

Q&As from Parent Council meeting with the representatives from
Aberdeenshire Council Transport Unit.

- Q. The transport contract was recently retendered and despite hopes that the service would improve, there is evidence to suggest the service is in fact poorer and there are more issues this term than ever before. It was confirmed that a CPMS (Contract Performance Management System) is in place. Can you share your providers performance against these measures to date?**

Under Terms & Conditions of Contracts, breaches will incur penalty points and monetary fines, up to a certain level and if there is not an immediate improvement the contract would be terminated. A transport surveyor carries out compliance checks and parents and schools report concerns too. If there was a serious breach the contract would be terminated immediately. The circumstances would be fully investigated but an independent witness, preferably a Council employee, would be required. It is often the case that "guilt" is assumed, and penalty points issued, and then the contractor will come back with reasons/excuses/mitigating circumstances why the incident occurred.

When a contract is terminated tenders will be sought for a short-term contract, with a different operator.

- Q. The process to be followed when a bus breaks down has been shared but what is considered to be acceptable with regard to the number of breakdowns in a given period?**

Contracts stipulate that vehicles have to be maintained, and buses are serviced every 4 weeks. Recurring breakdowns will be dealt with under CPMS. If always the same bus, it is expected that the contractor will resolve. It was acknowledged that there had previously been a high level of breakdowns which companies have tried to resolve and performance has improved.

- Q. What risk assessments are carried out with regard to break downs and lateness of buses resulting in young people waiting by the roadside for lengthy period of time? And what thought is given to pupils exiting buses in country locations directly onto overgrown and uneven grass areas?**

There is a road safety team and any concerns that are flagged up, eg a narrow verge, will be looked at, risk assessed and resolved.

- Q. We would be keen to understand more about lighting and bus stop provision, as well as the installation of crossings. Who makes decisions on these matters?**

The Passenger Transport Unit has responsibility for bus stops and shelters. The PTU (Public Transport Unit) designates pick-up points for pupils. If a pick-up point is assessed as dangerous, its location would be moved.

- Q. What is the policy with regard to high winds and the impact this can have on services?**

The decision to travel in adverse weather conditions lies with the operator. The policy is that with winds of 45mph+ double decker buses will not be used. Obviously, operators do not have sufficient replacement buses to hand (costs being excessive) and a plan will be devised in liaison with the school. Double runs may be required but plans for improved communications with parents (School App)

should mitigate lengthy waits at pick-up points. On homeward journeys, the policy is that S1-S3 students will be sent home first, and again parents will be informed as early as possible. It is recognised that there were quite a few occurrences last year and parents will be advised/reminded of the policy.

- Q. How do the drivers monitor if all the pupils have been collected and what is the procedure if a pupil is missed? There have been instances of buses driving past pupils and leaving them behind.**

This should never happen. Drivers have a manifest and although it is not possible for them to know who may choose to travel on a particular day, drivers should not drive past pupils. Buses have CCTV cameras and any such occurrence would be dealt with appropriately by the bus company as well as the PTU.

- Q. There has been much discussion over the safety of the children whilst on the buses. The Council expects all school transport vehicles to have seat belts available for pupils to use. Can you share the Council's policy and expectations on bus safety and what you expect of your providers with regard to the use of the seat belts during travel?**

Passengers on small buses have to wear seatbelts, however, it is not compulsory on larger buses. The onus is on the operator to advise drivers to encourage seatbelt wearing, and students can be educated on personal safety, but ultimately it is the students' decision as to whether or not they choose to wear a seatbelt.

- Q. Can you confirm who the responsibility lies with should a young person be injured on a school bus.**

It depends on the circumstances. The prime responsibility lies with the operator but everyone has a role to play. If passengers are not sitting safely and they hurt themselves as a result, then they will be accountable for their own actions.

- Q. Where a public service is more efficient than a school bus service, can you advise if a school pass can be used on this service? Example being Drumlithie service taking 40 minutes to an hour which is unacceptable.**

We believe that this situation was as a direct result of issues with roadworks in and around Stonehaven which have now been resolved.

- Q. With Nicolls ceasing to trade in November and the contract being retendered, how will the Council maximise on this opportunity to engage a contractor who can provide a more efficient and safer service?**

Hopefully the service has improved; the PTU has not been made aware of any issues since August.