

NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

REPORT

To: EDUCATION (RESOURCES) SUB COMMITTEE		Subject: SCHOOL TRANSPORT ARRANGED BY SPT: PERFORMANCE REVIEW 2002/2003
From: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION		
Date: JULY 2003	Ref: MM/BB	

**Summary**

This report reviews the mainstream transport contract for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003. 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 education (resources) sub committee is recommended to:

- (a) note the performance of the home to school transport contracts arranged by SPT for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003.



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NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL : DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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### School Transport arranged by SPT : Performance Review 2002/2003

#### Report by Director of Education

#### 1. Background.

1.1 This report covers the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 and covers the monitoring of schools contracts and the vehicle inspections carried out by SPT. This monitoring is 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 set by the Council and managed by SPT.

1.2 The table below gives further details of the free school transport contracts arranged by SPT.

	Primary	Secondary	Total
No of Schools	84	25	109
No of Pupils	3425	5765	9190
No of Contracts	121*	120*	224

\* Dual contracts involved

#### 2. Monitoring.

2.1 Monitoring of schools contracts is undertaken on both a proactive and reactive basis. Pro-active monitoring is based on a programme of checks with the aim of checking all contracts at least once during the school year. However, where complaints are received, reactive 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 the executive's engineering inspectors. Owing to staff shortages the level of routine monitoring was lower than planned during the year.

2.2 The table below records the monitoring checks made on contracts during the year:

	Primary	Secondary	Total
No of contracts checked	102	99	201
Inspection visits at schools	214	124	338
Checks at other locations	69	81	150

### 3. Vehicle Monitoring.

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

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

- 3.2 The table below records the number and type of vehicle checks carried out during the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003:

	<b>Double Deck</b>	<b>Single Deck</b>	<b>Minibuses</b>	<b>Taxis</b>
Customer care inspections	284	426	56	102
Engineering inspections	31	65	19	14

### 4. Pupils attending Schools outwith North Lanarkshire.

- 4.1 During the period under review, a number of pupils were transported from North Lanarkshire Council area to other local authority areas. The table below records details of the number of pupils, number of contracts and local authority area.

<b>Council Area</b>	<b>No of Contracts</b>	<b>No of pupils transported</b>
East Dunbartonshire	6	84
Glasgow City	1	1
South Lanarkshire	7	473

In the same period a number of pupils were transported to schools within North Lanarkshire from other local authorities, as detailed below:

<b>Council Area</b>	<b>No of Contracts</b>	<b>No of pupils transported</b>
East Dunbartonshire	7	378
Glasgow City	8	519
South Lanarkshire	7	290

- 4.2 These contracts are included in the inspection process carried out by SPT customer care inspectors.

## 5. Specific Problems Investigated.

5.1 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 some examples:

(1) **Coatbridge High School** – Following complaints that the bus from the Glenboig and Annathill areas operated by DC Low had insufficient capacity, a customer care inspector investigated and found that a 33 seat vehicle was being provided for a contract specification of 7 seats. However, the inspector found that the bus was operating late and a formal warning letter was issued in respect of this. Further monitoring showed that the bus from Gain was operating late and a further warning letter was issued.

(2) **Cumbernauld Primary School** – There were complaints about the uplifting points for pupils in the Carrickstone area. Both a bus and a coach operated on this contract and when the coach arrived before the bus, there was jostling for the limited seats. The contractor was advised to ensure that the bus runs before the coach to avoid problems.

Following a complaint that the contractor was providing insufficient capacity, customer care inspectors monitored the contract and found that the contractor was providing two double deck buses for three contracts. This meant that there were some 18 seats fewer than specified being provided and a warning letter was issued.

A further complaint was received regarding the condition of the vehicles and alleging that the buses had wet seats. A customer care inspector investigated and did not uphold the complaint.

(3) **Cumbernauld Primary School & St Andrew's Primary School** – Following concerns regarding the condition of the vehicles operated by Jay Coaches Ltd, two buses were inspected by one of SPT's engineering inspectors and he found one bus had two broken seat frames. As this defect is deemed to be safety related, an immediate prohibition was issued. The vehicle was also found to have an oil leak and this resulted in the issue of a delayed prohibition. The other vehicle was found to be in a satisfactory condition apart from an oil leak resulting in a delayed prohibition.

A further complaint related to the route followed in Cumbernauld Village to the effect that the vehicles were having difficulty in negotiation both the Wynd and Main Street due to parked vehicles. A customer care investigator investigated and found that some turnings were very tight for buses. This was aggravated by the presence of parked cars. He concluded there was no way to lessen the problem without changing the drop off points which would result in children having to cross busy roads. Strathclyde Police were advised of the situation and they undertook to monitor the situation and enforce parking restrictions where necessary.

(4) **Eastfield Primary School** – Following complaints that the bus from Croy and Craigmarloch operated by JJ Travel was arriving late in the mornings, a customer care inspector monitored the contract and found that the bus arrived at the school at 0858, just outside the specified times. This resulted in the issue of a warning letter.

(5) **Greenfaulds High School, Cumbernauld** – A complaint was received that the bus operated by First Glasgow to the Craigmarloch area was not following the correct route. A customer care inspector monitored the operation and found that the bus was operating within the specified times and along the specified route

(6) **Holy Cross Primary School, Croy** – Following complaints that the bus from Balloch operated by Jays Coach Ltd was leaving early, a customer care inspector monitored the contract and found that the bus was operating within the specified times. The inspector noted that the Our Lady's High School bus, also operated by Jay Coaches Ltd started its run in the same area five minutes earlier and he saw some of the Holy Cross Primary School pupils attempting to board the secondary school bus in error. This may have caused the complaints.

(7) **Newmains Primary School** – A complaint was received from the contractor that his buses were experiencing difficulty in getting to the designated bus bay due to the number of parents cars parked on the road outside the school in the mornings.

A customer care inspector carried out observations and found that whilst the bus bay was not obstructed, parents were double-parking or parking in such a manner that the road was obstructed. Strathclyde Police have also been involved and a number of parents were reported to the procurator fiscal for causing an obstruction.

(8) **Rochsolloch Primary School** – A request was received from parents of pupils residing in Woodview Drive that the bus from Cairnhill uplift pupils within the housing estate rather than on the main road. A customer care inspector, along with representatives from North Lanarkshire Council and Strathclyde Police examined the situation with the contractor who provided a bus to test the clearances around the housing estate's roads. Owing to concerns regarding the parking of cars causing an obstruction it was agreed that pupils would be uplifted in Cairnhill Avenue and that a review of the arrangements would be carried out in the next term.

(9) **St Patrick's Primary School, Shotts** – Following complaints regarding the timekeeping of the buses, a customer care inspector carried out observations and found that one bus arrived early and the other arrived late. Additionally, the contractor failed to provide sufficient capacity and a formal warning was issued in respect of these failures. Further monitoring showed that buses were operating late and more warning letters were issued.

(10) **St Serf's Primary School, Airdrie** – Following a complaint that the bus from the Glenmavis area operated by DC Lowe was overcrowded, a customer care inspector investigated and found that the contractor was providing a 16 seat vehicle instead of a 20 seat vehicle. It was also noted that the bus was arriving late at the school. A formal warning letter was issued in respect of these points.

Routine monitoring of this contract showed that the contractor, DC Lowe, was providing insufficient capacity for the pupils travelling from Glenmavis. A warning letter was issued and further monitoring revealed that the contractor was using a 16 seat vehicle instead of a minimum of 20 seats and another warning letter was issued. In addition, the inspector found that there was an unauthorised passenger being carried.

Following a complaint that the bus from Glenmavis was arriving late, a customer care inspector monitored the contract and found that the bus was indeed arriving late and the contractor was providing insufficient capacity. A warning letter was issued for these failures and further monitoring carried out. This monitoring showed no improvements and further warnings were issued. As the contractor had not improved performance of the contract, the contract was terminated with effect from 20 December 2002 and a new contractor appointed to take over the contract from 6 January 2003.

## 6. Co-ordinated Monitoring Checks.

- 6.1 SPT is continuing its initiative of actively co-operating with the Vehicle Operator Services Agency, Vehicle Inspectorate Division and Strathclyde Police on a regular basis, resulting in joint checks on operators being carried out. These multi-agency checks will continue to be undertaken on an ongoing basis to further strengthen the checks carried out on operators.
- 6.2 The inspections were aimed at ensuring that buses and other vehicles were roadworthy and that all requirements of the contracts were met. Vehicles were checked by Strathclyde Passenger Transport's customer care inspectors to ensure that the Conditions of Contract were being complied with whilst the police checked that the vehicles were being operated legally and were in a roadworthy condition.
- 6.3 The vehicles are examined by both the Vehicle Inspectorate's Vehicle Examiners and the Passenger Transport Executive's Engineering Inspectors, as well as specially trained police officers, all of whom work to the same standards as the Vehicle Inspectorate. This results in vehicles being given a comprehensive "roadside" examination.
- 6.4 In the North Lanarkshire Council area, this initiative resulted in a total of 36 vehicles being inspected. The table below gives further details of these inspections.

No of Schools	No of Vehicles Inspected	No of Vehicles found to be in a satisfactory condition
12	101	60

The table below indicates the action taken against the remaining 41 vehicles which were not found to be in satisfactory condition.

Immediate Prohibitions	Delayed Prohibitions	Defect Notices
5	13	23

## 7. Action Against Poor Performance.

- 7.1 As a result of monitoring through the Executive's system of four weekly traffic returns and the issuing of warning letters, a total of £11396.96 was deducted from payments due to contractors for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003. Of this, £5126.18 was deducted from contractors for failing to submit their traffic returns timeously or for their non-receipt. A total of £6270.78 was deducted following the issue of a warning letter.
- 7.2 During the period covered by this report, 4 contracts were cancelled due to being no longer required. Additionally, four contracts were cancelled due to the contractor receiving an excessive number of warnings regarding performance of the contract.
- 7.3 Two contracts were suspended during the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003 due to the contractor refusing to have their vehicles inspected. These contracts were

suspended between 20 September 2002 and 25 October 2002 and alternative arrangements were made to convey the pupils concerned to and from their school.

## **8. Warning Letters Issued to Contractors for Non Performance of Contracts.**

**8.1** 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 to SPT then deductions are made from operators payments, and the warning is recorded against the contractor.

If there are continued breaches of contract conditions, this can result in contracts being withdrawn if more than 4 warnings are issued in a 12 week period, or more than 6 warnings in a 12 month period.

During the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003, a total of 286 warning letters were issued to contractors in respect of their failure to meet the required performance. A total of 47 warning letters were rescinded after appeals by the operators concerned, resulting in a total of 239 warning letters standing.

Additionally, a total of 45 warnings were confirmed as standing following unsuccessful appeals by the contractors against the issue of a warning letter.

## **9. Recommendation**

The education (resources) sub-committee is recommended to:

- (a) note the performance of the home to school transport contracts arranged by SPT for the period 1 April 2002 to 31 March 2003