

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: Education (Resources) Sub-Committee	Subject: School Transport arranged by SPT: Performance Review
From: Director of Education	
Date: 31 July 2000	
Ref: MM/KF/FLB	

Summary

This report reviews the mainstream transport contract arrangements. It aims to ensure that the financial performance of the contracts, the agency role of SPT and the general performance of transport contractors are subject to scrutiny by the sub-committee.

Recommendations

The resources sub-committee is recommended:

- (i) to note the performance of the home to school transport contracts arranged by SPT for the period January 2000 to April 2000.
- (ii) to request the submission of further performance reports to future meetings of the sub-committee.

Christine Fallock

Members wishing further information about this report should contact:
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NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL : EDUCATION DEPARTMENT**School Transport Arranged by SPT : Performance Review****Report by the Director of Education****1. Background.**

- 1.1 This report covers the period 10 January 2000 to 14 April 2000 inclusive and covers checks on schools contracts carried out by the SPT's customer care inspectors and vehicle inspections carried out by SPT's vehicle examiners. These checks are part of the Quality Assurance System which aims to ensure that school contracts operated on behalf of North Lanarkshire Council by SPT meet the quality standards set by the council.
- 1.2 Within the North Lanarkshire Council area there are 79 primary schools and 26 secondary schools currently provided with transport for pupils who are eligible for free transport to and from schools. This requirement is met by a total of 237 contracts, of which 129 serve both primary and secondary schools.
- 1.3 Currently 3,109 primary school pupils and 6,020 secondary school pupils are transported on the contracts referred to above.

2. Monitoring.

- 2.1 Monitoring of schools contracts is undertaken on both a proactive and reactive basis. Proactive monitoring is a programme which checks all contracts at least once during the school year. However, where complaints are received re-active monitoring takes place with intensive checks being made on both the contracts concerned and the operator of the contracts. Additionally, where complaints are received regarding vehicles, arrangements are made to have the vehicles inspected by SPT engineering inspectors.

3. Checks at Schools.

- 3.1 Customer care checks were carried out at a total of 40 primary and 22 secondary schools between 10 January 2000 to 14 April 2000. This means that 50.6% of primary schools and 73.3% of secondary schools were visited by the customer care inspectors to check on contracts.

Some schools were checked on more than one occasion resulting in an overall total of 65 checks at primary schools and 48 checks at secondary schools. The number of checks carried out is shown in the table below.

Week Ending	Checks at Primary Schools	Checks at Secondary Schools
14-Jan-00	1	3
21-Jan-00	2	2
28-Jan-00	5	2
04-Feb-00	6	1
11-Feb-00	10	5
18-Feb-00	2	1
25-Feb-00	10	6
03-Mar-00	6	4
10-Mar-00	3	0
17-Mar-00	3	5
24-Mar-00	5	5
31-Mar-00	2	1
07-Apr-00	8	9
14-Apr-00	2	4
Total number of checks	65	48

4. Checks on Vehicles

- 4.1 Checks on vehicles are divided into operational checks undertaken by SPT customer care inspectors and engineering checks undertaken by SPT engineering inspectors.

Generally, operational checks are undertaken at schools whilst engineering checks are mainly conducted at operator's garages or other maintenance premises. Engineering checks are also undertaken at schools, mainly as "spot checks" and usually following specific complaints regarding vehicle condition.

4.2 Checks by Customer Care Inspectors

The customer care inspectors carried out checks on a total of 206 vehicles operating on school contracts within the North Lanarkshire Council area. The number of vehicles are summarised in the following table.

Week Ending	Checks on Double Deck Buses	Checks on Single Deck Buses	Checks on Minibuses	Checks on Taxis
14-Jan-00	9	0	1	0
21-Jan-00	2	6	0	0
28-Jan-00	5	5	1	1
04-Feb-00	5	10	0	0
11-Feb-00	13	10	3	1
18-Feb-00	1	2	0	0
25-Feb-00	12	11	2	8
03-Mar-00	4	11	2	2
10-Mar-00	4	1	0	0
17-Mar-00	2	8	0	1
24-Mar-00	2	6	3	2
31-Mar-00	1	1	0	2
07-Apr-00	12	24	2	0
14-Apr-00	1	5	1	1
Total number of checks	73	100	15	18

4.3 Pre- Contract Inspections

During the period covered by this report, pre-contract inspections have been carried out on 3 operators, who have expressed an interest in becoming contractors. During these inspections, a total of 3 vehicles were examined, comprising 1 single deck vehicle and 2 minibuses.

6. Specific Problems Investigated.

6.1 During the period covered by this report, in addition to the routine monitoring of contracts, a number of specific problems were investigated and action taken to remedy the situation. The following are specific problems investigated by the customer care inspectors during the period covered by this report.

(a) Coatbridge High School

Discrepancies were noted with the numbers travelling to the Marnoch and Glenboig areas. It was found that there were more pupils travelling than specified in the contract and the contract specification was revised in consultation with the contractor.

(b) Dykehead Primary School

The bus serving the Shottsburn Road and Byron Place areas of Shotts was reported to arrive late in the mornings. A check by the customer care inspectors showed no evidence of this being a regular occurrence, but investigation showed that the bus did arrive late one morning due to a breakdown.

(c) Knowetop Primary School, Motherwell

It was reported that buses servicing this school were having difficulty in parking in the designated bus bay in the afternoons due to parked cars. A customer care inspector carried out observations and found that parents arriving early were parking in the bus bay. It was noted that when the parents saw the inspector observing them, they would move to another part of the road.

(d) Our Lady's High School, Motherwell

Following a complaint about possible capacity problems on the contract serving the North Motherwell area, investigations revealed that sufficient capacity was being provided by the contractor using four buses. It appeared that some pupils were waiting for the last bus and allowing the first ones to depart, leading to the reported capacity problem. All buses now depart at the same time.

(e) St. Columba's Primary School, Viewpark

Complaints were received that the bus from Tannochside was arriving late. Checks by the customer care inspectors found that the bus was operating to the contract specification.

(f) St. Matthew's Primary School, Wishaw

Reports had been received that there were irregularities with the way the taxi serving Craigneuk was being operated. Investigations showed that the contract was being operated correctly.

(g) St. Patrick's High School, Coatbridge

The school reported that an unauthorised passenger was travelling on the bus conveying pupils from the Burns Road area of Shotts. The contractor was instructed that this must not happen again and checks were undertaken by the customer care inspectors to ensure the contractor complied with this instruction. Later in the session a complaint was received that an unauthorised passenger was travelling on the bus from Byron Place area. The customer care inspectors found that there was no unauthorised passenger travelling.

(h) Stane Primary School

Following the fire at Stane Primary School, a temporary contract was arranged to convey pupils to Benhar Primary School and a customer care inspector monitored the operation of this contract in case of any difficulties. Apart from some minor teething troubles on the first day, the contract has operated satisfactorily since, with no problems being reported.

(i) Stepps Primary School

It had been reported that the buses from Cardowan and Millerston were operating erratically. A customer care inspector found that the buses arrived within the specified times. The contracts also serve St. Joseph's Primary and this school insists that the buses do not arrive before 0855, resulting in the Stepps Primary pupils being dropped off first. The inspector reminded the contractor that he must operate within the specified times and if he had any difficulties to advise the SPT immediately. Further monitoring will be carried out.

7. Multi-Departmental and Multi-Agency Checks

SPT is continuing its initiative of conducting simultaneous checks on operators by the customer care and engineering inspectors. The customer care inspectors note details of vehicles operating on school contracts and these are then passed to the engineering inspectors who then examine these vehicles for mechanical condition on the same day.

Additionally, the co-operation of the vehicle inspector and police is sought on a regular basis, resulting in joint checks on operators being carried out. These on-going multi-departmental and multi-agency checks will further strengthen the checks carried out on operators.

8. Deductions for Non Performance of contracts.

As a result of monitoring through SPT's system of four weekly traffic returns and the issuing of warning letters, a total of £2,988.18 was deducted from payments due to contractors for the period between 10 January 2000 to 14 April 2000.

As the traffic return system operates on the basis that traffic returns are sent in by contractors at the end of a four weekly period and adjustments are made in the following monthly payment, information can only be supplied two months in arrears.

9. Contract Cancelled and Operators Suspended.

During the period covered by this report, there were no contracts cancelled due to being no longer required. There were no other contract cancellations during the period covered by this report.

10. Warning Letters Issued to Contractors for Non Performance of Contracts.

10.1 Warning letters may be issued to operators drawing attention to apparent breaches of the conditions of contract which give an opportunity to the operator to explain their actions. In the event of the explanation not being acceptable then payment deductions are made, and the warning is recorded against the contractor.

10.2 If there are continued breaches of contract conditions, this can result in contracts being withdrawn.

During the period 10 January 2000 to 31 March 2000, a total of 89 warning letters were issued to contractors in respect of their failure to meet the required performance. A total of 14 warning letters were rescinded after an appeal by the operator concerned, resulting in a total of 75 warning letters standing. A total of 17 warnings were confirmed after unsuccessful appeals from contractors against the issue of a warning letter.

11. Budget

11.1 The expenditure for 1999/2000 for the home to school transport for primary and secondary pupils is £2,225,726 against a budget of £2,201,597 with an overspend of £24,129.

12. Recommendations

The resources sub-committee is recommended:

- (i) to note the performance of the home to school transport contracts arranged by SPT for the period 10 January 2000 to April 2000.
- (ii) to request the submission of further performance reports to future meetings of the sub-committee.