

PaCConnect
25th/26th June 2019
Home to School Transport Changes

Professionals in attendance:

Meeting 1: Fiona England (Chair of PaCC), Adrian Carver (Head teacher of Downs View), Richard Barker (Head of School Organisation, Families, Children and Learning), Stuart Cooper (Edge Public Solutions)

Meeting 2: Diana Boyd (Vice Chair PaCC) Rachel Burstow (Head teacher of Hill Park School, Richard Barker (Head of School Organisation, Families, Children and Learning), Stuart Cooper (Edge Public Solutions)

Introduction

- From September competition laws mean this must go to tender for contracts over the next 4 years.
- It's called Dynamic Purchasing System, interested companies get specified rates for different journeys and children requirements - companies bid for it.
- Those companies/operators who meet certain criteria will be checked.
- Selection questionnaire: providers who have been shortlisted will be checked against questionnaire's responses
- We understand that operators will have to make a profit, they are not expected to cut down prices / bids
- There are 2 new staff being employed at the council to help manage the system. There is also a new software system
- This is not about your child's eligibility for transport. That will not change.
- The council have identified routes and it's the routes that will be put to tender
- This could mean you will have a different taxi driver and escort from September

PaCC recognises that there are three areas which need to look at:

- 1) Communication with operator
- 2) Training for drivers and escorts
- 3) Health and safety

Key Issues

Communication

- Not hearing from drivers until day before – Increased capacity of staff should solve this problem
- Vital that change in driver must be communicated to parents
- Clarity of who is responsible for communicating – who we need to contact
- The need for early communication to parents about changes. Commitment to a date from the LA about when parents will be notified before the start of term.

Q. Will we be informed of any changes? For example when a child is on a school trip – whose responsibility is it to tell the driver?

A. There is no requirement for the school to tell the drivers. For example – operators must find out all inset days themselves.

Q: When we will know who is going to pick up my child?

A: We plan to award routes to operators by early July, then we verify, ideally by before the end of term / summer holidays, but in reality it'll probably happen in August.

Q. We get told the child will meet the designated driver – this doesn't happen. We've had a different driver every day. How is that going to improve? That part of the day is crucial for everyone's wellbeing.

A. More operators mean that there is potentially more capacity than before. There will be a variation in Post 16 depending on the timetable. With capacity and with the council managing, it's within our ability to change the operator if things aren't working.

Q. How quickly would this happen?

A. The scenario can be evidenced by CCTV – we will go to the operator to express if what's happening is unacceptable. They can be removed or changed immediately.

- There will be a maximum of 3 changes of driver in a term

Q. How and when will we be informed of new drivers and escorts?

- Currently tendering the routes.
- Should know by end of term.
- Post 16 is not so clear – in that situation often child isn't told until day before. This is because of variations in post 16 timetables. We don't know the timetable until we hear from the college which often isn't until term starts

Q. Routes – will all the children in the taxi be going to one particular school?

Likelihood is yes – depends on start and finish times of schools

Q: What if no one bids for a route?

A: we don't expect that to happen. If it does happen we will look at it again and see what to do, probably accommodate other routes/children, e.g. pair two routes/children's requirements

Q. Is there an opportunity for parents to communicate issues?

Points of contacts are in the council – there is a direct line of contact now.

Q: How the system will deal with negative feedback from drivers/escort?

A: These issues will be dealt by the Council, The Council will investigate on that.

Comments

- Flexibility about timing. Something has to be written in the contract about this. Diana Boyd – remove the pressure from parents about the time limit. The start to the day is so important. Continuity.
- Change of driver –arrangements need to be communicated. Even a space of 20 minutes can determine whether the rest of the day is a success or not.
- Perhaps communication by text could be very useful for last minute information and/or changes
- It will be very useful to have the driver's mobile number, which currently is not always passed on. That will save time and any problem. Direct contact/driver and/or escort's mobile could be added/required by the contract. We don't have a UPA so any change of driver can be extremely anxiety provoking

Safety and Training

Q. Safe-guarding – some of our children behave 'inappropriately' – how do we know our children will be dealt with properly?

- Information for each route/child is passed on to each provider. With more people in the council there is more control from the LA about how a child's behaviour is dealt with. Communication is needed.

Q. How often will you spot check?

There is no criteria for this yet. Diana Boyd – perhaps this is something that could be clarified?

Q. What kind of training do you insist on?

- The LA has never provided training. Schools sometimes provide training. Private trainers are available. A number of staff already employed will still be available

Q. How do you define a trained and qualified driver?

All operators must meet the 'Blue Book' standard. There is no specification of a particular course. Drivers don't have to be trained.

Q. Would parents be assured that a child with complex health issues will be placed with someone with first aid?

Likelihood is that people who have provided transport before who have experience will provide it again.

Further Comments

- Diana Boyd - Very complex children – individual needs. Must be contact with families. Info will be given from schools about each individual child.
- What is a suitably qualified/trained driver?
- Training isn't defined. What parents expect from the word 'training' seems to be different from the reality.
- Validation by transport team
- Experience also valuable
- Nuances of each child need to be taken into account
- Training for drivers and escorts needs to include understanding of anxiety and sensory needs, e.g. impact of loud radio, changes to routes without explanation. Who will offer training to ensure it's consistent and the same for all?
- Health and safety: how about a mini bus for Brighton And Hove children going to Northease Manor? A saving potentially plus my daughter finds being in a car alone very difficult which has happened. Parent carers to be sent photo of driver and escort to show to children and YP for a social story. Who will make spot checks and how often? What happens if contractors are found to fall below the standards, would council end the contract?

What's Important?

- Mustn't wait for things to go wrong then change
- Slack in the system
- Consistency of driver
- Flexibility of transport. No change

Q. Where is money being saved?

- Routing – right number of children in right provision. Sometimes larger taxis.
- More competition – more competitive price offered
- If 'cheapest' provider isn't doing what's expected they can be changed

Q. Children are picked up too early. Will that change?

The previous system was run by the operator. Because LA determine the route that will change.

Timescales

Q. Is there enough time to have everything in place?

- 10 Operators have met criteria. Includes all current operators
- About to put routes out to tender
- Letters will be sent to parents with details

Other questions and comments

To counteract the annual overspend, have you fought about increasing the budget in line with the annual Council tax increase?

Q: Where will the LA save money?

Providers who cost less. Some routes can be unified and have more children in the taxi, of course that will be pre-arranged. More efficient invoicing system. More work will be done electronically than done by people. Greater coverage/more availability for people to call number

Q: Good service so far, why this restructuring? Quality of care is good at the moment. Continuity is important

A: The retendering had to happen as each new contract lasts for 4 years. We are trying for the process to be the best possible

Q. Will it be possible to put some information on the Council website? Not getting any information/updates will create anxiety for parents

No answer in minutes

Q: Can be extra space in the car when children don't feel comfortable with travelling in a small car, also for those children with complex behaviour?

A: We are collating all the info about a child's needs including space needed in a car, if extra space is needed and so on ... We will have more large vehicles to accommodate those children who need more space

Q: Young adults who pay/contribute to it (around £20 per week) - will the charge increase?

A: Contribution is a different area

Q: What about the sustainability of the home to school transport?

A: That is the Council's duty. The Council has to look at future pressure(s) and resolve the issue(s)

Adrian Carver: parents can be reassured that here at Downs View/special school there is staff on the door, we will report if escorts' behaviour is not right. Also just to remind parents that funding cuts are from the Central Government not the Local Government