

School Transport update

Back in October 2015 3 parent carers from the forum met up with Cheryl Cowperthwaite (Locality Transport Team Leader for CCC) to discuss the issue around the school transport tendering process and families and their children not knowing who will be transporting their children to and from school and not meeting the escorts beforehand.

We explained how it has a detrimental effect on our children and especially those with Autism when they only find out the day before they start back after the summer holidays. We suggested that the tendering process could be done in eg April and then the families would know before the end of the summer term.

This was noted and we requested a copy of the minutes taken at the meeting, this was agreed. After sending a barrage of e-mails to Cheryl requesting the minute, we still haven't received a copy... John Barrett (Assistant Director for Children's Services) was copied in to these e-mails to which he responded –

From: Barrett, John P
Sent: 29 January 2016 12:20
To: Jenkinson, David A
Subject: Meeting with Cumbria Parent Carer Forum

Hi

I know things have been a little busy for you recently but Shirley Murphy Chair of the Parent Carer Forum has been trying to arrange a meeting with Cheryl as SEND transport is obviously an area of interest for the Forum. I spoke to Shirley yesterday evening and suggested that it might be useful if she met with you, I'm happy to attend as well. Would you be okay if I set up an hours meeting sometime?

Regards

John

John Barrett
Assistant Director

We had no response from David Jenkinson again after numerous e-mails, till the following message was sent in April 2016...

Dear David,

As chair of Cumbria Parent Carer Forum, I contacted you on behalf of many parent carers who are not happy with the school transport their children are receiving. This was sent to you on 23/02/2016 and displayed as read on my pc.

We find your lack of response both frustrating and very discourteous!!!

This issue has now been going for 6 months and fast approaching the tendering process for this year, quite frankly this is not good enough, and we are sure if it

was for your child it would be quite different. We also feel that since February you could have managed to arrange a meeting especially as it was a request from John Barrett... below is a copy of the e-mail sent just in case you need a reminder!!

Dear David,

As you may be aware myself and 2 other parent carers met with Cheryl Cowperthwaite on 20th October last year to discuss the issues we have with the transport for our children....

We were promised to have a set of the minutes that were taken, which we still haven't received even after numerous reminders by e-mail. Cheryl also said that she would be meeting with John Barrett to discuss our concerns.

We have sent numerous e-mails to ask how far on we are with this situation, but we so far have not had any response. I have spoken again to John and he copied me in on the e-mail he sent you to ask if you could set up a meeting for us. Could I suggest that we have this meeting as soon as we can as it has now been 4 months since our concerns were brought to the forefront. Thanks.

Kind regards

Shirley

Apr 16

Hello Shirley,

Thank you for your email, I can assure you that I do try not to be 'discourteous' in my approach and dealings with all people and organisations, if that is how you perceive my actions to be I apologise profusely.

I shall speak with my colleague Cheryl and look into your request.

Further, would you like to offer some time/dates for us to meet and discuss your concerns – please not next week as the diary is mad at the moment.

In the meantime, do you have any 'specific' concerns that I may be able to look at before we meet?

Regards

Dave

David Jenkinson - Transport Services – Senior Manager | Highways, Transport and Fleet

Summary of meeting

Notes of Meeting: Cumbria Parent Carer Forum and Cumbria County Council
19th May 2016; Cumbria County Council, Transport Services, Barras Lane,
Dalston, 10.00am

Attendees:

Shirley Murphy (SM) and Steven Johnstone (SJ), Cumbria Parent Carer Forum
Geoff Hill (GH), Transport Services Programme Manager, Cumbria County
Council (CCC)
Tricia Wilkinson (TW), Passenger Transport Officer, CCC
Caroline Watson (CW), Commissioning Manager – Transport, CCC

1. (GH) The Transport Team at CCC has been restructured. With effect
from 1st April 2016, responsibilities are as follows:

Transport Services Team: Responsible for Budget and Policy
David Jenkinson, Senior Manager Transport Services
Geoff Hill, Transport Services Programme Manager
Tricia Wilkinson, Passenger Transport Officer

Commissioning, Procurement & Contract Management Team:
Responsible for commissioning and procurement of all SEND Transport.
Liaise with Assessment/Statementing Officers for SEND transport commissions,
liaise with parents, schools and Health & Safety Team regarding Risk
Assessments. Prepare tender specifications and route planning. Organising
Escort Training Courses. Procurement of Transport Services and Contract
Management.

Caroline Watson, Commissioning Manager–Transport: 07584 883781/01228
221703

Debbie Heard, Procurement and Contracts Manager–Transport:
07785592891/01228 221704

Commissioning Assistants:

Selina Carrol, Carlisle and Penrith: 01228 226430

Joanne Wall, Allerdale and Copeland: 01228 226428

Stacey Thame, Barrow and South Lakeland: 01228 226427

If parent carers have any queries about their child's transport, in the first
instance, please contact the Commissioning Assistant for the relevant area as
above.

Health & Safety Team:

Risk Assessments, equipment (harnesses, boosters etc), training for equipment

2. (SM) A meeting had been held with Council Officers in October last year
however no notes of meeting were provided. Apologies were given on behalf of
CCC and reassurance that going forward, meeting notes would be provided. CW
would provide notes of today's meeting by the end of 27th May for approval by
all attendees. SM & SJ would then share the final version with the Parent and
Carers Forum.

3. SM provided background on the Cumbria Parent Carer Forum and explained they have around 400 families represented through the Forum. Information is available through a website and Facebook page.

4. (SM) Concerns were raised about change in operators and escorts when routes are retendered. Information about who operators are is often last minute, can change and does not allow sufficient time for parents carers to reassure children and prepare for change.

(CW) Clarified the process:

- Transport can only be provided when a fully completed Transport Commission Form is received from the Assessment Officer in Children's Services Directorate.
- The Commission Form is then sent to Health & Safety for Risk Assessment.
- Once Risk Assessed, if individual transport is required, the route is put out to tender. This can take 3 -4 weeks. If no bid is received and the route has to go out for tender again, it can take a further 3 weeks.
- If the child can travel with others, routes are checked to see if there is available space. The school is contacted to see if they feel there will be any issues with the pupil mix.
- Health & Safety Team liaise with operator regarding specialist equipment. This may need to be brought back from a previous operator and checked before being reissued. Equipment is provided and purchased by CCC and training is provided where necessary.
- If the child can be added to the route, the transport operator is advised and sent the risk assessment and any other medical information that is relevant.
- Parent Carers are written to advising who the operator is and that they should contact the operator to arrange a meeting before transport starts. A risk assessment is also now being sent to parents (from 1st April) so that they have a record of the information we hold about their child.

Ideally, all this should happen with sufficient time to allow operators to meet parent carers and children however delays in the process sometimes mean that arrangements are made at short notice. We have to balance the need to provide safe and appropriate transport with the need and urgency to get the child to school.

If Commissioning Transport Team don't have the Transport Commission forms through from Children's Services by mid-June, there could be delays in having transport in place for start of term in September. This is because of the work that is needed to plan routes, get all pupils risk assessed which runs alongside advising existing parents of changes to routes that have been retendered and also planning and processing application forms for mainstream transport.

5. The need for continuity where possible was discussed. CW advised about the timeframes for the tender areas and confirmed that the time of year and way that SEND transport was tendered was being reviewed. Introducing new contracts in September when there are new starters, pupils transferring and general changes, with little ability to contact schools for information or to discuss changes in pupil mix could be lessened by having contracts starting at a different time of the year, eg Easter. This would be explored as part of the review.

6. At the moment, Commissioning Transport are unable to pass on the contact details for the parent carers to the transport operators. TW is looking into the reason for this as it would be much easier if the Operators are able to telephone parents to arrange pre-transportation meetings.

7. The availability of Escorts can also impact on the time taken to provide transport. All escorts are required to go on the next available training course (within 3 months of the start of a contract).

- Escort course covers equipment, basic first aid, managing behaviour.
- Refresher courses are also provided.

8. (GH) The availability of medically trained escorts is under review following changes to the ability of the NHS in providing training. There is a low likelihood of intervention being required; CCC is currently looking at how the risks can be covered. The use of parental grants may be explored so that parents can, in certain circumstances, provide the transport themselves and be reimbursed for mileage expenses.

9. Feedback is needed from parent carers, both when transport is working well and when it isn't. Contracts for services are currently awarded based on price with no weighting or scoring for quality. Feedback from parent carers and children would be helpful as part of the commissioning and procurement process and CW will work with SM and SJ to carry out some focused engagement and feedback meetings prior to areas being retendered.

10. Guidance Leaflets are still in the process of being prepared:

- Safeguarding Leaflet is in place and is to be refreshed (TW)
- Parent Carer Leaflet is being sent to out with letters regarding operator details
- Operator and School leaflet (which incorporates the Code of Practice) is currently being drafted (TW)

Once in place, all leaflets will be available on-line through the CCC Local Offer.

TW will look at the information provided to see if a simpler, perhaps pictorial guide can be produced to make the leaflets more user-friendly and a little less wordy.

11. (SM & SJ) Arrival times at schools can be an issue as is the "stacking" of transport. (CW) advised that at recent operator engagement sessions, some operators are taking pupils into classrooms. Liaison with schools will be ongoing to address this issue.

12. The use of spot-checks with operators was raised. CW confirmed the responsibility for this lies with the new CP&CM Team and there is a programme of planned checks being pulled together at present. TW explained that whilst CCC endeavour to secure attendance by DVSA (formerly known as VOSA), together with the relevant District Council Licensing Officer, due to their

commitments/constraints they are not always to attend. Any identified issues highlighted during a site inspection would be fed back to the appropriate agency.

13. CW was keen to see information sent to parents as quickly as possible. An increased use of email, where appropriate will be explored with parents who would rather have email than letter through the post.

14. All agreed that working together to help parent carers understand timescales and processes and for CCC to be more responsive to concerns/issues raised could improve the transport service.

15. All agreed that the meeting had been useful and going forward, twice a year would be beneficial. A meeting in the autumn pre-tender but post-September start and one around Easter time was proposed.

Since this summary was written we have another which we received 13th June 2016...

Point 6: Children's Services have been approached regarding our request to pass on parent carers' contact details on to transport operators. We are awaiting a response.

Point 8: The approach re Medically Trained escorts is similarly under discussion.

Point 9: Questionnaires are currently being drafted with input from other CCC Directorates. I will be back in contact to discuss this with you shortly.

Point 10: The Safeguarding leaflet has been slightly updated and order placed for reprint. We will ensure it is uploaded on the Local Offer when it is back from the printers. The School and Provider Guidance Leaflets are in the process of being drafted.

Point 12: A programme of planned checks at educational establishments has now commenced.

Hope this helps and I will keep you updated as we progress.

Kind regards

Caroline

Mrs Caroline Watson
Commissioning Manager - Transport | CP & CM Team

.....
We will inform you of any news about these issues, if you have and concerns about your child's transport, send to – cumbriaparentcarerforum@gmail.com or cumbriacpfccl1@gmail.com