

TITLE	Contract Management of Home to School Transport Taxi Escorts
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 29 August 2013
WARD	None Specific
STRATEGIC DIRECTOR	Mark Moon, Strategic Director for Neighbourhood Services

Briefing for the Corporate Overview & Scrutiny Committee

29th August 2013

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Response to:

Councillor Younis question at the May 2013 OSMC.

There is a concern that some home to school transport escorts are not able to speak English to an appropriate standard. Corporate Services asked by the OSMC to receive an exploratory briefing on:

1. The criteria for contracts for home to school transport

The Criteria for Home to School Transport Contracts is detailed in the *Code of Practice for School Transport and Community Transport Operations* and also *the Conditions of Contract for the Provision of School Transport Services and Community Services Transport* (both attached at Appendices A and B).

All transport operators need to complete *Pre-Qualification Questionnaire - PQQ* (attached) and pass the evaluation criteria to enable them to be accepted onto WBC's 'Select Tender List' (Attached as Appendix C).

The Pre-Qualification Questionnaire – PQQ is issued by the Council in connection with a competitive procurement process conducted in accordance with the Competitive Dialogue Procedure under Public Contract Regulations 2006 (“the Regulations- (Due to the size of this document, a copy can be obtained from Democratic Services on request. A copy will be available at the meeting on 29 August 2013”).

Once a transport operator has been accepted onto WBC's select tender list the Operator will be given opportunities to tender for contracts that may become available.

The Standing List of Operators is reviewed every 3 years with the current list scheduled for review by Dec 2013 with an effective date of January 2014. A new version of the *Code of Practice and Contract Conditions* is currently being produced and will include specific skills requirements (including communication skills) for Drivers & Escorts as well as the completion of Safeguarding Training as detailed below. Existing and new operators will be invited to apply to be assessed to go onto the Standing List. All Operators will be required to meet these new standards to be considered for inclusion on the Standing List.

2. How contracts for home to school transport escorts are managed;

The contracts are managed under the Councils *Code of Practice for School Transport and Community Service Transport Operations & Conditions of Contract for the provision of School Transport Services and Community Services Transport* (attached). This

includes the physical monitoring of transport operators at schools such as Addington where assistance is received from WBC Taxi licencing and Thames Valley Police and remote monitoring which is undertaken by Schools in other Boroughs by the Schools themselves.

All compliance issues *raised by Parent's, Schools, SEN Officers etc.* are recorded on CTU's Transport Management database (Trapeze – Routewise). The performance management of the Transport Operator such as missed collections, late collection or drop off of clients are also monitored.

Depending on the seriousness of the non-compliance immediate action may be taken to withdraw a particular Driver/Escort or to cancel the contract with the current Operator. Where there are a number of non-compliances in a given period the CTU would invite the operator into WBC where the issue of operational performance is discussed and also ensure that WBC gain the improvement required.

The CTU will be using new Contract Performance/ Management facilities within the Routewise transport software to introduce a new "points" based system of control as part of the *new Code of Practice for Operators* to be introduced by January 2014. Failure to deliver to the required service standards will incur "points" for each occurrence under the new conditions. This will improve tracking and reporting of each Operator as an automatic system is used to trigger alerts when "points" reach a particular level or frequency.

Failure to meet the *required standards* will result in the termination of contracts up to and including exclusion from the Councils 'Select Tender List'.

3. Briefing to cover questions around safeguarding measures and requirements around English language.

WBC requires all Drivers and Escorts used on School Transport to carry an identification badge issued by a Local Authority. WBC's own *Escorts and Drivers Authorised Identification Badge Scheme Guidance Notes & Application form* are attached as Appendices D and E.

The above documents describe what checks WBC will make of the applicant such as identity, Criminal Reference Checks (Enhanced CRB), training requirements, such as Passenger Assistant Training (PATs).

The current Code of Practice is not specific about the about the communication skills or use of the English language by Drivers/Escorts which will be addressed in the new Code currently being produced. It will request that it is a genuine occupational requirement for all Drivers and Escorts used on School Transport to reach or have a minimum standard of English to enable them to communicate both verbally and in writing.

Basically we need to show that it is a key requirement of the job and that it is proportionate to enable WBC to reach a legitimate aim such as being able to communicate to keep children safe. This will be a requirement is regardless of race or ethnicity etc. and is non-discriminating on grounds of colour/nationality.

I can only advise that the CTU has received very few reports of this nature, once in the past 12 months and this was an accent issue not specifically language. As with any report with concerns from Parents, Carers, Teachers or Members of the public the CTU will investigate and resolve such matters.

Going forward, client transport specific Safeguarding training *accredited by the CTA* is being implemented. This training will be classroom based, fully interactive *with a test at the end of the module and certificate to confirm successful attendance/completion of course*. It will be compulsory training for all contracted Drivers and Passenger Escorts to attend and pass this training for them to be allowed to be used on Wokingham Borough Council's contracted transport routes. Funding for and the process of a full training roll out program linked to the Standing List Review is currently being worked on.