

minutes



Meeting SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY AD HOC SELECT COMMITTEE

Date Tuesday, 13 January 2004 (commencing at 10.30 am)

membership

Persons absent are marked with 'A'

COUNCILLORS

Councillor Mrs Stella Smedley (Chair)
Councillor Mrs Nellie Smedley (Vice-Chair)

A	Yvonne Davidson		Stan Heptinstall MBE
	V H Dobson		Parry Tsimbiridis
A	Andy Freeman	A	Andy Stewart

Statutory Added Members

A Mr D Shannon
A Mr K Daly
 2 vacancies (Parent Governor)

MINUTES

The Minutes of the last meeting held on 6th November 2003 having been circulated were confirmed and signed by the Chair.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from:-

Councillor Yvonne Davidson (on other County Council business)
“ Andy Stewart

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS AND OFFICERS

None.

REVIEW OF EDUCATION TRANSPORT POLICY – SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

Derek Owen, consultant to the review introduced the report by saying that there was a clear need to review transport for children with special educational needs (SEN), but this was a large task and therefore he was suggesting that this be dealt with as a separate exercise. Councillor Stella Smedley agreed that SEN transport could not be reviewed inside the Committee's current timescale, and saw value in waiting until the Government's position was clearer.

Councillor Heptinstall asked whether there were any urgent issues needing the Committee's attention. John Cornforth, Education Department and lead officer for the review, stated that there were a number of practical, day to day issues, the main problem being increasing costs and increasing numbers of pupils.

The Committee was introduced to Mark Hudson, recently appointed Group Manager (Public Transport), whose experience would be useful in the future. Mr Hudson referred to a recent best value review into SEN transport conducted by Leicestershire County Council.

It was agreed to recommend that a decision on whether or not to conduct a separate review of SEN transport should be deferred at least until the expected Government reports have been published.

TRAVELLING TO SCHOOL: AN ACTION PLAN

Mr Owen reminded the Committee that it had given initial consideration to the document "Travelling to school: An Action Plan" at its previous meeting. The Government's aim was to increase the number of school travel plans, which in Nottinghamshire covered about 10% of schools. Mr Cornforth added that the County Council would receive £105,000 in each of the next two financial years. Discussions with Environment Department had taken place, with the agreement that the additional money would be used to supplement existing school travel plan activity. A steering group would be set up with officers from Environment and Education Departments and schools. He also indicated that schools completing a school travel plan would attract capital money for items such as bicycle storage and lockers. Andy Buckland, Team Manager (Operations) stated that officers in the Environment Department were meeting on 3rd December to discuss proposals to put to the Cabinet Member. He pointed out that any solutions involving more free bus services would be expensive. Councillor Tsimbiridis referred to other costs, for example to the environment. Mr Owen stated that a further Government report was expected in February. He pointed out that the Government would need to find parliamentary time to pass new legislation to permit some of the proposed changes. He wondered whether authorities would volunteer to pilot unpopular developments. The Committee then turned its attention to the three themes identified at the last meeting.

Curriculum needs of the 14-19 age group

Mr Owen explained some of the transport issues which arose as children travelled between schools for parts of their curriculum. Mr Cornforth explained that in Bassetlaw, a new post-16 centre was under consideration, as a collaboration between schools and the further education college. This purpose-built centre would have travel implications. Mr Hudson pointed out that some LEAs were using learners' support funding to provide transport between sites. Councillor Smedley stated that the County Council had some experience, where schools shared 6th forms. She pointed to the need for careful timetabling and reliable transport. Mr Buckland explained that organising transport in such circumstances was problematic, and best undertaken by the schools themselves, where they had the necessary skills. His preference was for schools to be given the responsibility and budget to organise curriculum-related transport.

It was agreed that this area of activity was too complex a task to recommend as a pilot under the Government's proposals.

Extended school day and after school activities

The report presented to the Committee was more positive about this as a possible pilot exercise. Councillor Smedley commented that if transport was available for another two hours, children could stay behind for valuable after school activities. Mr Buckland gave the example of the Dukeries College, where dedicated services were provided at the start and end of the school day, but outside those times service buses did not depart from the school. He pointed out that in urban areas, alternative services were more readily available. At Toothill Comprehensive School, one option being considered was asking school service buses to pick up at the school out of hours, while remoter communities would be served by a dedicated minibus. At Tuxford, he said that the school could book the existing Flexline, which operated after 6.30 in the evening for a pilot period.

Councillor Heptinstall wondered whether the number of schools achieving specialist status would mean more pupils travelling between schools after hours.

Mr Cornforth reminded the Committee that the Government was not providing extra money for the pilots. Given that an exercise on after school transport would therefore be carried out within existing resources, this could be done without becoming a pilot. A possibility suggested by Mr Buckland was a desktop exercise, based around a school's after-school activities, and the problems current perceived. Councillor Smedley saw the usefulness of this approach.

It was agreed to recommend that consideration be given to a pilot study on transport to meet the needs of the extended school day and after school activities, along the lines suggested in the report.

Staggered hours

Members and officers agreed that this would be a difficult area in which to pilot changes. Mr Hudson pointed out that small adjustments in school hours could produce cost savings. Councillor Smedley believed that governors should understand the implications of their decisions about changing the school day.

Mr Buckland commented that yellow buses could be effective if vehicles were used during the day. Some work was being done locally and nationally on yellow buses.

It was agreed that the Director of Environment would report some more details about yellow buses to the 13th January meeting of the Committee. The main item of business would be the Committee's final report.

The meeting closed at 12.15 pm.

CHAIR

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