

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel

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PART I **FOR INFORMATION**

HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT - TAXIS

1 Purpose of Report

To inform the Neighbourhood and Community Services (NCS) Scrutiny Panel of the arrangements for private transport to schools. This report will cover the contractual arrangements, safeguarding measures and costs of the service.

2 Recommendation/Proposed Action

NCS Scrutiny Panel is requested to note the information contained in the report.

3 The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan

3a. Sustainable Community Strategy Priorities

The arrangements for school taxis support the Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy by ensuring all local residents have access to education.

3b. Five Year Plan Outcomes

The Five Year Plan outcome the contract helps to deliver is:

- *Children and young people in Slough will be healthy, resilient and have positive life chances*

4 Other Implications

(a) Financial

The contractual arrangements are subject to a competitive tendering process.

(b) Risk Management

None.

(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

Local authorities are under a legal obligation to provide home to school transport under the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

There is no identified need for the completion of an EIA.

5 **Supporting Information**

- 5.1 Home to School Transport is a statutory service. The Local Authority has a legal requirement to provide transport for eligible children including those attending academies. In Slough the majority of children receiving transport qualify as children with special educational needs (SEN). Children who do not have SEN will qualify if they are over 3 miles from their school (if 8 years old or over) or 2 miles if they are under 8 years old.
- 5.2 Nearly all these children travel by way of bus pass or in a few cases a train pass. Around 115 children travel on 2 coaches to Churchmead School from the Langley and Colnbrook areas. SEN children travel on a mixture of minibuses, people carriers and taxis (some of which are wheelchair accessible). The total cost of the Home to School Transport service is approximately £1,600,000 per annum.
- 5.3 There are 33 routes (all SEN children) where a basic 4 seater taxi is used. They represent the highest cost per head. These 33 routes cost a total of £475,000 per annum. However, it should be noted that 27 of these require an escort, 12 of them involve travel to schools outside of the Slough Borough Council (SBC) area and 9 of them are for children with very challenging behaviour. Many Contractors do not wish to take on these children because of the problems caused for the passenger assistants.
- 5.4 Of the remaining routes:
- 34 are wheelchair-accessible vehicles (a mixture of 8 seat or larger minibuses)
 - The remainder are non wheelchair-accessible vehicles (also a mixture of 8 seat or larger minibuses)

Only 3 of these do not have a passenger assistant.

- 5.5 The main tendering exercise for all the Home to School Transport is done by the Procurement Department and usually is for 3 year contracts. An option to extend for a further one year has just been taken with the aim of keeping costs down. The extended contracts will run until 31st August 2017. For normal day to day operations if a new route is required bids are invited from the Contractors who successfully tendered for the 3 year contract. These additional contracts are awarded to the best priced bidder. At the end of each academic year (August) there is a normal fall out of children finishing school and new intake requiring transport. This requires route re-organisation and where possible savings are sought.
- 5.6 All Contractors and their staff on transport must have an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check before they can work on any route. The cost of the check is paid for by the Contractor or his staff member. We are required to keep

records of all checks done and issue a badge for each driver / escort quoting the DBS check reference number.

- 5.7 There are 5 companies used by SBC who are based outside the SBC area. One of these holds a Slough Operator's Licence for 9 drivers. The other 4 companies use 19 drivers licenced through their own authorities (Wycombe District Council, the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead, London Transport for London and one with a licence issued by the Traffic Commissioners for Leeds). The Leeds licence is not used for any taxi services and covers the 2 coaches for Churchmead. There are currently 3 Contractors licenced with SBC providing home to school transport.
- 5.8 SBC's contract with Home to School Transport Providers sets out the requirements by which the Contractor's staff must comply. SBC's Home to School Transport Co-ordinator monitors routes for all contractors on an ad hoc basis and checks a variety of matters (e.g. taxi plate, driver and escort badges) when doing so. He averages around one monitoring inspection per week depending on available resources and work commitments.
- 5.9 Additional Contractors to encourage more competition are always desirable. However, the nature of the work dissuades many companies from offering provision. In addition, some taxi companies are not suitable to provide it and have to be discounted. Most routes require an escort and some taxi companies do not want the problem of dealing with collecting an escort, carrying out the run with its particular demands and then taking the escort back off duty. The Home to School Taxi Contract is not as straightforward as providing standard services and this needs to be clarified with any potential service providers.
- 5.10 Local companies who have provided a good service for us in the past have also subsequently pulled out. This can be because they found standard taxi work simpler and sufficiently lucrative to discontinue their work with schools. Often the demands on transport staff dealing with SEN children are not fully appreciated until the contract is active.
- 5.11 SBC is also mindful of the fact that a school such as Arbour Vale (the school in the SBC area with the largest number of SEN children) deal with a large number of children on a 1 to 1, 1 to 2, or 1 to 3 basis. However, those providing transport for these children are offering the service to groups of 6 or 7 with just one escort on the vehicle. As a result, SBC considers that transport staff manage the situation very well within these constraints.

6 Conclusion

The NCS Scrutiny Panel is asked to note this information, which has been supplied in direct response to issues raised by Members.

7 Appendices

None.

8 Background Papers

None.