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Report To Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

Denbighshire County Council

Purpose Of This Report

This report is submitted by the Head of the Transport & Infrastructure Department, in response to an invitation to submit evidence by the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, in the context of its study of home to school transport. The report provides an overview of the Denbighshire County Council (DCC) "yellow bus" initiative.

Description of the Initiative

DCC introduced in September 2003, a pilot initiative operating a new 68-seat single deck coach to provide education transport services, employing a dedicated full time driver. The vehicle features a number of enhanced safety features including three point belts to all seats, R66 compliant body strength, passenger surveillance system and high profile exterior yellow livery and bilingual "school bus" text. The vehicle and driver are managed by the County Council's Transport & Infrastructure Department. DCC are understood to be the only local authority in Wales to operate such an initiative.

The vehicle is used to operate a home to school transport service for entitled pupils, and extensive use of the vehicle is made by a number of schools during the school day for transport to swimming lessons, field trips etc.

The pilot initiative has proven to be a great overall success, and will be maintained in the long term. Examples of measures of its success include the following:

A: Improved vehicle quality, comfort, safety and general ambience.

B: Dedicated and motivated regular driver, smartly presented, having developed good liaison with children, schools and helpers.

C: Good public relations for the County Council.

Two important features of the initiative are, firstly, the ability to "co-ordinate" off peak work for schools

with the peak time home to school transport service, in order to collectively help produce an overall high quality service. Secondly, whilst the initiative needs to be cost effective, it is non-profit making. By being an "in house" operation, there have also been good cross cutting benefits, for example involvement with a Junior Road Safety Conference, and the vehicle, along with others in Denbighshire's fleet management, being fitted with an exhaust system particulate trap, thus reducing harmful emissions.

Future Aspirations

DCC intends to maintain the existing operation, based on the results of its first year of service.

The County Council is pursuing scope to expand this initiative by at least one additional vehicle in 2005. A significant number of requests for off peak transport by schools have had to be rejected because of the constraint of currently having only one vehicle.

The significant challenge facing the Council in expanding this higher quality service, with its clear safety benefits, in financially constrained times, whilst at the same time maintaining a balance of service with the predominant private sector providers.

Conclusion

The Denbighshire County Council "Yellow Bus" initiative represents a bold decision by a local authority to take on direct the operation of a large passenger carrying vehicle. It is considered, however, that the initiative demonstrates several examples of good practice and delivers distinct characteristics that are highly valued by users of the service.

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