

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee

Cabinet

Date of Committee

28 April 2005

Report Title

Home to School Transport

Summary

Interim Report of the Home to School Task and Finish Group set up by the Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The report was considered by the Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 10 March 2005.

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Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?

Yes.

Background papers

Cabinet Minutes – 24 June 2004, Briefing Papers provided at the Learning Overview and Scrutiny Meeting on the 23 September 2004, Terms of Reference provided at Learning Overview and Scrutiny meeting on the 9 November 2004

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-

Details to be specified

Other Committees

Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Local Member(s)

Other Elected Members

Cllr Richard Grant, Cllr John Haynes and Cllr Mick Jones

Cabinet Member

.....

Chief Executive

.....

Legal

Jane Pollard

Finance

Dave Clarke

Other Chief Officers

David Carter, John Deegan

- District Councils
- Health Authority
- Police
- Other Bodies/Individuals Monica Fogarty
Mark Gore – comments included
Nick Williams

FINAL DECISION None

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS: Details to be specified

- Further consideration by this Committee
- To Council
- To Cabinet
- To an O & S Committee
- To an Area Committee
- Further Consultation

Agenda No

Cabinet - 28 April 2005.

Home to School Transport

Report of the Chair - Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Recommendation of the Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee:-

That the Cabinet approve that all school buses for primary and secondary school children should be suitably equipped with seatbelts and the Cabinet considers how this change may be implemented having regard to the financial resources available.

1. Views of the Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Juned reported that the Task Group had looked at a number of issues including:

- Contracting Profile
- Seatbelts
- Statutory Entitlement and different fare options.

Cllr Juned noted that she had been the only Member able to attend most of the Task Group meetings and this had proved frustrating in putting forward recommendations. The report therefore put forward evidence and information that had been gathered to date.

During the discussion, the following points were highlighted:

1. It was important that the Spokespersons of each Group ascertained what input Groups were going to make and that these were fed to the Task Groups. Substitutes could be used and these did not have to be Members of the Learning O&S Committee.
2. There was a need to ensure that facilities offered across the whole county were equal and that no groups were favoured or discriminated against.
3. Warwickshire had a policy where all primary school children had to have escorts on buses/coaches. It was noted that not all counties provided escorts on school buses.
4. It was agreed that escorts and seatbelts were separate issues and the presence of escorts on a coach or bus did not reduce injuries to children if the bus/coach was involved in an accident or swerved.
5. The Fenny Compton bus contract had been awarded in accordance with County Council policy and had commenced in September 2004 and was in place for three years.

6. It was noted that where operators had previously not provided seatbelts, this was gradually changing and future tenders would be required to give costs with and without seatbelts.
7. Members commended the interim report and noted that the final report would be brought to the Committee in June.

Cllr Juned and the Chair thanked the Officers for the hard work they had done for the Task Group.

The motion was carried with 8 in favour and one against that the Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to the Cabinet that all school buses for primary and secondary school children should be suitably equipped with seatbelts and the Cabinet considers how this change may be implemented having regard to the financial resources available.

2. Background

- 2.1 Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee identified the area of spiralling costs in providing free and assisted Home to School and College transport as an area for in depth scrutiny within its programme of work for 2004/2005.
- 2.2 At their meeting on 24th June 2004, Cabinet suggested that the Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee could include in its examination: -
 - The strategic decisions relating to satellite education venues being taken by colleges which involve transportation of students and/or lecturers
 - The liability for transportation costs and the financial implications for the Council
 - Environmental issues
- 2.3 At their meeting on 23rd September 2004, Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered briefing papers provided by Education Department regarding;
 - Home to School Transport Policy
 - Provision for Pupils not entitled to Free Transport
 - Post 16 Transport
 - Seat Belt Policy
 - Procurement Arrangements
- 2.4 A Task and Finish Group was set up to focus on Home to School Transport. This was chaired by Councillor Susan Juned. Other party representation was provided by; Cllr Fowler, Cllr Hayfield, Cllr Alan Smith (replacement for Cllr Baldry) and School Governor Chris Smart completed the Group. Appendix A is attached outlining the conclusions of the Task and Finish Group on Seatbelts.
- 2.5 A Task and Finish Group was set up to focus on Post 16 students and their travel. This was Chaired by Claire Sangster, the Governor representative and each party was represented by the following Members; Cllr Booth, Cllr McCarney and Cllr McCarthy.

3. Aims and Objectives

3.1 The aim of the scrutiny exercise was to consider and propose options that improve the arrangements for Home to School and College Transport while ensuring value for money.

3.2 Outcomes from both exercises could be that:

- All eligible pupils receive a value for money transport service, in accordance with legislation relating to length of journey and time spent travelling.
- The exercise produces a clear pricing/charging structure with appropriate schemes and routes for pupil/student travellers, in consultation with contractors and partners.
- The structure(s) consider the impact on costs and revenue and the environmental implications.

CLLR JOHN BURTON
Chair - Learning O&S
Committee

Shire Hall
Warwick

14 March 2005

Seatbelts – Task and Finish Group

Seatbelt Legislation

- Seatbelts do not have to be provided on buses operating home to school transport. (A bus is defined as a vehicle not capable of exceeding 60mph).
- Seatbelts must be provided on vehicles defined as coaches and minibuses operating home to school transport.

Position in Warwickshire

- It was agreed by the Education Committee in 1996 that all new contracts would be issued on the basis of a seat for each child. This would remove the use of standing capacity on vehicles. This effectively abolished the three for two rule in Warwickshire. The Authority uses a mixture of vehicles to convey pupils and students between home and school/college.
- The majority of children travel on public service vehicles without seatbelts which also accommodate fare paying passengers. Capacities are sometimes difficult to monitor due to the fare paying passengers.
- Tenders are issued on the basis of a vehicle for a specified number of children. There is no stipulation at the tender stage that seatbelts are required. Operators are able to use buses or coaches and need to meet legal requirements. Successful contracts can be awarded to a company using buses or coaches or a combination of both
- Approximately 9450 entitled pupils under the age of 16 travel on home to school transport in Warwickshire. A little under half travel on seatbelted vehicles.
- In the last few years WCC have established a small fleet to operate home to school transport and public transport services. These vehicles are all fitted with seat belts and operate mainly in central and southern areas of the county where the cost of contracts is considerably higher.

Implication of Moving to Seatbelts on All Vehicles

- There are currently 20 double deck vehicles used in the county for transporting under 16 pupils. Double deck vehicles do not have seatbelts fitted. If routes presently operated by these vehicles were retendered, 30 replacement single deck vehicles would be required – Approximate cost £525K per annum
- A consequence of using only vehicles with seatbelts would be the removal of the majority of buses from the school transport network. Companies widely

used across the county including Stagecoach, Travel West Midlands and Arriva could be lost from the market as they do not currently operate belted vehicles. Belts could possibly be retrofitted to some modern buses - Approximate cost of retendering and retrofitting £218K per annum

- To meet the implications of the above would create a significant demand for coaches which are currently not available in Warwickshire. Apart from the practical difficulties this would cause there is likely to be a significant increase in existing coach prices when services are re-tendered. Approximate cost £145K per annum.
- Disability Discrimination Act requirements prevent coaches being used on many local bus services as they do not enable access for some people with disabilities. An increase in seatbelt availability would remove some of the opportunities for integration of public and school transport, promoted in the Transport Act 1985, and fully utilised in Warwickshire in recent years. Approximate cost £95K per annum.
- The figures quoted in this report are based on a desktop exercise. The only way in which more accurate costings can be obtained is through a comprehensive tendering exercise. However, it is unlikely that the total **annual** cost of providing seatbelts on all vehicles will be less than £983K per annum.
- Regardless of the cost of comprehensive seatbelt provision, the replacement of all double decks, and single decks which operators are unable or unwilling to fit with seatbelts, is likely to result in a significant shortage of vehicles which can meet WCC minimum standards. Any measures to increase the number of vehicles offering seatbelt provision should therefore be treated with caution. A phased approach is essential.
- Whilst the estimated cost of providing seatbelts on all school vehicles is less than was the case five years ago, significant cost implications still remain and any policy change to secure this provision would place a considerable and ongoing pressure on the home to school transport budget.

Implication of Moving to Seatbelts on Vehicles Conveying Primary School Pupils

- All the factors outlined above also apply in respect of primary home to school transport but, in all cases, with much less financial implication. The main reason for this is that far less primary school pupils travel on home to school transport:-

North Warks	275
Nuneaton and Bedworth	166
Rugby	389
Stratford	404
Warwick	198

Total 1437

This figure represents a little over 15% of the total number of mainstream under 16 pupils receiving home to school transport.

- Very few primary school pupils travel on double deck vehicles
- At present, approximately 972 primary school pupils travel on seatbelted vehicles. The remaining 465 (32.4%) do not. The cost of providing seatbelts on all primary school transport would be £93K per annum.

Other Issues Raised by Task and Finish Group

Accidents

- WCC's safety record on home to school transport is excellent. Whilst there have been minor incidents which have resulted in precautionary hospital checks for a small number of passengers, there have been no serious injuries to Warwickshire passengers for at least the last ten years. The most recent serious accident involved a bus carrying Warwickshire pupils to Chipping Campden School in Gloucestershire. The bus collided with a lorry on the B4035 in Charingworth. The lorry driver did not survive the accident but none of the bus passengers were hurt. The bus was fitted with seatbelts.
- The very small number of school transport related incidents need to be set in context against the number of passengers travelling. Up to 13,000 pupils and students travel throughout the school year. The equates to 4.94million passenger journeys per annum.
- Research has shown that travelling to school by bus is still one of the safest methods of transport available to school children. There is no evidence, either locally or nationally, to suggest that the absence of seatbelts on a bus increases the likelihood of injury in the event of an accident.

Criteria for Contract Selection

- School transport contracts are retendered on a four year rolling programme. More than 100 operators are on the WCC tender list but bids are rarely received from more than four or five operators. Contracts are usually, but not always, awarded to the lowest bidder.
- Contracts are awarded subject to a satisfactory vehicle and premises check carried out by the County Vehicle Inspector.

Legal

- The Terms and Conditions for the Provision of A Passenger Transport Services allows both parties to terminate the Agreement with four months notice. This only tends to be used in exceptional circumstances.

Conclusion

- Warwickshire County Council meets all legal requirements with regard to seatbelt provision. Any measure to increase the number of seatbelted vehicles, whether across the board, or primary school transport only, will definitely have cost implications.
- However, this exercise indicates that the cost of increasing seat belt provision is markedly less than similar exercises carried out five years ago. This is due to there being more belted coaches, the increasing presence of School Links, and the ongoing removal of double deck vehicles wherever feasible.
- Members may feel that the additional cost involved, particularly in respect of primary school transport only, is worth considering given the sensitive and high profile nature of this subject. Operationally, it should be possible to renegotiate or retender those primary school services affected by September 2006. Countywide seatbelt provision would take considerably longer.

Kevin McGovern, 1 December 2004

SEATBELT COSTS - PHASED APPROACH - SCHOOL TRANSPORT

TENDERING CYCLE PERIOD	FULL YEAR COST	PART YEAR ADJUSTED COST		ACTUAL COST (CUMULATIVE)	
Dec-05 2005/2006	£118,125.00	£29,531.25	Full year @25%	£29,531.25	2005/2006
Apr-06	£283,125.00				
Dec-06 2006/2007	£93,125.00	£23,281.25	Full year @25%	£424,531.25	2006/2007
Apr-07	£97,125.00				
Dec-07 2007/2008	£94,125.00	£23,531.25	Full year @25%	£615,031.25	2007/2008
Apr-08	£141,125.00				
Dec-08 2008/2009	£59,125.00	£14,781.25	Full year @25%	£841,531.25	2008/2009
Apr-09					
Dec-09 2009/2010	£97,125.00	£24,281.25	Full year @25%	£910,156.25	2009/2010
Note that there are 2 contract cycles beginning in Apr and Dec. Therefore the cumulative costs will include the full year cost for the years following the year of contract renewal.				£983,000.00	2010/2011 & BEYOND

SEATBELT COSTS - PHASED APPROACH - PRIMARY SCHOOL TRANSPORT (included above)

TENDERING CYCLE PERIOD	FULL YEAR COST	PART YEAR ADJUSTED COST		ACTUAL COST (CUMULATIVE)	
Dec-05 2005/2006	£9,000.00	£2,250.00	Full year @25%	£2,250.00	2005/2006
Apr-06	£66,000.00				
Dec-06 2006/2007	£9,000.00	£2,250.00	Full year @25%	£77,250.00	2006/2007
Apr-07	£9,000.00				
Dec-07 2007/2008	£0.00	£0.00		£93,000.00	2007/2008
Note that there are 2 contract cycles beginning in Apr and Dec. Therefore the cumulative costs will include the full year cost for the years following the year of contract renewal.				£93,000.00	2008/2009 & BEYOND