

Notes of RPCAG Focus Meeting  
10.30a.m. Friday 23 September 2011  
SEN Transport

|            |                         |  |
|------------|-------------------------|--|
| Attendees: | Brian Castle            | Asst Director of Community Services LBRUT    |
|            | Robert Flowers          | Transport Manager – Community Services LBRUT |
|            | James Neal              | RPCAG  |
|            | John Doherty            | RPCAG Secretary                              |
|            | Monica Ramey            | RPCAG  |
|            | Joanne Hood             | RPCAG  |
|            | Laura Lennuyeux-Comnene | RPCAG  |
|            | Robert Hindley          | RPCAG  |
|            | Barry Woodward          | RPCAG / Vice Chair                           |
|            | Kate Thomson            | RPCAG  |
|            | Jill Clarke             | RPCAG  |
|            | Lorraine Clements       | Jigsaw Care Services                         |
|            | Paul Leonard            | RPCAG  |
|            | Joanne Kemp             | RPCAG / Chair                                |
|            | Pat leggett             | RPCAG / Administrator                        |

Brian Castle and Robert Flowers agreed to attend the meeting to talk about the proposed SEN transport changes within LBRUT.

Brian Castle opened the meeting by saying he would explain the proposed changes that are being discussed within the Council. It is a fact that the Council needs to find savings due to cuts in government funding. To save Social Services they have already looked into Administration and Human Resources for savings. Richmond is hoping to become a commissioning Council. This means everything will be done by external contractors and the Council will only pay for the services they need. Because of this, they have been looking at the cost of passenger services for children.

The Council is working with Price, Waterhouse Coopers to find savings. This means procurement has come under close scrutiny. This means a close look at transport provision much of which is already provided externally. Once the Council has decided what their needs are they will go out to tender. When this is done, if the contractors prove to be more expensive the services will stay in-house.

BC wasn't sure how long this process will take but feels they should have reached some kind of conclusion near the end of October. BC felt it was important to speak to the users, which was one of the reasons they agreed to address the meeting. They want to find out what people value so they can be included in the specification.

Once the contracts have been agreed and are in place he agreed it was important to

have clear lines of communication so users can let his office know of any issues. The contact will be through his office, Community Services and Quality Assurance. At this moment in time it was proposed that all escorts would remain in-house staff. There would also be a 'whistle blower' service available. At the moment Robert Flowers office check all licences and CRB's and this function will continue. Both BC and RF asked the parents to continue to advise their office of any concerns that they have.

One parent asked why LBRUT were using PWC as they were obviously expensive and probably, in the case of transport, did not have a lot of knowledge about the requirements of these vulnerable children. BC and RF confirmed that they would be responsible for helping to write the contracts and would also be the people responsible for looking at the bids and the services offered. BC wanted to assure parents that the Leader of the Council cares deeply about vulnerable people.

A parent asked what would happen if the in-house escorts left the service. RF explained that their replacements would be employed and trained by the contractor. This did concern the parents but RF assured everyone that the contractors would have to train staff to the standard set down by LBRUT.

There have already been problems with buses and drivers in the current situation and some problems have taken as long as six months to be resolved. Therefore the parents were concerned that this would get worse when they have to deal with outside contractors. Parents wanted to know what would be put in place by the department to ensure there is some control over the contractors. It was considered that as the department is writing up new contracts it should be looked at a chance to improve the service. How were parents expected to feed back any problems that arose. RF said he believed (though he couldn't promise) that the office function would remain therefore any problems would still go through the department.

The parents who attended felt that if the department discussed the contracts with the parents they would be able to help save the council money. RF said he controls all journeys, Age Concern, respite care, temporary accommodation, children in foster care, etc, not just SEN transport, and a large number of these are already contracted out.

Everyone wanted to point out how important the role of the escort is. They have a very special relationship with the children and parents would not like to see this jeopardised. BC and RF wanted to assure parents that they were very aware of this. These vulnerable children could not always deal with changes at short notice. RF said route planning would still his department's responsibility so they would take this into account. It was confirmed that, contractors already supply some escorts. When asked what the timetable was for these impending contracts. BC said the contracts should be agreed sometime in 2012 and they would be for three years.

RC was asked whether there was any plan or the children to be picked from a certain point rather than from their homes. He said that this was not one of their intentions.

One parent was concerned when a car arrived to pick up her child and there was no escort, the explanation being that the escort was sick. The parent was not sure what was the best way to handle the situation. RF advised the parent not to let the child into the car before she had checked with his department, as the contractor is obliged to call his department to report the situation. The department would then advise the parent as to what should be done.

It was pointed out that there had been an incident when the department had made new arrangements for one of the children without consulting the family. These children like continuity and need time to adjust so contact with the family is essential.

Paul Leonard wanted to say, on the behalf of the department, that although standards still could be improved he felt the service was so much better than it used to be.

Everyone present wanted re-assurance that BC would incorporate their views in their decisions. They did not want a second-class service. Parents would like to be involved in the tendering process. Everyone agreed savings were needed but not if they were detrimental to the service. BC asked those present whether anyone would like to have the budget passed on to them, so they could purchase their own transport. None of the parents wanted this.

BC understood that there should be involvement with the parents. He suggested that he would write a draft specification and send it to RPCAG for the members to comment. BC agreed to the suggestion for a letter for every parent and carer that would include a questionnaire. Another thought was a questionnaire sent through RPCAG and other organisations. There was some concern over the time all this might take. There was a thought that maybe a RPCAG could be invited to participate in their role as an action group. BC agreed parents should definitely be involved in the round table consultation; he just needed to look into the logistics.

When these contracts were in place parents would still contact BF's department with their problems.

At this point the meeting was brought to a close and the guests were thanked for taking the time to talk to RPCAG members.

1 October 2011  
Pat Leggett