

## TRANSPORTATION MATTERS

Report By: Director of Regeneration

### Wards Affected

County-wide

### Purpose

1. To inform Committee about the coordination of transport services including those provided by the voluntary sector.

### Background

2. Public Transport Contracts

The Council has a duty under the Transport Act 1985 to ensure an adequate level of public transport within the county. Approximately 60% of public bus services are provided commercially by bus companies. The Council monitors this network, and changes to it, and secures such additional services as may be necessary to meet its definition of adequacy.

Subsidised bus services are secured with commercial bus operators by competitive tender and contracts are awarded for periods of up to 5 years, the period being limited by legislation.

There are currently 73 contracts with bus companies for the provision of bus services with an annual value in the region of £2M. Subsidised public bus services carried 1.3M passengers in 2007/8 and commercial services contributed a further two million. Subsidised buses covered 2.6M bus/kilometres in service. The average subsidy per passenger journey is £1.53.

Nine bus service contracts, with an annual value of £766,000, are "joint" contracts that cater for both the public service requirement and the needs of home-to-school transport. Approximately 210 transport-entitled students are carried on these contracts each day, representing an annual total of 79,800 journeys at a cost to the Children & Young Persons' Directorate of £159,000 per annum, which is paid to the Regeneration Directorate to offset contract costs, rather than to bus companies. The average cost per pupil per day is £3.98

A "Best Value Review" of transport in 2003 identified no benefits from further integration of the two Directorates' functions.

3. Home-to-School Transport

Home to School transport is provided by the Children and Young Persons' Directorate in furtherance of its duty under the Education Act 1944. Free transport is provided for children up to the age of 16 depending on their age, the school they attend and the distance travelled. Subsidised transport is also provided to children aged 16 to 19 attending post-16 education establishments.

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Further information on the subject of this report is available from  
Steve Burgess, Interim Transportation Manager on 01432 260968

Home to School transport services are secured by a combination of closed contracts secured with commercial bus operators and licensed taxi operators by competitive tender, "joint" contracts with the Regeneration Directorate, by which children travel on subsidised public bus services and by the purchase of season tickets for children to travel on commercial bus and train services.

The Children and Young Persons Directorate provides transport for approximately 6000 pupils and students by means of 218 closed contracts, 9 joint contracts and 8 ticket purchase arrangements. The annual budget for home-to-school transport provision is £5.4 million with an average cost of £4.74 per pupil per day.

#### 4. Social Care Transport

Adult Social Care provides transport for social care clients on the basis of individual need. It operates a fleet of 15 vehicles and contracts for services with commercial bus and taxi operators.

In 2007/8 a total of 350 clients was provided with transport, equivalent to 46,350 journeys per annum, at a cost of £648K per annum, with an average cost of £13.98 per journey.

The council-owned fleet is used in circumstances where it is cost effective to do so.

#### Opportunities for Integration

Joint contracts for education and public service needs are selected on one of two bases:

- a) Where the route of the subsidised public bus service passes, or can reasonably be changed to pass, a school and where buses can run at suitable times to carry transport-entitled children who live on the route.
- b) Where the Regeneration Directorate subsidises one or more off-peak services in rural areas and a suitable home-to-school contract run has been identified that can be combined to make a suitable package for tendering.

Additionally, where the route of a commercially-operated bus service passes a school or college and where buses run at suitable times transport-entitled children can be provided with season tickets to use on the service so as to eliminate the need for a separate vehicle.

The relevant managers in each Directorate are responsible for reviewing contracts and for identifying opportunities for joint working. In 2008/9 to date, one joint contract has been amended to allow the cancellation of a school contract, whilst two joint contracts were discontinued as it appeared that the bus company concerned would be prepared to operate them on a commercial basis. The savings from joint contracts are shared between the two directorates.

#### Barriers to Integration

- a) Where schools are located in areas where no suitable public bus service – commercial or subsidised – exists and where there would be no justification for providing one.
- b) Where the number of children entitled to free transport is such that the buses catering for them are full and there is no room to carry members of the general public.

c) Where there is a mismatch between the vehicle specifications for each type of service. For example, where the public service requires a 25 seat, low-floor wheelchair accessible bus and the school transport requirement is for a 53 seater coach with seat belts.

d) There is a legal requirement for all buses and coaches used for closed home-to-school transport for children aged 16 and under to be fitted with seat belts. When not employed on home-to-school work, the vehicles involved are often used for other work, such as excursions or private hire. This requirement does not apply to buses used on public service runs, but all NEW service buses and all buses used on 80% on Council bus service contracts are required to be wheelchair accessible, which does not apply to school contracts. As the public service bus fleet is replaced, in anticipation of a new legal requirement for 100% accessibility by 2015 the number of vehicles suitable to fulfil all requirements is diminished.

e) There is a certain degree of opposition from parents who have been used to having their children conveyed by closed home-to-school contracts to moving to buses which are open to the general public. This is sometimes expressed in terms of the absence of seat belts on public buses and sometimes in terms of "stranger-danger". Both issues appear to be problems of perception rather than reality, but can give rise to unfavourable publicity.

### Voluntary Sector

The Regeneration Directorate has entered into Service Level Agreements with seven Community Transport providers throughout the county to provide a basic level of public transport in areas where no public transport exists and for people who are unable to use it.

As currently established, the providers do not have the appropriate licences or permits to operate public bus services and their operations take the form of social car or minibus schemes using volunteer drivers. The scale of the Community Transport providers and their reliance on volunteers make it unlikely that they can expand their operations significantly. Two schemes, in Leominster and Ledbury, do undertake work for Adult Social Care.

### Integration between Public Transport and Adult Social Care Transport

Public bus services, commercial and subsidised, follow fixed routes and timetables and cater for a wide variety of journey purposes. The routes and timetables are based on long-term demand for the service and cannot easily be adapted to meet individual needs.

Adult Social Care transport is provided directly to individuals and attempts to meet individual needs. The possibilities of contract integration were studied as part of the Best Value review in 2003 but were found to be extremely limited for the following reasons:

a) Most Social Care clients require door-to-door, escorted transport from home to their destination and return.

b) Many journeys provided by Social Care for their clients involve journeys to and from Day Centres which are not located on public transport routes.

c) Whilst attempts have been made to identify opportunities for creating integrated contracts whereby one vehicle undertakes social care and public transport journeys as part of a day's work in the way that has proved possible with education transport, this has not proved feasible in practice. The opening hours of Day Centres, the need for door-to-door transport and the collection and delivery of escort staff usually mean that there is insufficient free time within the operating day to provide an attractive bus service as part of the same operation.

d) The Social Care fleet is designed for the provision of specialist services and is not suitable for the operation of public bus services.

e) There is a perception, often shared by the clients themselves, that social care clients need specialist transport provision and are incapable of using public transport, even where accessible buses are provided.

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**That the contents of this report are noted.**

## **BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- None