

Formal Response to Audit and Risk Management Report on Home to School Transport Draft v1.1

Recommendation 1

The existing Transport Policy concentrates on eligibility only and does not cover other relevant matters, such as stating wider service objectives.

We recommend that the policy document is developed further to include all matters pertinent to the service, as well as stating policy on eligibility it should state wider service objectives and how these objectives should be achieved, i.e. value for money, quality assurance, performance indicators etc

Recommendation 2

A formal review process is not written into the existing Transport Policy and existing reviews only update legislative requirements.

We recommend that the requirement for conducting annual reviews be written into the policy in order to promote best practice and improve the overall functionality of the service i.e. value for money, quality assurance, performance indicators etc.

Response

Both recommendations relate to the Children and Young People's policy document which is outside the control of the Transport Procurement and Operations Group, TPOG. These issues will be tackled in detail within the future guidelines for the TPOG structure and operation.

Recommendation 3

No minutes are taken for the meetings held between Transport, Education and Social Services where the monitoring of spending is discussed.

We recommend that these monthly meetings be minuted, with immediate effect, in order to evidence meeting discussions and the reasons for decisions taken and the resulting actions

Response

Since June 2005, all meetings which have taken place between CYP and TPOG have been minuted by an officer from TPOG.

Recommendation 4

Development and Cultural Services have no specific performance indicators to assess the effectiveness of home to school transport.

We recommend that performance indicators are introduced specific to home to school transport in order for the provision to be effectively evaluated and so decisions will be based on accurate information.

Response

Although there are currently no specific performance indicators for home to school transport, there is a Service Level Agreement in existence between 'Education Services, Special Educational Needs / Admissions Team and Development and Cultural Services, Transportation (Public Transport Unit)'. Within this SLA, there is a series of tasks / responsibilities which may be taken forward as performance indicators. Other performance indicators can be developed relating to complaints procedures, monitoring of service user satisfaction, escort training, etc.

There is no equivalent SLA between Social Services and Transportation. In terms of operation the existing SLA has been transferred across to the newly-formed CYP, however it will need to be updated as the new structure and functions of TPOG emerge.

It is suggested that the following are used as the basis of developing Key Performance Indicators, KPIs and are monitored and reported appropriately through the joint CYP/TPOG meeting. These KPIs should be formalised by 31 October 2006.

KPI TPOG will arrange to notify the operator, parent and education establishment of the transport arrangements within five working days of the transport being arranged.

Target: 95% notified within five working days

KPI TPOG officers will complete a checklist for each contract arranged to ensure and demonstrate that the most cost-effective means of travel has been arranged.

Target: 100% of contract awards recorded onto a checklist

KPI TPOG officers will meet regularly with CYP officers to discuss and update current and forecast spend in relation to SEN and mainstream school transport budgets.

Target: one minuted meeting per month

KPI TPOG will provide reports on financial monitoring setting out total and disaggregated costs of service provision.

Target: one monitoring report per month

Recommendation 5

As performance indicators have not been set effective monitoring of the service provided cannot take place.

We recommend that monitoring systems be introduced in order to clearly evaluate progress against these performance indicators and to enable decisions to be based on the most effective information.

Response

Once KPI's have been established TPOG will develop appropriate monitoring systems. It is envisaged that the computer system, Routewise, that is used to register and manage all contracts, will be able to be developed to produce the necessary reports to monitor the performance indicators. It is proposed that the KPI's will be reported through the monthly monitoring meetings on a quarterly basis. Monitoring arrangements should be in place by 30 December 2006.

Recommendation 6

The transport 'Guidelines' issued to all individuals travelling do not clearly stipulate that either a travel pass or an identity card must be produced in order to travel and make no specific reference to the complaints process.

We recommend that the transport 'Guidelines' be updated to reflect the above information. In order to ensure that they remain up to date they should be reviewed at least annually.

Response

A series of guidance leaflets has been prepared. The five 'Transporting Children between Home and School' leaflets are:

- Guidelines for Students
- Guidelines for Parents
- Guidelines for Staff in School
- Guidelines for Escorts
- Guidelines for Drivers / Operators.

Each of the leaflets indicates the requirement for students to present a travel pass or identity card in order to travel. The leaflets also invite people with problems or concerns with regard to home to school transport services to contact Derby City Council TPOG and provide full contact details.

In time for the start of each academic year the information on the leaflets is reviewed and amended if necessary.

Recommendation 7

There is no documented guidance or formal procedures for dealing with complaints. We recommend that the process for dealing with complaints be formalised and guidance notes prepared with standard documentation, in order for all complaints to be dealt with in the same way.

Response

There is obviously a formal Council complaints procedure that members of the public can follow. It is assumed that the complaints that the audit report

was referring to were the more general day-to-day complaints and enquiries that the team receives through various forms of communication.

Despite the fact that there is no documented guidance for dealing with complaints, a fairly standard approach is adopted by the TPOG team. Although there are peaks at the start of the academic year, TPOG receives few complaints. Complaints received tend to fall into the following categories:

- Timekeeping in relation to services
- Driver attitudes
- Parents not being at home for the return of students in the afternoon
- Non-issue of identity passes (due to waiting list for late applicants)

The vast majority of complaints are received by telephone and responded to in the same way. The officer who answered the telephone takes responsibility for dealing with the complaint. The officer will begin by ascertaining whether the complaint is valid and requires investigation. If, for example, a taxi arrives to collect a student up to ten minutes late, this issue will not be investigated (as this is within the conditions of contract for taxi operation) and the reason will be explained to the complainant. Issues which are deemed to be breaches of contract conditions are investigated with the operator, school, student and parents as appropriate. Only if the complainant is not satisfied with the response or the officer is not in a position to undertake further investigative work, will the complaint be forwarded to a more senior Public Transport Officer.

If an investigation is required following a telephone complaint, TPOG officers usually respond to the complainant to inform them of progress or to confirm the course of action that has been taken to address the complaint.

Complaints which are received by letter are responded to by letter. There are City Council performance indicators relating to the timescale for responding to letters received which officers try to adhere to.

All serious complaints are recorded onto the Routewise system on a contract by contract basis. The system provides an option to request a report listing all complaints received with regard to a particular contract. The complaint received is logged, together with action taken and the final outcome.

It is our view that a procedure should be established that considers the following issues:

- Complaints should be logged in the same system whether telephone, letter or email complaints

- Each complaint investigation should be completed by the despatch of a letter to the complainant outlining the outcome of the investigation and the reasons for the decision taken
- Details about a right of appeal should be included within any correspondence with the complainant
- Any appeal against a decision (to be conducted by a senior officer) should also be logged on Routewise and in the paper filing system, and contact made with the complainant as above

It would be helpful to have some performance indicators and we would recommend that the following be considered once a procedure has been established.

KPI TPOG officers will record all complaints on Routewise (whether or not they required investigation) – possibly pro-forma to record process?

Target: 100% of complaints to be easily accessible via Routewise
interrogation

KPI TPOG officers will respond to written complaints in writing within x working days writing (including letter re. receipt of complaint)

Target: 95% of complaints to be resolved within x working days

KPI TPOG officers will investigate and resolve complaints received by telephone within 7 working days

Target: 95% to be completed within 7 working days

The procedure should be completed by 30 November 2006, and KPIs and monitoring arrangements should be in place by 30 December 2006.

Recommendation 8

Service users, the public and schools are not consulted regarding their satisfaction with the service provided.

We recommend that evaluation forms should be devised to assess the effectiveness of the service which are given/sent to service users at pre-determined timescales. These should be collectively analysed and the results acted on accordingly in order to improve the operation of the service provided.

Response

This process is not currently performed but is intended to be scheduled into the future tasks of TPOG. It is suggested that a standard questionnaire form be developed to address the following issues:

- School attended
- Service used
- Punctuality of service
- Cleanliness of vehicle

- Availability of seats
- Length of journey
- Attitude of drivers
- Performance of escorts
- Etc.

The form would incorporate a bi-polar scale whereby for each issue, respondents would indicate whether they were 'very satisfied', 'satisfied', 'neither satisfied nor dissatisfied', 'dissatisfied' or 'very dissatisfied'. This approach would enable the level of satisfaction with each individual service, and an overall level of satisfaction with all services, to be measured. A final question inviting respondents to provide additional comments would identify specific concerns which could be followed up by TPOG officers.

The survey, which should be conducted independently of DCC, should be undertaken once per year (for example after October half-term or in the first half-term after Christmas). This would enable any issues to be addressed during the academic year. We recommend that the questionnaire is sent to students' homes to enable them to complete the form in conjunction with parents / guardians before returning it in a pre-paid envelope. A cross-section of services should be surveyed each year (number and frequency to be agreed with TPOG).

In addition to the user survey, it is recommended that a semi-structured questionnaire is developed for the purposes of consulting school staff. The topics which are in the user questionnaire will be included, although staff will be provided with the opportunity of identifying specific services which are better or worse than others. We would suggest that the approach adopted would be a face-to-face interview, which would enable the senior TPOG officer to explore issues and address them immediately after the meeting.

It is proposed that the following indicators are used as a basis for monitoring satisfaction:

KPI TPOG will survey parents, school staff and operators once per year to assess their opinions with regard to the transport services provided

Target: x number of contracts to be surveyed per year

KPI To achieve a high level of user satisfaction with the services provided

Target: 85% satisfied or very satisfied in year 1

KPI To achieve a high level of satisfaction with the services provided among school staff

target = 85% satisfied in year 1

Recommendation 9

There is no performance monitoring of the service providers to provide quality assurance of the service provided.

We recommend that a quality assurance programme should be established at the earliest opportunity, under the direction of the Transport Procurement and Operations Group Manager, to ensure that the section maintain an appropriate service.

Response

This process is not currently performed but is intended to be scheduled into the future tasks of TPOG. Each potential service provider should be required to complete a simple pro-forma when applying for the first time to be entered onto the register, or at each subsequent renewal. This pro-forma will request data relating to vehicle age, maintenance records, complaints and QA systems, etc. A minimum threshold will be set for the answers on the form which must be reached in order to be allowed onto the register. Any refusal to complete the pro forma will automatically disqualify the potential service provider from appearing on the register.

KPI Each potential new service provider will be required to complete a pro-forma detailing vehicle ages, maintenance records etc; each form to be assessed before service provider is entered on database of potential tenderers

Target: every new service provider to be assessed in this fashion; 95% of new service tenderers to be assessed and notified of the result within 10 working days

KPI Each existing service provider will be required to complete a pro-forma as detailed above; each form to be assessed to ensure that service provider is eligible to be maintained on the register

Target: each existing service provider to be assessed in this way within 12 months of the new system becoming operational

Recommendation 10

There is no inspection programme of the service providers to ensure that contract terms and conditions are being adhered to.

We recommend that an inspection programme be established at the earliest opportunity, under the direction of the Transport Procurement and Operations Group Manager, to ensure that the section maintain contract compliance.

Response

Currently officers are scheduled to monitor contract performance as often as possible. This should take place as often as twice a week. In practice, owing to staff shortages, it tends to take place either when a specific complaint has

been received and an investigation is warranted, or when there is slack within the other work activities of TPOG.

The monitoring tends to take the form of an inspection, rather than a technical monitoring of the vehicles. There is currently a lack of technical expertise within TPOG to allow technical monitoring. This should be rectified in the future structure of TPOG.

We believe that there should be a three strand approach to future monitoring of service providers, contract operations and vehicle:

- Access to maintenance and other records of the service provider to be requested on an annual basis to ensure that the answers provided within the pro forma are correct (the right to access to these records to be included within the conditions of contract – all new contracts will contain these clauses; all existing contracts will be amended to include this clause)
- Monitoring of contracts will take place as currently at schools on a routine basis – each contract to be inspected at least once each school year AND all companies deemed worthy of investigation to be followed up by a special inspection which will be in addition to the routine monitoring. A simple monitoring spreadsheet will be developed which will draw upon the existing paperwork and will allow the inspection results to be recorded on the database, and also in the paper files

Examples of the types of KPI that should be developed to monitor this service are set out below:

KPI service providers and contracts about which a complaint has been received which is deemed worthy of investigation to be investigated within x working days

Target: 100% to be investigated within x working days

KPI contracts to be subject to routine inspection during each school year

Target: 85% of all contracts to be inspected during the school year

- An inspection of the vehicles themselves also to take place during the routine monitoring; this will require an additional monitoring pro-forma and the use of a TPOG member of staff, or officer seconded for the purpose, in order to ensure that the vehicle is sound and in accordance with the information provided earlier by the service provider.

KPI service providers and contracts about whom a complaint has been received which is deemed worthy of investigation to be investigated within 5 working days

Target: 100% to be investigated within x working days

KPI contracts to be subject to routine inspection during each school year

Target: 85% of all contracts to be inspected during the school year

Recommendation 11

The Conditions of Contract for the Provision of Passenger Transport Services make no provision for records to be accessed with respect to contract delivery.

We recommend that such a clause be written into the contract conditions to enable internal and external audit to access records with respect to contract delivery should the need arise.

Response

In practise there is access to records on contract delivery as the invitation to tender for mainstream school bus services includes, in Section 4, reference to accessing records. The document states:

"The Contractor will be required to supply an invoice and the following supporting information on a monthly basis. No payment will be made unless this information is provided:

- a. Total number of fare-paying passengers per route
- b. Total number of passholders per route
- c. Total revenue per route (on contracts where fare-paying passengers are carried)

The Council will retain the right to audit the information supplied and the contractor will provide reasonable access to premises to authorised Council officers to examine any aspect of the operation and finances of the service(s) secured by the Council."

It is accepted that this instruction does not transfer through to the Conditions of Carriage for Public Service Vehicles. The Conditions of Carriage were revised in July 2002. There are other conditions in the document which are outdated and in need of revision. The process of revising the Conditions will need to be a priority in the new TPOG work programme.

Recommendation 12

The paperwork on file for emergency taxi cover, contract DC220, had not been fully completed and was unauthorised.

We recommend that controls are tightened up to make sure that all paperwork is fully completed and to ensure that prior to emergency contracts being issued all paperwork has been checked and authorised by a senior officer.

Response

On the specific contract that is mentioned in the recommendation the situation has now been rectified. On the general issue of controls on the awarding of emergency contracts, these procedures have been reviewed and the procedures are being finalised.

Recommendation 13

There is currently no provision for providing training and/or information sessions for drivers and escorts.

We recommend that a support service be established to offer training/instruction to service providers who would benefit from guidance on how to deal with the difficult situations they may encounter.

Response

From January to June 2006, a training session was held every two weeks (excluding school holidays) for escorts who are currently employed on school transport contracts awarded by TPOG. 20 people per session have received basic training in how to deal with issues such as autism, epilepsy and behavioural problems among students, as well as child protection issues. The training session lasts 3 hours and is provided by specialist staff at St. Andrew's special school in Derby. The training involves verbal presentations with handouts for participants to take away with them.

Many escorts do not speak English as their first language, so communication with students can be difficult. Some escorts are employed by CYP, with others being employed by the operator. The majority of escorts employed by operators of current contracts have attended the training session and received a certificate.

The cost of holding each session is £175 which covers the cost of room hire and paying for supply staff at St. Andrew's School for the period of the training session. Training is offered free of charge to escorts; the Conditions of Contract specify that the operators should bear the cost of training, although this would be likely to be passed on to DCC in the form of inflated contract prices.

The interim approach has worked well to date, but it is unclear whether St. Andrew's School is willing to make it a permanent arrangement. The training is provided by staff with experience of dealing with SEN students, but not necessarily skilled trainers. Other organisations have skilled trainers and offer escort and driver training services (contacts through Community Transport

Association, etc.). The low cost of the current arrangements make it an attractive option for taking forward, but further discussions with St. Andrew's should take place to explore future possibilities.

It is suggested that a KPI is developed in relation to monitor the levels of escort training.

KPI Escorts on new contracts will attend a DCC escort training course within x weeks of the contract beginning

Target: 90% of escorts to attend a training course within x weeks of commencement of the contract

This KPI and monitoring arrangements should be in place by 30 November 2006.

Recommendation 14

With the introduction of a training support service controls need to be established in order to monitor the process.

We recommend that a central register is produced and maintained to record the details of individuals who have received training and new drivers / escorts who have requested to be booked on subsequent sessions. This information should be used to monitor the effectiveness of the support service and provide accurate records of all of those that have received instruction.

Response

It is intended that there is a rolling programme of training, but as noted above, this is dependent on escorts identifying issues in which they require training.

A formal record of escorts which have attended training has been established and is kept updated by TPOG officers.