

# Education and Lifelong Learning Committee

**ELL(2)03-06(p3)**

<b>Date:</b>	Wednesday 8 February 2006
<b>Venue:</b>	Committee Rooms 3&4
<b>Title:</b>	Monitoring the Recommendations of the Committee's Report into School Transport

## **Purpose**

1. To update on the progress and implementation of recommendations within the Committee's report into school transport.

## **Summary**

2. This paper updates the action taken to implement the recommendations for the Assembly Government in the school transport report and the work underway with Local Education Authorities (LEAs) to take forward the recommendations for which they are responsible.

## **Background**

3. The Committee's report into school transport made 30 recommendations for improvements to school transport in Wales. Five recommendations were for the Assembly Government, of which I accepted four. One recommendation was for the UK Government. The remaining 24 recommendations were for LEAs, which have statutory responsibility for provision of school transport under section 509 of the Education Act 1996 – two jointly with schools and one jointly with Regional Transport Consortia.

**4. I provided the Assembly Government's written response to the report on 14 June 2005, followed by an oral statement on 22 June.**

## **Consideration**

Recommendations for the Assembly Government: legal responsibilities and codes of conduct

5. The Committee recommended that the Assembly Government should issue guidance to clarify current legal responsibilities and liabilities in relation to school transport and on preparation of codes of conduct aimed at improving standards of pupil behaviour on school buses. In my written response I indicated that we would pick up both these issues – as well as a number of other issues raised in the recommendations to LEAs - in the revised Assembly Government guidance to LEAs and schools on school transport. That remains the case and consultation on the guidance will begin shortly. This will reflect feedback received from the Assembly Government-convened coordinating group – representing education and transport interests in the Assembly, LEAs, bus operators, the Association of Transport Coordinating Officers (ATCO), the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT) and the Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) – with whom officials shared a draft of the guidance.

## **Review of Risk Assessments**

6. The review will be undertaken by Halcrow, one of the framework consultants for Transport Wales. Officials in Schools Management Division (SMD) and Transport Policy and Administration Division (TP&A) have met with Halcrow to discuss and agree the terms of reference for the review. The next step is to identify the sample of LEAs (and schools in those LEAs) to take part in the review. I hope this will enable work to commence in early Spring. We will consider how best to disseminate the review findings as part of the project.

7. The Committee may wish to be aware that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) is in the process of undertaking a programme of visits throughout Wales to examine the management of vehicle and pedestrian movements on school sites. The HSE will provide feedback to individual participating LEAs and we are liaising with the HSE to obtain some general best practice advice for dissemination on an all-Wales basis.

## **School Transport Bill**

8. The School Transport Bill failed to achieve Royal Assent when the UK Parliament was dissolved for the General Election in May 2005. The Bill has not been brought back to Parliament. However, the Department for Education and Skills' White Paper "Higher Standards, Better Schools for All – More Choice for Parents and Pupils", published on 25 October 2005, proposed changes to school transport in England which are being taken forward through the forthcoming Education and Inspection Bill. We have sought framework powers in the Bill for the National Assembly to legislate on school transport, in line with the arrangements envisaged in the White Paper "Better Governance for Wales".

## **Recommendation for the UK Government**

9. In my response to the Committee's report I said that I would write to the UK Government about reviewing the 'three for two' concession. I wrote to Department for Transport Ministers on 19 July 2005. Their response indicated that no review is planned. However, it should be remembered that LEAs do not have to use the concession and, in fact, very few in Wales continue to include it in their contracts.

I have urged LEAs who still use the concession to consider phasing it out altogether.

## **Recommendations for LEAs**

10. The Assembly Government is committed to working with LEAs, bus operators, schools, parents and pupils to take forward improvements to the safety and quality of home to school transport. There is £1m of new annual funding in the Assembly's budget for 2007-08 and beyond for that purpose.

11. I discussed school transport when I met Local Authority Education Members and Directors of Education on 16 November 2005. I welcomed the steps already taken by many LEAs to improve school transport. I underlined that it was important that LEAs considered the Committee's recommendations in letting new school transport contracts, in particular in relation to phasing out the use of double deck buses; introducing CCTV and Codes of Conduct to tackle pupil misbehaviour; setting age limits on buses used; and, requiring vehicles equipped with seatbelts wherever possible (and ensuring their use).

12. At official level, the Assembly Government-convened coordinating group has had useful meetings and discussions on the Committee's report, the Assembly Government's response, and the draft revised Assembly guidance on school transport. The group will continue to meet in 2006, with one of its main objectives to consider ways to share and disseminate best practice across Wales.

13. Together with Cllr. John Davies, WLGA spokesperson for education and lifelong learning, I will be attending a meeting of the coordinating group on 22 March. I will be expecting a report for that meeting on progress across Wales to take forward improvements to school transport. I shall also want to discuss with the WLGA and LEAs use of the new £1m funding from 2007-08.

## **Financial Implications**

14. There are no immediate financial implications arising from this paper.

## **Cross Cutting Themes**

15. Although home to school transport falls within the portfolio of the Education and Lifelong Learning Committee, there is overlap with the Economic Development and Transport portfolio and also some implications for Finance and Local Government

## **Action for Subject Committee**

16. The Committee is invited to note the contents of this paper.

**Jane Davidson**

# **Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning**

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