress your topic and invite you to attend
- If Members would like you to speak in support of your topic at such meetings you will be notified and supported through the process by a Scrutiny Officer
- If you do not wish to speak you do not have to; your choice will not influence fair consideration of your topic.

Please return this form to the address below or send it by email. If you want any more information about Scrutiny or submitting a new topic for consideration then please contact the Scrutiny Team.

By Writing to:

The Scrutiny Services Team
C/o The Guildhall
York
YO1 9QN

Or Email: Scrutiny.services@york.gov.uk

Or Phone: 01904 552038

For Scrutiny Administration Only

Topic Identity Number 141

Date Received 30 August 2006

SC1- date sent

Town Farm
116 Main Street
Askham Bryan
York
YO23 3QS

Mr Terry Walker
Public Transport Planning
9 St Leonard's Place
York
YO1 7ET

COPY

25th March 2006

Dear Mr Walker

Askham Bryan school bus to St Mary's CE Primary School, Askham Richard, which does not have Seat-belts.

We are writing to you to express our concerns regarding the Askham Bryan School bus which currently does not have seat-belts.

There are more than 19 pupils using the school bus regularly with an age range of between 4 and 11 years old.

Our main concern is the safety issue due to not having seat-belts. Because the children are of such a young age, they do not always remain seated through out the journey. A huge concern, due to the safety implications, is if the bus was required to stop suddenly. Only the other day, 10th March 2006, there was an accident involving a car and the milk man just minutes before the bus, what would have happened if the car had collided with the bus?

This would not be an issue if the children were restrained by a seat-belt.

In a letter, copy enclosed, from York City Council in July 2005 you state "The underlying principles are to ensure child safety and to minimise car journeys and congestion in the villages." This was with regard to a dedicated school bus. Surely you are not ensuring child safety if the bus does not have seat-belts fitted.

Parents of a further 9 pupils said that they would use the Askham Bryan school bus if it had seat-belts on. This would considerably ease the continued congestion and complaints by the residents of Askham Richard, and would also have a beneficial impact on the environment.

The majority of Askham Bryan Parents currently using the school bus are very concerned that during the journey to and from school their children are at risk because they are not wearing seat-belts. **We would never make even a short car journey without wearing a seat-belt why should a bus be any different?**

The other school bus provided by Selby Council to transport St Mary's children to Bilbrough and surrounding villages always has seat-belts, as do all the buses used on school trips. It is Law that school trips cannot go ahead unless the coaches have seat-belts. We feel that the same laws should apply to school transport.

Please find attached the names and addresses of the 19 parents with 28 children who would continue to use, and potentially use the Askham Bryan School Bus if it were to have seat-belts.

For the safety of our children we are requesting that you provide a school bus with seat-belts immediately.

We look forward to hearing the action you are going to take on this matter.

Yours sincerely



Mrs E Hughes
On behalf of Askham Bryan Parents

Cc

- **John Grogan, Labour MP for Selby Constituency**, Tadcaster Business Centre, 4-6 Bridge Street, Tadcaster, LS24 9AL
- **Anne McIntosh, Conservative MP for the vale of York & Shadow Minister for Family welfare**, House of Commons, London, Sw1A 0AA.
- **Janet Hopton, York Rural West Ward Councillor**, The old Vicarage, 11 Church Lane, Nether Poppleton, York, YO26 6LB
- **Mark Ellis, Head of Access**, Mill House, North Street, York ,YO1 6JD
- **Mrs Rawling, Acting Headteacher**, St Mary's Church of England Primary School, Askham Richard, York, YO23 3PD.



Education and Leisure

Mill House
North Street
York YO1 6JD

Tel: 01904 613161

To: All Residents of Askham Bryan

July 2005

Dear Resident

Askham Bryan school bus to St Mary's CE Primary School

I am writing to all residents in response to parental concern about the designated morning school bus that was changed to a public service route last September to offer residents a public transport link to York College and York.

Since that change, more parents are using their cars to take their children to school which is causing congestion in Askham Richard outside the school. One possible solution would be to establish the route as a school special only, and not allow the public to travel on it, in the hope that it will encourage parents to send their children to school by public transport. We do appreciate the potential inconvenience that this could cause to the community although use by the public is currently low.

Therefore the City of York Council is seeking the views of the community before taking a decision. If there were to be a change in access to the bus service it would come into effect from September. Any change would be on a trial basis; if children continued not to use the service but the public wanted to, then clearly it would be the right move to restore public access to the route at that time. If far more children used it and there was support for a dedicated school special, the Council would probably think it appropriate to continue the dedicated service. The underlying principles of the proposal are to ensure child safety and to minimise car journeys and congestion in the villages.

If you have any views on this please contact Mark Ellis, Head of Access, Education and Leisure, Mill House, North Street, York YO1 6ZG or email: mark.ellis@york.gov.uk

We would appreciate any comments or views by Friday 5 August.

Yours sincerely

Mark Ellis
Head of Access

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Home to School Transport Review

A questionnaire was sent in early/mid December to all parents who use the service. An excellent response was achieved with 8 replies from 9 families.

1 Are you happy with the current service provided?

All 8 replies were either happy or very happy.

Comments included:

The current driver is very pleasant and punctual

The bus driver is very friendly and punctual

The bus collects the children close to home, takes them safely to school and is very effective

The bus is reliable, the vehicle is in good condition and the drivers are friendly

2 If you are not satisfied then what would you like to see changed?

No comments written

3 What could be improved?

Contact between provider and parents to inform of any issue i.e. no collection during bad weather etc.

4 Any other comments?

The service for Bishopthorpe children is excellent

Please do not change the current arrangement. We have used the bus for 7 years without any problems. It is safe, efficient and environmentally friendly way of transporting children to school.

On the whole this is an excellent service

A reliable and friendly service

Julian Davies
19 January 2007

Chair of Governors
Archbishop of York's Junior School
Bishopthorpe

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East Riding Of Yorkshire Council

Criminal Records Bureau Clearance of Bus Drivers and Escorts

A Criminal Records Bureau Disclosure is required for all persons who have substantial access to children and vulnerable adults. These guidelines apply to staff employed by contractors to the Council and staff employed directly by the council.

If the Disclosure received from the Criminal Records Bureau contains details of any offence; the following guidelines should be observed:

Offence	Guidelines
Any offence of a sexual nature.	The person is not acceptable to the Council under any circumstances.
Any offence of violence	If the offence occurred within the preceding 10 years, the person is not acceptable to the Council. If the offences occurred more than 10 years before the date of the Disclosure, a senior officer, following an interview, will consider the person. The length of time since when the offence took place and the number and severity of offences will be taken into account.
Any offence involving the improper use of drugs.	If the offence occurred within the preceding 10 years, the person is not acceptable to the Council. If the offences occurred more than 10 years before the date of the Disclosure, a senior officer, following an interview, will consider the person. The length of time since when the offence took place and the number and severity of offences will be taken into account.
Any offence of driving whilst under the influence of alcohol.	If the offence occurred within the preceding 5 years, the person is not acceptable to the Council.
Any offence involving theft or deception	If the offence occurred within the preceding 5 years, the person is not acceptable to the Council. If the offences occurred more than 5 years before the date of the Disclosure, a senior officer following an interview will consider the person. The length of time since when the offence took place and the number and severity of offences will be taken into account.
Any serious motor vehicle or serious driving offence.	If the offence occurred within the preceding 5 years, the person is not acceptable to the Council. If the offences occurred more than 5 years before the date of the Disclosure, a senior officer following an interview will consider the person. The length of time since when the offence took place and the number and severity of offences will be taken into account.

City of York Council Transport Review Kendric Ash

Main Themes

- **Strategy** – Where does Transport sit in terms of priorities and does it have the focus it should. Is it linked to the corporate objectives of the Authority.
- **Eligibility** – What is the criteria, how is it applied, is it consistent and what can we learn from others
- **Current Operations** – An examination of procurement, systems & processes, culture and customer focus
- **Finance** – What is the real cost to the Council, where do the budgets sit and what efficiencies can be made whilst improving service
- **Collaboration** – Where are there areas of collaboration and what opportunities exist for sharing of best practice and working together

General Findings

- No recognition of future needs for transport, focus tends to be today's problems – e.g. Introduction of Individual Budgets in Social Care and the growing pressures in relation to the "Green Agenda"
- Eligibility needs clarification, corporate agreement, Council wide communication and consistent application – e.g. No documented eligibility criteria in ASC
- Transport teams operating completely independently of one another – no operational links or best practice approach between Adult Social Care, Special Educational Needs and Dial 'a' Ride
- There is no focus on 'demand' for transport services – "We have a fleet how can we use it"– but it should be "we have a transport need how can we best fill it"
- Procurement is disjointed losing ability to minimise cost and improve supplier performance – taxi firms playing one department off against the other often dictating cost and provision, potential cartels + sellers market

General Findings (continued)

- Internal fleet within ASC is not fully utilised and considerable amounts of spare capacity currently exist with other providers - e.g. Dial and Ride (3 buses) and Special Schools (7 buses)

- The cost of Special Educational Needs transport is high in comparison with other local authorities in terms of average cost per child – e.g. In year cost of £28.84 per child per day vs benchmark £18 to £20
- Financial management arrangements are fragmented and confusing with a lack of ownership - Several budgets are based on historical cost
- Linkages with other transport providers is weak, not fully understood and there is substantial opportunity for collaborative working both within the boundaries of CYC and beyond

The Way Forward / Key Challenges

- Agree, assemble and widely communicate a corporate policy which clearly states the strategic intent for passenger transport – city wide
- Build an infrastructure which is demand based and shares best value procurement with best practice methodology.
- Create permanent customer linkages utilising Service Level Agreements, Key Performance Indicators and regular review processes.
- Deliver financial transparency and generate appropriate budgets with full accountability from within the transport teams
- Get all transport providers to the table and drive local and regional passenger transport initiatives; Yorkshire Hospital Trust, PCT and Community Transport

Quick Wins

- The Demand Responsive Transport Management System (DRTMS) being implemented by Children's Services needs to be extended and existing SEN routes should be reviewed using the DRTMS functionality
- Undertake a full review of all passenger transport vehicles, determine availability, consult timetables and routes to maximise utilisation and reduce cost
- Address the shortfalls in the eligibility criteria, decision making process and operational linkages for Home to School / Adult Services and Community Transport (Dial & Ride and York Wheels)
- Review current SEN transport sub-contracts and look to move a percentage of children to internal fleet provision
- ASC taxi contract renewal is due - agree short term arrangement and commence procurement of new contracts with high focus on moving towards partnering arrangements

Sustainability - short / medium term

- Establish a Transport Review Steering Group for York City to own the Transformation project and help shape the future
- Create a detailed Service Improvement Plan with clear quality & finance driven targets and actions
- Communicate intent to Directorates for appropriate cascade to include fully clarified transport policy
- Baseline true levels of transport expenditure and introduce delegated accountability to transport teams
- Clearly communicate aims and objectives to transport teams and introduce a Performance Management culture

Sustainability - short / medium term (cont'd)

- Complete review of procurement process to move towards partnership working – consult with suppliers
- Sit down with all customer representatives and agree a move toward demand driven transport, agree stages for change and regular reporting process
- Commence reengineering of all operational systems and processes and document
- Meet with Community Transport providers to agree allocation of customer base, areas of potential duplication for resolution and opportunities for growth
- Fully review contract with ABRO to maximise vehicle availability and realisation of proposed overall cost savings

Longer Term

- Create local Steering Group with York Hospital Trust, Yorkshire Ambulance, PCT and Community Transport providers to develop and implement initiatives for creating a fully integrated, 'Green' Transport Management solution for York, delivering:
 - Fewer vehicles on the road
 - Less journeys
 - Reduced impact to the environment
 - Citizen confidence in the transport infrastructure and greater use of existing public transport
- Develop collaborative working environment with bordering authorities to:
 - Enhanced procurement efficiencies

- Share best practice
- Further improve buying power
- Maximise fleet utilisation

Outline Efficiency Gains

• City of York	Forecast (06-07)(£K)	Saving (annual) (£K)
Transport Management	190	20
Direct Employees	475	40
Internal Fleet	360	35
Sub-contract transport	2,530	390
Subsidised Transport	95	15
Totals	3,650	500
• Trafford MBC		
Budget	7,200	
Savings delivered to-date	2,500	

Key Deliverables

- Established vision and long term strategy for the future
 - reductions in vehicle numbers & journeys, more passengers per vehicle, CO2 emission reductions
- Positive PR - generating much needed interest amongst the citizens of York and other transport providers
- Better coordinated with tracked improvements to service delivery
- Optimised cost with adaptable provision - correct balance between internal and external provision
- Robust collaborative relationship with other providers
- Enhanced staff morale and customer confidence

Questions?

Top Line Travel of York Limited

Home to School bus services: safety issues

1. Seat belts on home to school contracts.

Seat belts are a legal requirement on coaches but not on buses. Therefore, some home to school contracts already use seatbelt-equipped vehicles and some do not.

There are several issues to take into account where seatbelts are concerned.

I fully accept the advantages, and support the use, of seat belts in cars and coaches, and am by no means anti-seat belt. However, my main concern is that a ruling to require seat belt equipped vehicles on all home to school contracts would be a misguided attempt to be seen to be doing something about safety without achieving much or, indeed, anything.

The first issue to address is to ensure that, if fitted, seat belts are worn. My experience, in using seatbelt equipped coaches on the F3 and other contracts in the past, is that this will not happen. Unless and until a way is found to ensure that seatbelts are used properly, such a ruling would involve a great deal of expense for no benefit.

The claim "seatbelts save lives" is too simplistic in this context. Seat belts would not have saved the lives of the bus driver and the schoolgirl who were killed when an out-of-control lorry collided with their bus at Wilberfoss in 1992. The construction of buses, and indeed the construction of their seats, affords much more protection without a seatbelt than is available in a car.

Buses on home to school contracts tend to be used in areas where overall speeds are low; the risks associated with high speed motorway driving are vastly different from those involved in urban areas.

2. Many school contract operators tend to use end-of-life vehicles because the competition for contracts keeps prices down to a level where the cost of new buses or coaches cannot be justified. On the occasions when newer buses or coaches are used, it is usually because they are also used on other work, which spreads the cost.

The implication for this company, were there to be a requirement for seat belts on home to school transport, is that we could no longer participate in this work because we have no seatbelt equipped vehicles and could not justify the cost of replacing them unless contract prices are increased to reflect the extra cost.

The loss of school contracts would make it harder to recruit drivers, because we need some work on schooldays to balance the heavy commitment to weekends and school holidays when our tour buses are at their busiest.

Our existing buses were not designed to be fitted with seatbelts, and we believe that any attempt to fit them would be unsafe and unacceptable.

Top Line Travel of York Limited

Home to School bus services: safety issues

2. continued

The option of buying seatbelt equipped buses, or buying some which could be fitted with seatbelts, is not practical because the Council's policy of accepting the lowest tender means that we could not compete with other operators who would offer to do this work with elderly (but seatbelt equipped) coaches.

While seatbelt equipped double deck buses are available, many of these (for example, the Scania's used by Harrogate Coach Travel) are high floor buses of pre-euro emissions standard and we now wish to buy only low floor vehicles of euro 2 standard or better. Contract prices are not sufficient to allow this additional investment.

3. We do not have any buses equipped with seat belts. However, as explained above, I do have experience of using seatbelt-equipped coaches at York Pullman Limited during the period 1997-2000.

My experience was that very few children used them and we did have the occasional instance of damage which could not be repaired immediately; if a seat belt is damaged, the seat cannot be used. The refusal to use belts is particularly noticeable among secondary school pupils - peer pressure among teenagers to be "cool" is not an easy attitude to reform.

- 3a. There are probably two options - technology involving seat detectors (as on some cars when a "fasten seat belt" light is triggered by a person sitting in the seat without the belt being fastened), which is expensive both to fit and maintain; or the use of an escort specifically for this purpose. It would be impractical to expect the driver, whose attention should be directed entirely to driving, to supervise the use of seat belts as well.

In either case, there will be a greatly increased cost and this will ultimately be passed on to the local authority. While some operators may be tempted to ignore the additional cost of providing, maintaining and repairing seatbelts, they will eventually find that they cannot do so and there will be a price to pay.

This could be additional contract costs, the cost of re-tendering if a contractor surrenders a contract or goes out of business, or the potential cost of a less scrupulous operator economising on other maintenance.

Top Line Travel of York Limited

Home to School bus services: safety issues

4. My main concerns regarding safety on school transport are about the behaviour of those being carried. To this end, my company has invested in closed circuit television on several buses, and this has successfully been used on several occasions to allow the school to deal with problems such as rowdy behaviour, damage and bullying. On at least two occasions, parents who did not believe that their children had been involved in rowdy behaviour were convinced when shown the CCTV recordings.

However, no account is taken of this when tenders are considered: I believe that CCTV is invaluable and should be specified. Those of us who provide it already are at a disadvantage when tendering because of the extra cost.

Specific areas for attention are: an inability to queue; rushing towards the bus when it arrives at a stop (with a risk of somebody falling or being pushed under the front wheel); standing up or walking around the bus (with a risk of falling if the driver has to stop suddenly); fighting; throwing items around the bus or from the bus; stamping of feet and other behaviour which distracts the driver; crowding the platform as the bus arrives at the stop; leaving food and other rubbish on the bus; or causing damage. We take a strong line on all of these, and on the use of foul language, and will not allow children to travel on the platform of the bus (which, although illegal, does happen elsewhere).

We wish to acknowledge the invaluable help given by Fulford, Canon Lee and St Wilfrid's Schools, in particular, and the staff of the CoYC Education Transport section, whenever problems have arisen.

Safety can be improved, and problems such as these minimised, by the insistence on scholars (and their parents) signing a code of conduct, and rigorous enforcement by the Council and the schools.

We make it clear that any complaints about our staff will be treated seriously, investigated and action taken if necessary. This emphasises that a code of conduct is fair.

5. We do make CRB checks but believe that this should be done by the local authority or the Traffic Commissioner. It would be much simpler if this were to be undertaken by the City Council, or by a partnership of local authorities to avoid the need for separate checks to be carried out for different authorities. It would be even more acceptable if this information becomes the province of the Traffic Commissioner, who has the power to remove a PCV licence from anyone who is not suited to hold one.

Top Line Travel of York Limited

Home to School bus services: safety issues

6. Compulsory CRB checking would be welcome on condition that bureaucratic delays do not make it impossible to staff such contracts. Also, in view of the number of drivers from Eastern Europe currently employed in this industry, a secure method of checks for non-UK nationals is needed.

It would be unjust if a situation were to arise where one driver could not be used on a school service because CRIB checks had not been completed, but another driver from another country could be used because such checks could not properly be carried out at all.

7. If the contractors had to carry out the checks, there would be a great deal of inconsistency, delays and a need for more administrative time. It would be preferable for the local authorities to do this, as NYCC do already.
8. Five year contracts would encourage operators to invest in newer buses, which will improve quality. However, depreciation on a new bus used only on school services can be around £60 per day. Contract prices do not reflect this.
9. There has been some deterioration of behaviour with some scholars, but this is relatively minor and is by no means universal. York has, to the best of my knowledge, never suffered the appalling behaviour experienced on school buses in some areas, although there have been some notable exceptions.

On the whole, behaviour is good so long as the school and the local authority are prepared to take action to deal with any trouble immediately - and this includes having staff available to assist or give advice on a Friday afternoon.

Peter Dew
Managing Director
Top Line Travel of York Limited
23 Hospital Fields Road
Fulford Industrial Estate, YORK Y010 4EW

27.11.06

Chair's Foreword

Local Education Authorities must provide free transport for children of primary school age who live more than two miles from their nearest suitable school. Travelling by bus to school has a higher safety record than car journeys. It is better for the environment, reduces congestion and develops confidence in children but some parents are reluctant to allow their children to use this form of transport because they regard the vehicles as being unsafe, outdated and the behaviour on the buses to be of a low standard.

This report has attempted to make recommendations that will in the long-term improve the quality of the buses used, improve safety, improve behaviour, reduce traffic congestion and encourage the uptake of places on school buses.

I would like to thank all those who contributed to the production of this report including Members, Officers, proprietors and managers of transport companies, parents, governors and headteachers of the schools involved. The frankness and openness of their contributions enabled the board to identify clear targets that can be achieved.

There has been a marked variation in the type and quality of vehicle used for transporting primary school children to and from school in the past and this report if implemented would ensure that all pupils receive the same provision.

Cllr Charles Hall
Chair of Education Scrutiny Board
February 2007

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Submissions to the Education Scrutiny Committee from Cllr David Scott

I'm sure that all members of this Scrutiny Committee will agree that York's children are its most valuable resource.

I was at the Executive Member for Education Advisory Panel in April 2006 when Cllr Janet Hopton first raised the concerns of pupils travelling on buses taking them from their home to St Mary's Primary School. At that time the Executive Member for Education promised action. I am therefore disappointed that almost a year later nothing has actually been done to address these concerns.

Having said that I commend the hard work of this Scrutiny Committee. I would however like to raise some concerns with the draft report before you today.

The Scrutiny Committee have properly identified a number of important issues.

- The Education and Inspection Bill will increase the provision of home to school transport that will be provided by this Council.
- There are environmental issues associated with the provision of School transport
 - Parents that boycott a service that is perceived to be unsafe will add to the carbon footprint of the home to school transport arrangements by using their own cars
 - Older buses used by some contractors will cause more environmental damage than newer vehicles
- Different Schools have different experiences with home to school transport arrangements and have different concerns
- The contracts for this service do not currently guarantee minimum specifications for bus safety, seatbelts and vehicle emissions. It is possible for a contractor to switch an acceptable vehicle to an unacceptable vehicle without notice or penalty.
- Only 4 out of the 10 contractors carry out CRB checks
- Contractors have concerns about pupils behaviour at times, but that there are options for contractors, schools and this Council to address this.
- Current contracts for some primary schools run up to 2011, but have a 6 months notice provision to bring them to an end sooner.
- Some vehicles used for home to school transport would not be allowed to be used for school trips.

At the last meeting the Bus and Coach Operators made a number of submissions to this committee. I must take issue with some of those.

The Bus and Coach Operators said

“There was little evidence to suggest that fitting seatbelts in buses made journeys safer, rather the lack of seatbelts was a perceived problem.”

And

“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.

The main problem to safety was the behaviour of pupils on transport and this was exacerbated on double decker buses where drivers had less visibility.”

I e-mailed Pat Harris, Director of BUSK and BUSK would give the following submissions to this Committee

“I can confirm that I am the person responsible for making any public statements about any issue surrounding the transportation at children and young people.

I have carried out much research over the last 14 years in all aspects of road safety and worked alongside experts in crash impact research and well as manufacturers of buses, coaches, minibuses and cars. I have also been advised by consultants in accident and emergency medicine about different types of injuries including permanent and fatal injury to passengers travelling in all types of vehicles, wearing different types of safety belts correctly, incorrectly and not wearing any at all and also those passengers who are standees.

I can confirm that as a result of this research and working partnerships that I continue to have with outside agencies, that I never have, or never would make a statement that to say that there was no evidence to suggest that seatbelts on vehicles made them safer. The fact is, that passengers who are protected by a properly engineered safety belt are less likely to sustain serious, permanent or fatal injury unless of course the accident is of a very high speed or the accident for instance is a car passenger whose car impacts with 40 tonne truck or tanker.

I am more than happy to talk to you about these issues if you think this might be helpful. I have a lot of experience in working to make transport safer for everybody, that is, pupils, drivers and all other road users. I led a Task Group within the core team of Monmouthshire County Council's Best Value Review and resulting from this they are currently running a pilot which so far has had great success in improving the behaviour of pupils and saving money as well.

I work for various local authority and the police in projects to help educate pupils how to keep safe on their daily journey to school. BUSK also provides resource materials that are used by schools, RSOs, the police and transport operators.

BUSK would support the use of properly engineered safety belts in any transport used for home to school transport although I have, in the past, voiced concern over buses and even some older coaches, that are fitted with safety belts. The reason for this is that the buses I have seen that have belts installed are the older vehicles that were not built to take belts and where the seats are not of the correct structure to take the stress loads that would be imposed upon them during an impact. In these circumstances I would advise against the use of belts because there is evidence to show that belts fitted into these types of vehicles with inadequate structures etc., could prove to be lethal to the passengers.

I would also point out that the statistics that are often quoted by some in the coach and bus industry are flawed. They talk about passenger miles and compare this with car passenger miles. What they do not say is that the passenger miles they refer to often include trains and air miles. Also car passenger miles very often includes minibuses.

I can also tell you that between 10,000 and 11,000 passengers are injured inside buses each year and around 2500 children are injured inside buses and coaches each year as a direct result of not wearing belts.

Around 20% of the injuries to children are permanent which means they will not be able to live a normal life. Children aged between 10-14 are more likely to be injured.

There is some evidence that if children are wearing belts then they do not cause the same distraction to the driver. Driver distraction is a huge problem.”

I would ask this Committee to consider serious those comments

The issue of older vehicles being used on the contracts has been raised before this Committee. One must ask why our young people are asked to travel in buses that couldn't be used once they were in school. If it isn't economic or safe to fit a bus with £5,000 worth of seat belts then that bus shouldn't be used.

It is strange that the contractors complain that old buses are used because of cost pressures, whilst at the same time the Council sees the home to school transport rising above inflation.

I would also like to comment on some of your draft recommendations.

Recommendation 1

I agree that there is a need to provide seat belts to St Mary's School home to school transport service. However I cannot accept that this requirement should only be done if it is at a "reasonable cost".

What price can you put on a child's life? It needs to be an absolute, not at a reasonable cost.

I would ask for an addition that requirement apply to all current primary school contracts.

There is also a need to ensure that vehicles that are currently used and meet this Council's desired standards are not switched. There is a need for guarantees to be obtained from Contractors to ensure this.

Recommendation 2

I agree with it. But I would like it to make clear that this recommendation applies to all new contracts, including secondary school home to school transport,

There is also a need for newer vehicles to be used. The recent West Coast rail crash show that new vehicle designs are safer for all in the event that the worst happens. I would remind you that BUSK believe that seatbelts can also reduce the possibility of an accident occurring as well as reducing injuries in the event of an accident.

Additional Recommendation

I would ask you to consider an additional recommendation be adopted:-

“That as a matter of urgency current contracts providing home to school transport for secondary schools be examined and reviewed to ensure that vehicles used have seat belts fitted. Where Contractors are unable to do so that those contracts are brought to an end and contracts compliant with Recommendation 2 are entered into.

That where suitable vehicles are currently being used that suitable guarantees are obtained from Contractors that they will continue to be used until such time as the contract is renewed.”

I hope that the Executive and the Council will act quickly upon your report.