

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

TUESDAY 21 OCTOBER 2003 AT 10.00 AM

Agenda Item No

4

OPERATION COACHMAN

Report of the Director of Environment

Author: Rob Smith, Integrated Transport Services Manager
(Tel: 01992 556118)

1. Purpose of Report

To consider, at the request of CSF Scrutiny Committee, the output from Operation Coachman along with other issues associated with taxi licensing.

2. Summary of Report

Operation Coachman is a national programme, initiated by the Vehicle Inspectorate and Police, to check the roadworthiness of vehicles (coaches and minibuses) involved in the delivery of home to school transport services.

The report considers the results from the current programme of Operation Coachman inspections. It also examines a number of issues raised at CSF Scrutiny Committee associated with taxi licensing.

3. Conclusions

The results from the Operation Coachman exercise have shown a high standard of vehicles in operation in Hertfordshire. Members are asked to consider if they wish to undertake further scrutiny of this issue.

4. Background

- 4.1 Operation Coachman is an annual, national exercise undertaken jointly by the Vehicle Inspectorate and the Police. In Hertfordshire, there is a close working relationship with these bodies and the County Council's Passenger Transport Unit's Enforcement Officers. As a result of this relationship a large annual programme of checks has been developed on all types of home to school transport vehicles including taxis. The Coachman figures are abstracted from the data for the annual programme. The purpose of these inspections is to check the compliance of Home to School Transport vehicles' with relevant regulations relating to road safety and the environment.
- 4.2 At the request of CSF Scrutiny Committee, a report was presented to its meeting on 16 October 2002 with the results from the 2002 exercise (see Appendix 1). From this it can be seen that the results for Hertfordshire compared well with national and regional figures (summarised below).

Operation Coachman 2002

	No of Vehicles Tested	% receiving immediate prohibition notices	% receiving delayed prohibition notices
National	1,582	5%	9.5%
Herts & Essex	60	3%	5%
Herts	23	0%	0%

- 4.3 At the CSF Scrutiny Committee meeting members welcomed this information.
- 4.4 Following consideration of the results, the discussion widened into the issue of Hackney Carriage licensing and the possibility that unlicensed drivers were being used on County Council contracts.
- 4.5 Councillor Richard Smith raised a number of questions (see Appendix 2). It was suggested that a joint CSF/ACS/Environment topic group be established to consider the matter further. The specific questions were responded to in a letter to CCllr Smith and subsequently copied to members of the CSF Scrutiny Committee (see Appendix 3).

- 4.6 At its meeting in January 2003, CSF Scrutiny Committee agreed to review the need for a topic group in light of information awaited from the Hackney Carriage Licensing Authorities, the District Councils.
- 4.7 Further updates were provided to CSF Scrutiny Committee at its meetings in March 2003 at which it requested that Environment Scrutiny Committee consider adding an item on Operation Coachman to their work programme.

5. Operation Coachman 2003

- 5.1 Operation Coachman took place this year between 24 March and 4 April. The Vehicle Inspectorate has only been able to provide national statistics. Hertfordshire Police has provided statistics for the county. The statistics for this year's operation are given in the following table:-

Operation Coachman 2003

	No of Vehicles Tested	% receiving immediate prohibition notices	% receiving delayed prohibition notices
National	1,101	7%	8%
Herts	6	0%	0%

- 5.2 These results, whilst as good as last year's for Hertfordshire (i.e. no serious defects found), are taken from a smaller sample than last year. It is understood that the decision for a smaller sample was as a result of our comprehensive joint annual programme of testing and Hertfordshire's good results in previous years.
- 5.3 In the period from January 2002 to date the joint rolling programme of checks carried out by the Vehicle Inspectorate, the Police and PTU have checked 374 vehicles (138 coaches, 171 taxis and 65 minibuses). No prohibition or delayed prohibitions were issued with only minor issues arising. Further tests are planned up to the end of December 2003.

6. Hackney Carriage / Taxi Licensing

- 6.1 The County Council has many contracts with taxi operators throughout Hertfordshire. Any taxi operator contracted by Environment is first checked to ensure that it has appropriate licenses issued by the licensing authority, the relevant District Council.

6.2 Meetings have taken place between the District Licensing Officers and officers from the county's Passenger Transport Unit and Child Protection Unit to satisfy ourselves that appropriate standards and procedures are being applied by Districts in the issuing of licenses.

6.3 Lists of taxi contracts, suppliers and schools served have been provided to all Districts for their information.

7. Financial Implications

The cost of the staff involved in carrying out vehicle inspections is included within the Environment Department's revenue budget.

8. Rural Implications

Whilst the Operation Coachman process, or the wider checking of taxis, has no direct rural implications, greater use is made of taxis for home to school transport in rural areas due to the generally lower level of bus service in such areas.

Background papers used in preparing this report

CSF Scrutiny Items - October 2002, January 2003 and March 2003.

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**CHILDREN, SCHOOLS & FAMILIIES SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

WEDNESDAY 16 OCTOBER 2002 AT 10.30 AM

Agenda Item
No.

4

OPERATION COACHMAN 2002

Report of the Director of Children Schools & Families

Author: Nick Powley, Education Access Manager
Tel: 01992 555933

Executive Member: Robert Gordon

1. Purpose of Report

To consider the details of Operation Coachman 2002.

Cliff Broadhurst asked a question at the last Scrutiny Committee meeting (19 June 2002) about Operation Coachman. After receiving an answer from the Executive Member, Mr Broadhurst asked for a more detailed report to be brought to this meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

2. Summary of Report

The report provides details of the Operation Coachman exercise, undertaken nationally every year, and includes information about the inspection within Hertfordshire.

3. Conclusion

Operation Coachman yielded good results in Hertfordshire. The Committee will wish to consider whether further scrutiny of this issue is required.

4. Background

Operation Coachman is a national exercise, undertaken annually by the Vehicle Inspectorate and the Police. This year it took place between 15 April and 26 April 2002. The operation is designed to check the compliance of Home to School Transport vehicles with the various regulations to help ensure road safety and environmental protection.

Nationally, 1,582 buses, coaches, minibuses and private hire vehicles were checked by Vehicle Examiners. Of these, 80 (5%) received immediate prohibition notices and were not allowed to proceed with their journey until the defects had been rectified. There were also 150 (9.5%) delayed prohibition notices issued. This means that defects have to be rectified within 10 days.

The Vehicle Inspectorate does not normally make individual details of checks public. However, some analysis is provided by area. The relevant area for Hertfordshire is Hertfordshire and Essex. 60 vehicles were checked in this area and 2 (3%) were given immediate prohibitions and 3 (5%) were given delayed prohibition.

Following detailed enquiries, the following figures have now been made available for Hertfordshire.

In all, 23 vehicles were checked at two locations, namely Chorleywood School (10 vehicles) and St Clement Danes School (13 vehicles). In general these checks went well with no vehicles receiving either immediate or delayed prohibition notices.

This good set of results is explained by a considerable input by the PTU's Enforcement Officers who make regular visits to each school (at least once per term to monitor overall quality and general compliance). This is supplemented with an agreed rolling programme of visits to all schools jointly with PTU Enforcement Officers and Vehicle Inspectors. Also, if problems are brought to the attention of the PTU, there are arrangements for special inspections to be carried out with The Vehicle Inspectorate.

5. Financial Implications

There are no direct financial implications within this report.

6. Conclusion

Our overall aim is to continue to ensure that children are transported safely to and from their school. The Passenger Transport Unit has good monitoring processes in place and Operation Coachman complements these.

An Officer from the Passenger Transport Unit will be attending the Scrutiny Committee meeting to answer any questions. The Committee will wish to consider whether further scrutiny of this issue is required.

Background information referred to by the author:

Minutes of the Children, Schools and Families Committee Meeting: 19th June 2002.

Appendix 2

Questions Raised at CSF Scrutiny Committee – October 2002

Did Coachman only target PSVs (hence the attendance of Vehicle Inspectorate) or were Hackney Carriage and PHVs also checked?

Are frequent liaison meetings arranged between Local Authority Hackney Carriage Officers and County Transport Officers? When was the last one?

Are current lists of school runs available to Hackney Carriage Officers?

Since the Metropolitan Police area was devolved to Hertfordshire, thus making licensing of Private Hire Operators and Vehicles a legal requirement, are ALL vehicles and operators allocated school contracts now properly licensed? (If not who are they and where are they based? – probably Potters Bar and Borehamwood).

Are PSV Operators permitted to use small buses (less than 8 passenger seats) or private cars on their school contracts (THIS IS ILLEGAL). Are small bus (minibuses with 9-16 seats) drivers CRB checked (they do not require PSV licenses).

Have there been any problems with the CRB checks for escorts. Are all escorts checked? Is this the responsibility of the contract Operator or County?

Should offences against Taxi or Private Hire legislation be discovered by County Enforcement Officers do they prosecute or are Local Authority Officers informed to do so on County's behalf?

How many prosecutions are made annually by County? How many contracts are removed annually?

How could local licensing officers assist County to improve standards of operators, vehicles and drivers?

Appendix 3

Cllr Mr R Smith
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County Hall
Pegs Lane
Hertford SG13 8DN
Fax: 01992 588649
Tel: 01992 556118
rob.smith@hertscc.gov.uk
My ref: RAS/KPR
Your ref:
Date: 13 January 2003

Dear Mr Smith

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FOLLOW UP

As you will recollect, at the CSF Scrutiny Committee on 22 January it was resolved that officers would respond to the questions you raised which related to various issues about the County Council's contracts, and also to clarify the role of the Passenger Transport Unit's (PTU) enforcement officers.

At that meeting, it was clarified that Operation Coachman was a national exercise involving Police and the Vehicle Inspectorate (VI) and figures for this county were eventually obtained and reported to the CSF Scrutiny Committee. It was also pointed out at the Scrutiny Committee that Hertfordshire had, in addition, its own partnership arrangement with Herts Police and the VI to look at buses and coaches at schools on a programmed basis that was particularly effective.

You sought information on progress on this on an e:mail to me in December. My apologies for the delay in reply, I was awaiting the outcome of a meeting that has now happened.

The meeting was held at Luton on Friday attended by Hackney Carriage representatives from Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire, the Vehicle Inspectorate and Adrian Hardy from the Passenger Transport Unit. Among the items agreed was a suggestion that a similar partnership to the one that exists for the checking of buses and coaches be entered into with all parties present, and that a programme of visits be arranged within Hertfordshire. This would then allow more comprehensive checking of smaller vehicles. This would include special schools in the Welwyn Hatfield area. PTU had suggested the establishment of such an approach prior to the Scrutiny Committee.

Turning to the detailed issues you raised, the Coachman exercise at national level was mainly to do with buses and coaches, although clearly, from the statistics, a few smaller vehicles and taxis were checked.

When invited, PTU officers do attend meetings arranged by the Hackney Carriage Officers. However frequent contact (several times a year) is made with each licensing officer on specific.

A list of all contracts is currently being prepared and will be sent to all licensing officers for information.

With the change in Metropolitan Police boundaries, the County Council utilises licensed operators in Hertsmere and Broxbourne Borough Councils. There are a few contracts where PSV operators take advantage of the provisions in the Transport Act 2000 whereby vehicles with less than nine seats can be used by a PSV driver with a disc displayed in the window. The VI yesterday clarified that this could amount to up to 10% of a PSV fleet, although this is a very technical area. Whilst these contracts are provided within the law and satisfactorily, they do not use vehicles licensed through District licensing officers.

PSV drivers are not routinely CRB checked. The County Council initiates checks on escorts. There were delays at the start of the academic year. New or unchecked escorts are checked as soon as possible and there is now the list 99 system to help within 24 hours.

When the PTU planning or enforcement staff become aware of problems, they inform the relevant district council licensing officers. The County Council does not prosecute operators but does remove contracts, perhaps two or three per year for reasons of non compliance.

Finally, we are keen to promote the partnership described above and to co-operate with District Officers to improve standards of vehicles, drivers and operators.

I trust this information is helpful, but suggest that, in my absence next week, you may wish to contact Tony Edwards in the PTU (01992 558653 or ext: 28653) and arrange a meeting with him and Adrian Hardy to discuss this and any other matters of concern.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Rob Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Rob Smith
Integrated Transport Services Manager

Copy to: Tony Edwards, Passenger Transport Unit, Environment
Adrian Hardy, Passenger Transport Unit, Environment
Ray Shostak, Director of Children, Schools and Families
Nick Powley, Children, Schools and Families
Cliff Broadhurst

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