

## NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL

## REPORT

To: EDUCATION (RESOURCES) SUB-COMMITTEE		Subject: REVIEW OF SCHOOL TRANSPORT IN SCOTLAND - REPORT BY THE SCOTTISH CONSUMER COUNCIL
From: DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION		
Date: JULY 2005	Ref: MM/KF	

**Summary**

The Scottish Consumer Council published a report on school transport based on research into local authority policy and practice. The recommendations made by the Consumer Council compared to North Lanarkshire Council's provision are detailed in this report.

**Recommendations**

The education (resources) sub-committee is recommended:

- (i) to note the report by the Scottish Consumer Council on school transport.
- (ii) to advise the committee at a future meeting on any developments relating to the report.



Members wishing further information about this paper should contact

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## NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

### Review of School Transport in Scotland

#### Report by the Director of Education

#### 1. Background.

- 1.1 The Scottish Consumer Council has published a report on school transport based on research into local authority policy and practice. The research focused on various aspects of the transport service, including monitoring of the contract, information given to parents, complaints handling mechanisms and issues concerning pupil's safety.
- 1.2 The research has identified a considerable amount of good practice in Scottish local authorities particularly the provision of free school transport beyond the statutory minimum, contract monitoring and safety initiatives.
- 1.3 The recommendations in the report, together with the provision made by North Lanarkshire Council in each area are detailed below.

#### 2. Recommendations of the Scottish Consumer Council

- 2.1 The report makes 14 recommendations aimed at the Scottish Executive and local authorities. The overall aim of the report is to prompt a more consistently good service across Scotland.

These are outlined below and North Lanarkshire's position is detailed in **bold**.

##### 2.1.1 Recommendation 1

The Scottish Executive and local authorities should consider how a more consistent national approach to school transport can be achieved, particularly through revised guidance, the sharing of best practice and, if required, legislation.

**Action to be led by the Scottish Executive.**

##### 2.1.2 Recommendation 2

The Scottish Executive should undertake a review of the criteria used for free school transport provision in the context of current and changing travel patterns and the acceptability of existing criteria.

**North Lanarkshire Council provides transport to primary pupils who reside more than one mile from their zoned primary school and to secondary pupils who reside more than two miles from their zoned secondary school. This provision is more generous than the statutory requirement. It applies the benchmark of one mile for pupils under the age of eight (from their zoned school) and 2 miles for children aged over the age of eight.**

### 2.1.3 Recommendation 3

Further research should be conducted to determine whether there is a need for extending the use of attendants on school transport in Scotland. The Scottish Executive should review the practice amongst local authorities.

**In North Lanarkshire Council attendants are presently used on double decker vehicles only. However if there are problems with pupil behaviour appropriate action is taken in conjunction with the head teacher and Strathclyde Passenger Transport. This may involve employing an attendant on a temporary basis to ensure any problems associated with behaviour are resolved.**

**Occasionally permission is given for a school member of staff to travel on the bus. The member of staff is used as an adult presence only and receives no payment for this duty.**

### 2.1.4 Recommendation 4

All drivers responsible for transporting children to school (including bus, minibus, taxi and parental contracts) should have enhanced disclosure Scotland checks undertaken before a contract is awarded.

**All bus drivers have been through the Disclosure Scotland process. Accelerated programmes of enhanced disclosure checks are currently underway to ensure all drivers are put through this process prior to the start of the school contract.**

### 2.1.5 Recommendation 5

All attendants responsible for travelling with children to school should have enhanced Disclosure Scotland checks undertaken prior to a contract being awarded.

**All escorts have been through the Disclosure Scotland process. Accelerated programmes of enhanced disclosure checks are currently underway to ensure all escorts are put through this process prior to the start of the school contract.**

### 2.1.6 Recommendation 6

Local authorities should liaise with the Vehicle and Operators Service Agency (VOSA) in the Traffic Commissioners Office prior to awarding contracts to obtain relevant information on maintenance and reliability records.

**Strathclyde Passenger Transport liaise closely with VOSA to ensure operations meet the standards laid down by the Vehicle and Operator Service Agency. In addition, North Lanarkshire Council has commissioned SPT to carry out spot check monitoring of operators during the contract period.**

### 2.1.7 Recommendation 7

Local authorities should ensure that standardised conduct training is provided for all school transport drivers and attendants and that this should be quality assured.

**Training was arranged in 2004 for drivers and escorts who carry out special needs contracts. This training will be extended in the summer of 2005 to new drivers and escorts to ensure the transport needs of SEN pupils are being met.**

**The principle of training for drivers and escorts on mainstream contracts will be discussed with Strathclyde Passenger Transport.**

### 2.1.8 Recommendation 8

Local authorities should ensure that regular unannounced safety spot checks of school transport vehicles occur, either through their own inspections, PTE's where applications or through liaison with Vehicle and Operator Services Agency (VOSA).

**On behalf of North Lanarkshire Council, SPT currently carries out its own programme of spot checks and work with VOSA to inspect vehicles as part of an inter-agency process to ensure that safety standards are maintained.**

### 2.1.9 Recommendation 9

Local authorities should review the level of resources dedicated to monitoring school transport contracts to ensure high levels of vehicle safety and service standards are being met.

**High levels of vehicle safety checks are carried out by SPT to ensure that safety and service standards are met. Details of these are included in the regular SPT monitoring reports to the sub-committee. The annual cost of the current level of contractor monitoring is £215,205.**

### 2.1.10 Recommendation 10

Local authorities should continue to promote increased pupil safety in school transport, and in particular the sharing of good practice and experience in this area.

**The education department works closely with SPT, police and the department of planning and environment to ensure that the safety of children being transport to school on school transport is continually reviewed and developed.**

**A working group has been set up by SPT, with NL representation, to make recommendation on the management of pupil behaviour on school transport. This will allow good practice and experience to be shared with other local authorities**

### **2.1.11 Recommendation 11**

All local authorities should have contingency plans in place as recommended by Scottish Executive guidance. This will help to ensure that parents, schools and transport operators are better informed and able to effectively deal with situations as they emerge.

**North Lanarkshire Council adheres to the Scottish Executives guidance and the Scottish School Board Association publication “A Safe School Travel Pack”. Contingency plans are in place by SPT to deal with vehicle failures on school transport. North Lanarkshire Council have arrangements in place to deal with emergency school closures, for example due to adverse weather.**

### **2.1.12 Recommendation 12**

National and local strategies relating to positive behaviour should also embrace behaviour on school transport.

**A working group has recently been set up by SPT and local authorities to look at safety issues and pupil behaviour.**

### **2.1.13 Recommendation 13**

All local authorities should ensure that parents have full information available on how to complain and that the outcomes of complaints are fed back to help service improvements.

**All parents applying for free school transport for their children are given a leaflet detailing the arrangements for complaints concerning school transport. This gives details of telephone number, e-mail addresses for the education department and Strathclyde Passenger Transport.**

**SPT operate a postcard system. Schools are also encouraged to contact SPT with any complaints about school transport.**

### **2.1.14 Recommendation 14**

Local authorities should review the conditions set out within contracts and their arrangements for monitoring school transport contracts to ensure both value for money and improvements in quality are kept up to date.

**North Lanarkshire Council liaises closely with SPT both to ensure best value and good competition in transport contracts. There is regular discussion of the arrangements for school transport and improvement options. Details of these are included in the regular SPT monitoring reports to the sub-committee.**

### **3. Conclusion**

The school transport arrangement in North Lanarkshire Council generally meet the recommendations of the Scottish Consumer Council report. However, the department will continue to monitor existing procedures to ensure that they are in line with best practice. Close liaison with SPT and feedback from parents are important elements in their improvement strategy.

In particular, attention will be given to the following recommendations to the Consumer Council report.

- (i) The training of drivers and escorts
- (ii) The promotion of safety and good pupil behaviour on school transport.

### **4. Recommendations**

The education (resources) sub-committee is recommended:

- (i) to note the contents of the report by the Scottish Consumer Council on school transport.
- (ii) to advise the committee at a future meeting on any developments relating to the report.