

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CHILDREN SCHOOLS & FAMILIES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

WEDNESDAY 23 JUNE 2004 AT 10.00 AM

Agenda Item No

2

CRIMINAL BACKGROUND CHECKS FOR DRIVERS

Report of the Director of Environment

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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To respond to Scrutiny Committee's request for further information on the Enhanced and Standard criminal background checks carried out on County Council taxi contract drivers.

2. Summary

- 2.1 At the previous Scrutiny Committee on 19 March 2004 a report (item 3) confirmed that the 10 District/Borough Councils now undertake Enhanced Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks on taxi drivers before they are granted a licence.
- 2.2 In addition, the Environment Department's Passenger Transport Unit (PTU) carries out Enhanced checks of escorts on school transport on behalf of Children, Schools & Families (currently funded by the Environment Department).
- 2.3 This report explains the difference between Standard and Enhanced checks, and discusses the issue of checks in relation to bus drivers, both generally and on County Council contracts.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 District Councils licence taxi drivers, and now carry out Enhanced checks on the drivers. The Traffic Commissioner is the licensing authority for bus drivers and currently does not undertake CRB checks on bus drivers. Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider promoting Enhanced CRB checks as part of the Traffic Commissioners' process for licensing bus drivers.

- 3.2 Until changes can be considered by the Traffic Commissioner, Scrutiny Committee may wish to explore whether CRB checks for school contract bus drivers could be carried out by the PTU, possibly subsidised by the County Council.

4. Background

- 4.1 The Scrutiny Committee has highlighted the issue of the level of checks on taxi drivers used for transporting vulnerable children to school. The licensing of taxi and private hire drivers is a responsibility of the District/Borough Councils.
- 4.2 Members asked for further information about the difference between Standard and Enhanced checks.
- 4.3 The Standard Disclosure contains details of all convictions held on the Police National Computer including current and 'spent' convictions as well as details of any cautions, reprimands or final warnings. If a position involves working with children, the Disclosure will indicate whether information is held on Government Department lists held by the Department of Health and DfES, of those considered unsuitable to work with children. The Disclosure will also include in the future information held by the Department of Health on those considered unsuitable to work with vulnerable adults.
- 4.4 In addition to the above, the Enhanced Disclosure includes a check on local police records for locally held intelligence information about the applicant. Where local police records contain additional information that might be relevant the Chief Officer of Police may release the information for inclusion in an Enhanced Disclosure.
- 4.5 Standard Disclosures take about two weeks and cost £28 currently and Enhanced Disclosures take about four weeks and cost £33 currently, although charges are under review.
- 4.6 The Passenger Transport Unit (PTU) has worked with the Head of Child Protection for the County Council to ensure that the District and Borough Councils carry out Enhanced level checks on taxi drivers, both those who are applying for a new licence and those renewing a three-year licence.
- 4.7 The PTU carries out checks for escorts on coaches and taxis for mainstream and special needs clients. The checks are funded by the Environment Department, including the administrative process.
- 4.8 When the Enhanced CRB check is completed, and is considered satisfactory, escorts are issued with a badge to identify that they are approved escorts. The PTU does not have resources to monitor the wearing of badges but schools and parents are asked to check that escorts are wearing their badge.

5. Bus Driver Checks

- 5.1 There is also an issue in relation to the checking of bus (PSV) drivers whose licensing is dealt with by the Traffic Commissioner. Checks are not undertaken as part of that process, as applicants self-certify their background.
- 5.2 Members may wish to consider whether a letter should be sent to the Traffic Commissioner, seeking that CRB checks be built into the process of issuing PSV drivers' licences.
- 5.3 Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider whether it would be possible for the PTU to carry out checks on drivers of all HCC school contract buses, PSV coach and minibuses for schools services and ACS. Scrutiny Committee may also wish to consider whether this activity should be subsidised by Hertfordshire County Council in the interim.
- 5.4 To ensure that only 'checked' drivers are used on contracts, drivers would need to be appropriately identified and monitored. PTU currently does not have the spare staff resource to administer the additional checks and monitor badge wearing, either of escorts or bus drivers, and additional resource would be required.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 Enhanced checks for taxi escorts currently cost approximately £13,600 per annum, which is currently met from the Environment Department's budget.
- 6.2 There are approximately 90 "800" route local bus school specials and around 225 other coaches and minibuses using PSV drivers on HCC contracted services. Checks for drivers on such HCC contracts could cost an additional £13,600 per annum, allowing for there being some 400 drivers.
- 6.3 An additional member of staff in PTU to resource the checks and monitor badge wearing is estimated at £20,000 per annum.

7. Access to Services

- 7.1 There are no implications.

8. Conclusion

District Councils licence taxi drivers, and now carry out Enhanced checks on the drivers. The Traffic Commissioner is the licensing authority for bus drivers and currently does not undertake CRB checks on bus drivers. Scrutiny Committee may wish to consider promoting

Enhanced CRB checks as part of the Traffic Commissioners' process for licensing bus drivers.

Until changes can be considered by the Traffic Commissioner, Scrutiny Committee may wish to explore whether CRB checks for bus drivers could be carried out by the PTU possibly subsidised by the County Council.