



City of Westminster

Children, Sports and Leisure Policy and Scrutiny Committee

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Title: SEN Passenger Transport Update
Report of: Andrew Christie
Cabinet Member Portfolio: Councillor Chalkley

Wards Involved: All
Policy Context:
Financial Summary:

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1. Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the first four weeks of operation of the new Tri-borough passenger transport arrangements for home to school transport for children with special educational needs.

2. Key Matters for the Committee's Consideration

Report for information.

3. Background

The contracts for the delivery of passenger transport in Westminster came to an end in January 2014 and we therefore had to undertake a retendering exercise for the provision of the service. In line with the timescale for the delivery of a new tri-borough service, a short term contract extension was put in place until April 2014.

The Tri-borough Councils have undertaken a procurement exercise for passenger transport services for children and adults: covering home to school transport for children with special educational needs (SEN); transport for looked after children and transport for vulnerable young adults and older people.

The decision to commission Tri-borough passenger transport services was made with the intention of making savings through economies of scale, and new routing arrangements where children from different boroughs were travelling to the same school, to ensure that affordable travel arrangements can be made available to eligible children and adults in the long term.

Following the procurement exercise, contracts for large group (bus) travel were awarded to the following transport operators – Star Bus, HATS, Impact Group, CT Plus and Westway. Contracts for individual taxis were awarded to – Radio Taxis and HATS.

Because of the complexity of the service being provided, and the number of vulnerable children and adults receiving the service, a dedicated in-house Tri-borough Transport Commissioning Team (TCT) has been established. The main responsibilities of this team are: to process new requests for transport; to provide a single point of contact for any service user needing to notify their Council of any change of requirement or concern about service delivery; to exert stringent oversight of the contractors; to monitor their performance; and ensure that required standards are met. This is a new arrangement which, we believe, will be an enhancement to previous arrangements for service users, and ensure that the Councils get better value for money from their contracts.

Existing Arrangements

The arrangements in place prior to the new Tri-borough passenger transport contracts had developed piecemeal over many years. Consequently, while decisions about children's eligibility were fairly consistent across the 3 boroughs and have not been altered in this process, the commissioning of their travel arrangements was not. Historic custom and practice in this respect, in particular in Westminster, and to a lesser extent in Kensington and Chelsea was such that there was an over-reliance on transportation by taxi and more generally children were added to existing transport, without any strategic review of transport routes. The result of the approach was not only increased costs but also increased congestion outside schools. However, where such changes (taxi transport being replaced by buses) have been made, we have given very careful consideration to any subsequent representations made by parents or schools, if they think their child's needs cannot be met in this way.

Savings

Savings of £1.3m per annum are projected for WCC Children's Services against previous spend. This represents a reduced spend of 39%.

Implementation

On 23rd April a briefing note was circulated to all Members from Andrew Christie outlining the service readiness of the new transport service; with information regarding the contracts awarded, and the process that led to those awards.

These new arrangements are meeting the daily transport requirements across the 3 boroughs for:

- 720 children with special educational needs
- Up to 500 children in care, as and when required
- 280 - 300 vulnerable adults

- Westminster children account for 294 of the 720 children with special educational needs.

Prior to the new contract arrangements going live, transport operators prepared routes based on client data provided by the special educational needs, social work and adult social care services, and existing providers. The TCT worked hard to ensure that all parents, carers and schools were kept up to date via briefings held at schools, parents' and carer forums, day centres, and letters and leaflets being sent out. In addition, there were visits to key schools across the Tri-borough. The new transport arrangements went live from 22 April, in line with the start dates of the summer term, with the service being fully operational by 30 April.

The operation is transporting children to and from 122 schools, and involves 162 separate bus routes. The mobilisation of such a complicated operation along with putting in place the new TCT was anticipated to be difficult. The advisers we have used, who have done this work previously for other authorities, always highlighted that this was a particularly difficult exercise, given that we were changing providers across 3 boroughs, establishing new route networks across 3 boroughs, as well as putting in place a new Tri-borough TCT.

The TCT has led the mobilisation and has been working to sort individual problems as they arise.

Mobilisation Update

During the first 2 weeks of operation, there were a number of operational challenges experienced and we recognise and acknowledge that the mobilisation of the new transport arrangements has been problematic for some parents and children. These difficulties have included: children being picked up late, journeys being longer than they should be and then arriving late at school; the correct equipment not being available for a small number of children e.g. harnesses; concerns from individual parents at the point of pick up regarding the type of transport allocated to their child; change in escort and quality of escorts, particularly in relation to children's medical needs; parents' concerns that they were unable to contact operators when there were difficulties. Difficulties in relation to journey times were further exacerbated by the tube strike on 29th and 30th April.

The above difficulties and concerns have arisen for a number of reasons. The majority of the contractors have not previously provided a service in this

geographical area, and it is taking the drivers some time to get used to the routes. Unfortunately it has become apparent that the information held about children and vulnerable adults by social care and special educational needs teams was not complete in some cases. Much of this information was held by the previous operators who were not very willing to hand it over. Indeed, perhaps understandably, they were generally not very willing to co-operate with either us or the new contractors. In future this information will also be held by the TCT. The former operators' failure to co-operate also manifested itself in an unwillingness to assist in the TUPE arrangements. This again meant that it was only very late in the day that the contractors knew who would be transferring to work for them. In fact in some cases this only became clear when staff failed to turn up for work. In future it will be the new TCT's responsibility to hold this information.

In the third, fourth and now the fifth week since the initial mobilisation, operators and drivers have become more familiar with routes and this has resulted in a great improvement in the majority of home to school journeys. Continuing attention is however being required with some of the more individual arrangements e.g. journeys to after school provision where there have been some continuing delays and this is being worked on with operators to achieve the required improvements.

The table below shows the number of late collections and arrivals over the first four weeks of operation and shows an improving picture.

Day	SEN Transported	Reported Late Collections / Arrivals	% Late Collections / Arrival	Reported Absence - Operator Related	Reported Absence Other
Tue 22nd April	59	17	29%	1	2
Wed 23rd April	136	28	21%	1	2
Thu 24th April	158	5	3%		1
Fri 25th April	158	4	3%		1
Mon 28th April	437	17	4%		1
Tue 29th April	724	146	20%		9
Wed 30th April	730	137	19%		8
Thu 1st May	720	8	1%	1	0
Fri 2nd May	720	5	0		
Mon 5th May (BH)					
Tue 6th May	720	4	1%	0	0
Wed 7th	720	3	0%	0	0
Thu 8th May	720	2	0%	0	0
Fri 9th May	720	3	0%	0	0
Mon 12th May	720	1	0%	0	0
Tue 13th May	720	0	0%	0	0
Wed 14th May	720	2	0%	0	0
Thu 15th May	720	2	0%	0	0

NB – The above is compiled from data supplied to the TCT by operators and schools. However, we believe that the TCT has possibly not received all details and that there are a small number of buses that have been slightly delayed over the last 2 weeks. Reporting arrangements will be rectified in order that the accurate data is available to the TCT.

The number of general calls to the TCT has also shown a downward trend as shown below.

Day	Inbound Queries Received	Answered	% Answered	Abandoned	%
Tue 22nd April	16	16	100.0	0	0.0
Wed 23rd April	34	32	94.1	2	5.9
Thu 24th April	36	36	100.0	0	0.0
Fri 25th April	32	32	100.0	0	0.0
Mon 28th April	120	118	98.3	2	1.7
Tue 29th April	126	123	97.6	3	2.4
Wed 30th April	74	71	95.9	3	4.1
Thu 1st May	52	51	98.1	1	1.9
Fri 2nd May	26	26	100.0	0	0.0
Mon 5th May (BH)	0	0		0	
Tue 6th May	40	39	97.5	1	2.5
Wed 7th	39	38	97.4	1	2.6
Thu 8th May	25	23	92.0	1	4.0
Fri 9th May	26	26	100.0	0	0.0
Mon 12th May	33	31	93.9	2	6.1
Tue 13th May	23	23	100.0	0	0.0
Wed 14th May	22	22	100.0	0	0.0
Thu 15th May	30	30	100.0	0	0.0

Since the beginning of the new service, a total of 72 substantial queries from parents/carers have been received and responded to. These have been in relation to – timings, lateness and length of journey; consistency of escort and driver; lack of communication from operators to parents.

Review of individual cases

Since the publication to parents of the proposed route lists in April, across the 3 boroughs, a number of individual cases have been reviewed by the SEN Service and changes have been made in respect of 16 cases. These reviews have been carried out either arising from parental requests or because the early experiences of the operators which suggested some children were not adapting well to the new arrangements. Of the 16 cases, 7 were raised and agreed before the routes started and 9 since the start of the new service. In addition to the 16 individual reviews, 2 routes have been split due to the need to decrease a journey time. 11 of the reviews related to Westminster children, 3 to RBKC children and 2 LBHF. In four cases (3 WCC and 1 LBHF) the alternative arrangement put in place has involved the use of a walking escort.

School Information

The TCT and SEN Service have continued to keep in close contact with schools and schools have continued to work in close partnership with operators to assist with improvements. Schools report a continuing improvement in the service being provided, particularly regarding issues with lateness and arrival times. The two continuing particular areas of concern for schools are in relation to the consistency of escorts and drivers and the difficulty for both schools and parents in being able to get through to operators during peak times. Schools report that where escorts are becoming consistent, they are becoming more confident in their roles and are developing required skills. Some schools also noted to us that whilst a number of parents

had issues with some earlier pick up times and slightly longer journeys, most of them are starting to adapt to the changes.

Dates are being arranged for the TCT manager to visit a number of schools and meet with parents to discuss progress of the new transport services and continuing issues.

In addition, the TCT manager will also shortly join colleagues at the Westminster Parents Participation Group and the Tri-borough Parents Reference Group for the development of services for SEN. This will be a further opportunity for parents to raise continuing concerns they may have in relation to the transport arrangements.

4. **Health and Wellbeing Implications**

None.