

## **Transport workshop 2012-10-23**

21 parents attended

7 parents could not attend but sent comments via e-mail

Main issues and concerns identified by parents

### **1. Health and safety concerns**

- No contingency plan in place if the vehicle was involved in an accident. Parents were worried that if this were to happen then their children who were not sufficiently escorted would run away from the scene.
- Harnesses for vulnerable children were not provided and when they were provided they were faulty. Children are receiving bruising injuries because they are being forced to wear ill fitting seatbelts.
- Children who were originally transported on minibuses with two escorts are now being picked up by a taxi with no escorts. Children are travelling in over cramped conditions in taxis that have seats facing each other and knees touching. Some of these children do not like having their body space invaded in such an intimate way.
- Children are being driven to school in the passenger seat of the taxi because there is not enough room to transport them. These children would not sit in the front seat of their family's car because they cannot be managed there. There is a real danger that they would undo the seatbelt.
- Downs Park have been reduced to no escort in the taxis, Downs View have been reduced to one escort from two. No recognition given to the need for children to have an escort.
- Compromise on cost has meant safety concerns have not been addressed.
- There is no spare capacity on the buses.
- Staff not adequately trained to deal with vulnerable children.
- No clear lines of accountability provided to ensure that there is a full line of responsibility and what lies with whom.
- Journey times are so long that children are being physically sick when they arrive at school. They are tired from the long days and journey times that this is affecting their work. Children are given a black mark for being late when the reason is beyond their control.
- Longer journey times correlate with more children on the bus and pressure exerted by the drivers increases stress levels for families and children.
- Children restrained in smaller taxis are being injured on the journeys to school
- Parents are being asked to put their own children on the bus because the driver is unwilling to leave the vehicle. This means that younger children are being left in the house alone.
- Child was left on the front door step alone because the driver could not wait for the parent to open the door, or she was running late and was on her way home.
- Mobility issues for children who find it difficult to get in and out of the taxis especially in the wet.

## **2. Mental health and behavioural concerns**

- Children currently not travelling in the taxi provided because they cannot be encouraged to get into the taxi with new and unfamiliar drivers. In this particular case the parent is now taking her child to school because it has taken him a long time to trust his previous driver and escort. All this work has been undone by the change in driver and escort and now he won't even think about getting on the bus.
- Vulnerable children who find change difficult now on buses with new drivers and different routes despite the fact that escorts are still working for the company and have been put on different routes.
- No consideration is being made to children who have behavioural problems and may need to sit away from other children. There is no space for this to happen in a cramped taxi.
- Increased levels of anxiety for children who find change difficult. Children up all night with anxiety about the change.
- Driver stress is increased when they are at risk of being hit by children.

## **3. Communication concerns**

- Parents from Downs Park were not told of the change of contract. Parents at Downs View were told only a week before the beginning of term not leaving time for them to prepare their children for the change. Schools were not told of the new arrangements at all.
- Taxis will not wait for the children if they are not ready when they call. On the other hand parents have been expected to wait for up to an hour for the taxi to arrive with no explanation as to why they were late. When they asked why the taxi was late the reason was given that they had run out of petrol.
- Taxi drivers not having up to date information when families have moved or changed mobile phones.
- Different drivers turning up on different days and not being familiar with the children.
- Frontline staff in the taxi office are not aware of the specific needs of the children they are transporting. At the beginning of term parents were not able to speak directly to the providers by phone about the provision for their children.
- New staff did not have a full briefing on the individual needs of the children on their bus.
- Children have been able to listen to inappropriate conversations between the escort and driver.
- Parents have not been allowed to have the number of the drivers or escorts so that they are able to ring if there is a last minute change or the child is sick.

## **4. General concerns**

- There is no flexibility in the route that drivers take now so that children are missing large portions of time at after school clubs. Drivers are being forced to follow 'Green Routes'.

- After school provision is not being made to allow children to attend extra curricular activities.
- No allowances are made for children to be picked up from different places meaning that if parents want this to happen then they have to ring the taxi company in the morning.
- Schools have had to spend valuable teaching time on resolving issues for parents regarding their transport arrangements.
- A young child on a long journey was forced on several occasions to wet his pants because the escort staff and drivers refused to stop the bus and let him go to the toilet on a long journey. He was just out of nappies.
- Timing of the bus drop off time coincides with picking up other children from school. This means that a child who is extremely anxious is dropped off last on the round but if his mum is not home he will still not wait in the taxi and gets extremely distressed.
- Often the children who get school transport live along way from their schools. If they need picking up early or are ill then this adds to the stress for parents when they need to get them home quickly and have to make their own travel arrangements.

#### **Gil comments/response**

- He acknowledged all the concerns of the parents.
- Sue did write an apology that didn't work as well as we were hoping
- He acknowledged that these children do have particular needs however there were commercial reasons for needing to save money – Council has savings to make.
- To take the issues forward he would like:
  - Involvement of special school head teachers in contract reviewing
  - Involvement of parents – 4 parent reps to come together with the LA and taxi companies to discuss the issues raised and develop an action plan.
- Should we look at bringing the service back in house – may be easier for the council to manage themselves – easier to ensure good quality service?
- Commit to greater transparency re. need to make financial savings and what can be achieved

#### **Sue Shank's comments/response**

- There is a wider issue about where children go to school – need to improve all local schools so children don't have to travel so far. However, many families with SEN children are not made to feel welcome at their local school.
- Suggested we need to involve schools more in developing the service
- Agreed need an escort in each bus/taxi
- Not just a transport issue it's a care issue
- Sue said we do need to save money and make savings

However the LA need to consider longer term costs – law suits from lack of safety measures, mental health of parents from additional stress, children performing worse at school as so late. This should never have happened and the question was raised as to whether this really saved them money.

## **Recommendations made by parents**

### **5. Health and safety suggestions**

- Journey times should be limited to 45 minutes maximum which includes 5 minutes to let the child get on the minibus.
- Children should be transported in suitable sized minibuses and not on overcrowded taxis with an escort.
- Children need to be helped onto the bus by the taxi escort who comes to the door of the house.
- Drivers and escorts need mandatory training provided by the LA in how to manage difficult behaviours and help them understand the special needs they may encounter.
- Equipment should be provided for the children to travel safely in the vehicles.
- A risk assessment and needs assessment should be carried out on all children.
- Minibuses should keep the same drivers so that they can get to know the children they are transporting.
- There needs to be open and transparent accountability in the LA and the taxi company.

### **6. Communication suggestions**

- Driver and escorts need a comprehensive hand over about the children they are transporting from the parents and schools.
- Need to ensure procurement sets out more detailed specific requirements into the contracts.
- Escorts should give parents a 5 minute warning that they are nearing the house.
- The journey needs to be timetabled so that children are not forgotten and parents know when their bus is expected.
- Drivers should have up to date contact numbers for all the children on their bus and parents should have the contact details of the minibus so that they can ring up if necessary.
- There needs to be a trusting relationship built up between the parents and escorts.

### **7. General suggestions**

- Contracts need to be tendered earlier in the year and not during the summer.
- The transport service should be assessed by an independent party (possibly the Partnership Charter.)
- The service should be child centred and not led by the needs of the service.
- There needs to be more flexibility so that children can attend after school clubs or respite homes.

## **Summary actions**

It is fair to say that Sue and Gil are listening to the concerns we are telling them. Adrian wanted to reassure parents that he has been watching the taxis/mini buses arriving/leaving and have fed back issues immediately if there have been any.

- BHCC to provide copy of risk assessments written to set out procedures in place for if there is an accident/fire/injury and contingency plans. (Gil)
- Suggest an interim review of contracts to pick up health and safety requirements raised – Gil to feed in the above concerns and address these into an interim review (Gil)
- BHCC to provide all parents with a contact number/email for day to day enquires and if they have a complaint (Gil)
- Amaze/PaCC to write up summary report (Debbie)