

# minutes



Meeting SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY AD HOC SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Thursday, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2003 (commencing at 10.30 am)

## **membership**

Persons absent are marked with 'A'

## **COUNCILLORS**

Councillor Mrs Stella Smedley (Chair)

A Councillor Mrs Nellie Smedley (Vice-Chair)

A Yvonne Davidson

A V H Dobson

A Andy Freeman

Stan Heptinstall MBE

Parry Tsimbiridis

Andy Stewart

## **Statutory Added Members**

A Mr D Shannon

A Mr K Daly

2 vacancies (Parent Governor)

## **IN ATTENDANCE**

Councillor Martin Brandon-Bravo OBE

## **MINUTES**

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2003 having been circulated were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

## **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

An apology for absence was received from Mr D Shannon.

## **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS**

None.

## **REVIEW OF EDUCATION TRANSPORT POLICY – WALKING ROUTES TO SCHOOLS**

John Cornforth, Education Department and lead officer for the review, and Derek Owen, Consultant to the review, introduced the report, which outlined

current policy on walking routes and drew on examples visited by Councillor Stewart with officers on 9<sup>th</sup> October. Mr Cornforth reminded Members that walking routes were important for determining eligibility for free transport, even if they were not used for making the journey to school on foot. He pointed out that this was a controversial area of policy, but this did not mean that the policy was wrong. He added that where parents queried whether an available route was “safe”, they overlooked the expectation that a child would be accompanied as necessary. Mr Owen explained that the Environment Department’s road safety staff in their consideration of walking routes, preferred the term “available” to “safe”. He drew attention to some tensions between different policies, giving the example of the frequency of grass mowing and the availability of a walking route along verges. Councillor Stewart gave an example of a road which had had been re-designated as urban rather than rural, in order that its verges were cut 3 times a year rather than 2.

Councillor Tsimbiridis encouraged a bold approach, bearing in mind the environmental consequences of using private vehicles. Councillor Smedley commented that the cost of transport could mount up for families with a number of children. Mr Cornforth responded that while the Environment Department dealt with most issues relating to school transport, the Education Department would consider appeals under exceptional circumstances, including those relating to hardship. Councillor Heptinstall wondered whether adequate lighting was an issue. Mr Owen replied that there was no specific mention of this, though the visibility splay was a criterion. In response to a further point from Councillor Heptinstall, Mr Cornforth explained that walking routes were walked at different times of the day and in different weathers. In relation to the bridle way mentioned by Councillor Heptinstall, there might be a need to assess it in its worst condition. The outcome might be that it was cheaper to provide transport than repair the bridle way, or there might be another walking route available.

Councillor Tsimbiridis asked whether there had been any exercise which compared the cost of school transport with the cost of congestion, pollution etc. Mr Owen was unaware of any such work, but commented that the Public Transport Group had the task of promoting public transport and reducing car use, and the Government’s proposals might address such issues. Mr Cornforth reminded Members that the County Council’s integrated transport approach had led to a very cost-effective school transport service. Councillor Heptinstall commented that clearly some bus companies were interested in providing school transport, while others were giving the opposite impression. Councillor Stewart observed that the rules relating to walking routes had been developed some decades ago, but a common sense approach to policies seemed to be working.

The Committee concluded that there was no need to change the current criteria for assessing walking routes.

## **TRAVELLING TO SCHOOL – AN ACTION PLAN: GOVERNMENT PROPOSALS**

Members had been given a copy of the Department for Education and Skills/Department for Transport document “Travelling to school: An Action Plan”, which set out the Government’s proposals for promoting school travel plans. Mr Owen reported on additional information gathered by John Martin, Transport Officer in the Education Department, at a recent seminar. These included the themes to be tested through pilot studies, the need for legislation to enable those pilot studies, and the indication that there would be no overall increase in budget to fund the pilot studies. He wondered therefore how enthusiastic authorities would be to participate. Mr Cornforth added that the County Council had been allocated an additional £100,000 for the next two years to appoint additional travel advisors to work on school travel plans.

Councillor Smedley commented that although the proposals would not take effect until after the Committee’s review had been finished, the Committee might wish to recommend responses to it. Councillor Davidson wondered whether other authorities were having similar problems with carriers reluctant to transport school children. She felt that the Government’s proposals might be impossible to implement if public transport were not available. Mr Owen pointed out that it would be at least five years before the pilot studies produced any outcomes. He stated that the Committee might wish to suggest issues which had been overlooked in the Government paper, and whether the authority wished to put itself forward as an exemplar. He suggested that the Committee spend time on this at the next meeting. Councillor Smedley put forward the 14-19 curriculum, after school activities and staggered school hours as issues meriting attention.

Councillor Heptinstall asked whether yellow buses might be the long term solution. Mr Owen explained that some LEAs were piloting yellow buses, and this activity was being monitored by Public Transport Group. However, they were counter to a policy of integrated transport, and Councillor Stewart referred to the expense of a fleet of yellow buses.

There was discussion about whether the Committee’s draft final report should be submitted to the Environment and Education and Lifelong Learning Standing Select Committees. It was concluded that this was not necessary, as the Ad Hoc Select Committee drew on the membership of the two Standing Select Committees, and to do so would further extend the timescale for the review. The Chair expressed disappointment that the Environment Department had not been represented at the meeting, and asked for this to be conveyed to the Director. She invited Members to contact Mr Cornforth or Mr Owen with any other issues from the Government’s paper which they would like covered at the next meeting.

The meeting closed at 12 noon.

**CHAIR**