

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by Chief Education Officer

Committee: Educational Services Committee 19 March 2025

Subject: School Transport

1 Purpose

- 1.1 This report details for Members the proposed timetable for the processing of tenders for mainstream home-to-school contracts and for the transportation of pupils with Additional Support Needs (ASN).
- 1.2 This report seeks approval from Members to proceed with the proposed timetable in order to secure contracts for school transport for a 4 year duration for the ASN Framework Agreement and 5 year duration for mainstream contracts with Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) from school session 2025/2026 to session 2030/2031.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 To meet statutory requirements and Council policy, it is necessary to secure contracts for school transport for session 2025/2026. The process requires to follow a set timetable.
- 2.2 It is recommended that:
- i) The Chief Education Officer be given approval to proceed, in consultation with the Corporate Procurement Unit, with the necessary arrangements to secure tenders for the transport of children with Additional Support Needs for session 2025/2026 and beyond for contracts of up to 3 years duration with the option to extend for a further 12 months;
 - ii) The Chief Education Officer be authorised to make the necessary arrangements in liaison with Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) to renew any mainstream contracts for session 2025/2026 to 2030/31; and
 - iii) Following completion of the tendering process, the proposed preferred tenderers will be submitted to the Educational Services Committee for approval to award the Contract, Framework Agreement or Dynamic Purchasing System.

3 Background

- 3.1 The Education (Scotland) Act 1980 requires Education Authorities to make appropriate provision to assist pupils with accessing education. The Act requires that free transport be provided for all pupils up to the age of 8 who

live more than 2 miles from their local school and to pupils over the age of 8 who live more than 3 miles from their local school.

- 3.2 The policy presently operated by West Dunbartonshire Council provides free home-to-school transport for primary school children who live more than 1 mile from their local school and for secondary school children who live more than 2 miles from their local school.
- 3.3 Presently, we also provide transport for young people in the Senior Phase attending courses offered by our partner providers – Colleges in Clydebank and Glasgow.
- 3.4 The Education Authority is also required to make provision for pupils with Additional Support Needs to attend a school to meet their requirements. Presently, our approach is following the outcome of a 'Team Around the Child' meeting, transport may be requested for a child to attend school. Depending on the needs of the child, this could take the form of shared transportation or individual transportation with or without an escort.
- 3.5 Between 2023 – 2024, meeting this provision became increasingly problematic. The rise in the number of children requiring transport; the increase in challenge or needs of individuals; coupled with the reduction in the ability of the market to meet this provision presented significant problems. It became the norm to advertise contracts multiple times as there were no bidders through the existing framework. Where bids were received, costs were high, prompting the department to review options in order to achieve best value. 'Your Community Transport' were approached and were able to take on a small number of routes, but costs were still relatively high for this provision. For a small number of cases it was not possible to secure transport, resulting in parental expenses being offered to families in order to get their child to school, whilst we continued to pursue a suitable solution.
- 3.6 Internal Transport provide transportation for children to Kilpatrick School, Cunard School and Vale of Leven Communication Base. With the rise in costs for individual taxis and the challenge of securing contracts, a more resilient approach would be to have Internal Transport undertake routes to our other bases (Rainbow Base, Leven Base and Lomond Base) and our new ASN provision in Riverside in 2025/26. Where Internal Transport are not able to meet the service need, only then would providers on the framework be approached to bid for contracts. This would allow the taxi resource to be best utilized where the need required it, or for our provision of children travelling outside the local authority for their school placement.
- 3.7 With a reduction in central staffing, we need to address the workload that provision of home to school transport entails. Strathclyde Partnership for Transport operate an ASN Framework that presently only Renfrewshire and North Lanarkshire utilize. Local providers will be encouraged to join this framework, making it possible for SPT to undertake some of this work on our behalf.

- 3.8 Timing of work can be problematic. By its very nature, workload can be subject to peaks and troughs that are not predictable. 'Team Around the Child' meetings take place throughout the session, and the needs of individual children change – on occasion, so too can the school they attend, resulting in change to contracts that are already established. We propose a more manageable approach, determining a timetable of procurement activity, with parental expenses being offered as an interim solution. A timetabled approach would bulk procurement tasks together within a framework meaning adverts would be placed monthly or termly based on quantity, helping the industry plan and adapt to our needs in a more timely manner, but ensure parents were recompensed with expenses in the intervening time it took us to establish a transport provision.
- 3.9 In order to secure contracts for session 2025/2026 and beyond, it is now necessary to begin the process as timetabled below.

4 Main Issues

- 4.1 To address the challenges presented in
- 4.2 In order to address the Council's requirements, the following stages and timescales are recommended:
- a) March 2025 – Present information to Educational Services Committee and seek approval to proceed with the necessary arrangements to secure tenders for Mainstream and Additional Support Needs (ASN) school transport;
 - b) March 2025 – In consultation with the Corporate Procurement Unit and SPT prepare information regarding contracts to be renewed;
 - c) June 2025 – Report to Educational Services Committee seeking appropriate approvals; and
 - d) June 2025 – Contractors and SPT to be informed of the outcome of the tendering process, with families being informed of arrangements for the session 2025/26.
- 4.3 For session 2025/2026, it will be necessary to secure ASN transportation contracts at an estimated cost of £1,119,047 (split between WDC schools, and external day an residential provision) and Senior Phase school transport contracts at an estimated cost of £106,000. This cost can be accommodated within the allocated draft budget. Costs for ASN transport will be split between Internal Transport provision and contracts awarded through a procurement framework.
- 4.4 Members will be aware that in respect of mainstream contracts, SPT acts as agent for West Dunbartonshire Council in securing contracts.

- 4.5 For session 2025/2026, the estimated cost received from SPT based on the current mainstream school contracts is £816,356. This cost can be accommodated within the allocated draft budget.
- 4.6 It should be further noted that the duration of mainstream contracts can vary from 1 year up to 5 years.

5 People Implications

- 5.1 There are no direct people implications arising from this report.

6 Financial & Procurement Implications

- 6.1 Based on the current transport service requirements, the anticipated spend will be contained within draft budget. All spend within the contract, Framework Agreement or Dynamic Purchasing System award will be subject to tender procedures.
- 6.2 All procurement activity carried out by the Council in excess of £50,000 is subject to contract strategy. The contract strategy for Additional Support Needs Contracts was produced by the Corporate Procurement Unit in close consultation with Education Learning and Attainment. The contract strategy included but was not limited to; contract scope, service forward plan, the market, procurement model and routes – including existing delivery vehicles, roles and responsibilities, risks, issues and opportunities and on-going contract management.
- 6.3 The Additional Support Needs Contracts will contribute to delivery of the Council strategic priorities through the development of a robust contract strategy which will explore the inclusion of possible community benefits.
- 6.4 Further opportunities to maximise the positive social, economic and environmental impact for West Dunbartonshire Council through the contract will also be explored, via the use of Community Benefit Clauses included within the tender.

7 Risk Analysis

- 7.1 If timescales for tendering are met, there is no identified risk to the service in relation to this issue.
- 7.2 There is a risk that tenders may exceed current estimates.

8 Equalities Impact Assessment

8.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out. The assessment demonstrates that the school transport arrangements promote equality in terms of access to education for pupils.

9 Consultation

9.1 Procurement, Legal, Democratic and Regulatory Services and Section 95 Officer have been consulted on the content of this paper.

10 Strategic Assessment

10.1 High quality school transport contracts contribute to the Council's strategic priority of our residents being supported to increase life and learning skills, as part of communities that are resilient and thriving.

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Date: 11 February 2025

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Appendices: None

Background Papers: EIA screening

Wards Affected: All

