

Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

ELL(2) 15-04(min)

Minutes

Date: Thursday 18 November 2004

Time: 2.35pm to 3.46pm

Venue: Committee Rooms 3 & 4, National Assembly for Wales, Cardiff Bay

Members	Constituency
Peter Black (Chair)	South Wales West
David Davies	Monmouth
Mark Isherwood	North Wales
Janet Ryder	North Wales
Owen John Thomas	South West Central

Officials

Carrie Moss	Schools Management Division, Department for Training and Education
Owen Jones-Williams	Road Safety and Sustainable Travel Unit, Transport Directorate

In Attendance:

Alyn Jones	Transport Co-ordinator, Wrexham County Borough Council
Christopher Jones	Transport Co-ordinator, Bryn Melyn (Yellow Bus Project)
Colin Thomas	Director, Governors Wales
Glyn Owen	Chair, Governors Wales
Hugh Patrick	Vice Chair, Governors Wales
Caryl Davies	Safer School Transport, Ysgol Gymraeg Casnewydd
Shelia Grosvenor	Safer School Transport, Ysgol Gymraeg Casnewydd
Alan Kreppel	Committee's Expert Adviser - School Transport

Committee Service

Chris Reading	Clerk
Holly Pembridge	Deputy Clerk
Joanest Jackson	Legal Adviser

Item One: Introduction, Apologies, Substitutions and Declarations of Interest

1. The Chair welcomed the Committee and members of the public.

1.2 The Chair noted apologies from the Minister, Leighton Andrews, Jeff Cuthbert, Denise Idris Jones and Irene James. There were no substitutions. David Davies said that he would have to leave by 3.30pm and Mark Isherwood said that he would have to leave by 4.00pm.

1.3 No declarations of interest were made.

Item Two: Policy Review - School Transport - Information Gathering Papers: ELL(2) 15-04(p.1- p.3)

2.1 The Chair welcomed all presenters to the table. All presenters spoke to their papers. PowerPoint presentations from Alyn Jones and Governors Wales are available on the Committee's webpages at www.wales.gsi.gov.uk

2.2 The Chair then invited Members to raise questions and presenters gave the following responses:

2.3 Perceived Lack of Safety - School Buses

- Caryl Davies said that because there was a perception that some school buses were unsafe, more parents were inclined to take their children to school by car. 'Safer School Transport' was working with other organisations to develop safety procedures/protocols, many of which did not have cost implications.

2.4 Escorts

- Alyn Jones said that there was no formal application of escorts on general school buses in Wrexham County Borough Council. However, there were 150 escorts employed for special educational needs provision and there were significant problems in staffing these routes. When a

small surplus of escorts was available, these would be put onto dedicated mainstream routes. At the moment, CCTV was in place but not on vehicles exceeding 53 seats.

2.5 Yellow Buses

- Alyn Jones said that yellow buses served routes to two primary schools and eight secondary schools in Wrexham. There were 63 large bus contracts in Wrexham - 16 of which were yellow bus contracts. Wrexham County Borough Council deployed the lowest proportion of double decker buses possible.

2.6 Cost per Journey

- Alyn Jones said that savings were produced with the use of yellow buses as one vehicle could serve two contracts. A before and after survey had been taken with non-yellow and yellow buses. It transpired that the yellow buses could serve 360 pupils twice a day with seatbelts and CCTV with a saving of £25,000 per annum.

2.7 Staggering School Start and Finish Times

- Alyn Jones said that discussion/potential progress on staggering start and finish times would be awaited with interest; and
- Wrexham County Borough Council were reliant on the operators' commitment to providing yellow buses.

2.8 Dedicated Seats

- Alyn Jones said that there were dedicated seats for pupils on the Wrexham CBC's yellow buses designated for primary and secondary schools; and
- Christopher Jones said that the yellow buses already had seating plans in place but some parents had not yet applied for travel permits or their children. Dedicated seats did help diminish the likelihood of vandalism to the interior of the bus by school pupils. However, this did not alleviate pupils' misbehaviour.

2.9 Responsibility for Transporting Pupils to School

- Colin Thomas said that the responsibility for transporting pupils to and from school lay with local educational authorities (LEAs) in conjunction with bus operators/contractors;
- All presenters agreed that there was a need for clearly defined roles and responsibilities; and
- Caryl Davies said that the responsibility was shared between operators and LEAs. Although, LEAs were responsible for the provision of transport but also for monitoring the operators' compliance with the contracts.

2.10 Responsibility for Supervision on Buses

- Colin Thomas said that the responsibility for pupils' behaviour lay with schools. Pupils tended to respond more positively to routine and adults they knew (i.e. teachers). Effective management of pupil behaviour would also counteract bullying on buses; and
- Governors Wales was looking towards future developments in education such as the development of the community use of schools concept. Governors Wales hoped that there would be sufficient staff resources to manage pupils' behaviour on buses.

2.11 Balance of Responsibility between Local and National Government

- Caryl Davies said that there was a need for a central lead in provision of incentives for LEAs to comply with requirements. LEAs would probably be more innovative at local level if they had more legislative freedom and funding. Also, procedures and protocols were required for basic principles. Best practice should be facilitated and disseminated centrally; and
- Alyn Jones said that there was a need to take into account the safety of school pupils who were transported to school via public buses.

2.12 Seatbelts

- Christopher Jones felt that seatbelts were ineffective, particularly with secondary school pupils as they felt it was unfashionable to wear them. Pupils of primary school age were more likely to wear seatbelts without question. It was felt that pupil behaviour had deteriorated over the last 30 years. To some extent pupils over 13 years of age were responsible for their own behaviour. Drivers were not as best placed as teachers in a classroom to discipline pupils.

2.13 Closed Circuit Television (CCTV)

- Christopher Jones felt that CCTV worked in the short term but it became less of a deterrent to pupils in the long term. There had been instances where footage of misbehaviour had been shown to schools, some cases had resulted in police intervention and exclusion from schools.

2.14 Small Bus Operators

- Alyn Jones said that if fees for all school transport were introduced, there might be implications for the small operator but this was a key issue in such a deregulated industry. Companies could not be forced to tender on any basis. Operators relied heavily on Vehicle and Operator Standards Agency (VOSA) to ensure that vehicles met safety requirements. VOSA undertook strict inspections.

2.15 Ten Year Contracts

- Alyn Jones said that Wrexham County Borough Council was actively seeking more bus companies who would tender for yellow bus work. Operators did not usually want to spend £100,000 on a yellow vehicle but if they were guaranteed £250 per day for a 10-year contract, this would be more feasible.

2.16 David Davies left the meeting at 3.30pm and Mark Isherwood left the meeting at 3.46pm. At that time, the Chair declared the meeting to be inquorate, under Standing Order 8.9 and reminded Members that protection in respect of the laws of defamation no longer applied. The Chair ruled that the meeting should continue on an informal basis. The informal meeting terminated at 4.15pm. A note of the meeting can be found at Annex 1.

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Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Note of informal session - 15.46pm- 16.15pm

1. The Chair noted that the formal Committee meeting had become inquorate, under Standing Order 8.9, and therefore the session had become informal.
2. Owen John Thomas questioned presenters and the following issues were raised in discussion:

Draft School Transport Bill

- Wrexham County Borough Council had not yet volunteered for the pilot schemes enabled by the draft school transport bill but the bill was awaited with interest. Wrexham County Borough Council Transport Department did not feel it was currently in a position to deliver "transport for all" but it aspired to much of the provisions in the draft Bill; and
- Governors Wales were concerned that if free transport for pupils living outside the 3-mile radius was withdrawn that even more parents would be inclined to drive their children to and from school. It was felt that this problem would be exacerbated in rural areas.

Transportation to Welsh-Medium Schools

- Wrexham County Borough Council would have to consider the transportation of pupils to Welsh medium schools, some of which included very long journeys, in the context of the draft Bill.

3. The Chair invited Alan Kreppel, the Committee's expert on school transport to question presenters. Presenters gave the following responses:

Powers to stagger school start and finish times

- Alyn Jones said that LEAs were fairly reliant on the co-operation of schools and their governing bodies. Staggering start and finish times was feasible for contracts and schools providing it was done in a constructive manner. Start and finish times did not have to be altered hugely. There was a need for collective co-operation between schools for this to happen;
- Hugh Patrick said that budget fora in LEAs provided opportunities for schools to discuss such matters.

Extra Curricular Activities

- Alyn Jones said that there was a need to consider school transport in terms of extra-curricular activities, such as school trips, field trips and transport to sports matches.

Disability Discrimination Act (DDA)

- Alyn Jones said that the DDA brought challenges but Wrexham County Borough Council was seeking advice on this and a review was required.

Supervision outside the school gates

- Colin Thomas said that Governors Wales felt that caselaw suggested that schools had the duty to supervise pupils moving in and out of school buses - but legally this was a grey area;
- Joane Jackson, legal adviser undertook to look into the possibility of preparing a grid outlining legal responsibilities for supervision of pupils at the school gates.

4. The Chair invited Alan Kreppel, Expert Adviser to give a short overview of his recent meetings with small bus operators. The Chair advised that reports of these meetings would be available as papers to note at the next Committee meeting on 1 December.

5. The Chair thanked all presenters for their contributions. The informal session closed at 4.15pm.