

**RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL  
MUNICIPAL YEAR 2013 - 2014**

**ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES  
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**7<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2013**

**REPORT OF THE GROUP  
DIRECTOR, ENVIRONMENTAL  
SERVICES.**

**Agenda Item No. 5**

**REVIEW OF SCHOOL TRANSPORT  
ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE ACADEMIC  
YEAR COMMENCING SEPTEMBER 2013.**

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and Strategic Projects**

**1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

- 1.1 This report seeks to update and inform Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee on the provision of school transport for the start of the new academic year.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 It is recommended that Environmental Services Scrutiny Committee;

Note the content of the report and acknowledge progress made in respect of school transport arrangements for September 2013.

**3. BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 This report addresses the request for a further report to be submitted to update and inform Committee on the start of the 2013 academic year. It follows a series of annual reports that have highlighted positive year on year improvements following the problems encountered in 2008.
- 3.2 This report seeks to benchmark the 2013 return to school against the continuous improvements made year on year since 2009.
- 3.3 School Transport is managed by the Council's Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) which sits within the Highways, Transportation and Strategic Projects service, based at Sardis House, Pontypridd.

**4 PLANNING FOR THE NEW TERM**

- 4.1 The tried and tested "September Project Plan" was again used as the template for planning transport for the return to school for September

2013, incorporating new processes, together with lessons learned from previous years.

## **4.2 Pupil Data**

4.2.1 Members will recall that a Management Information System (MIS) linking ELL and the ITU to pupil data held by the schools within the Schools Information Management System (SIMS), was first implemented in 2011.

4.2.2 The MIS delivers seamless, timely and robust pupil data, including the automation of several labour intensive processes, and eliminating significant areas for potential data loss and corruption.

4.2.3 The system has since been further developed and in 2012 it was used to manage SEN admissions and pupil data.

4.2.4 The system allows the ITU visibility of pupil data as entered and managed by the schools. This means that the ITU not only has the most robust data available on pupil rolls, but is also alerted to and able to react to changes in pupil rolls as they are happening. This has enabled the ITU to monitor potential school leavers in years 11 and 12.

4.2.5 The data on leavers evolves substantially during the first half term of the academic year, but access to the data allows the ITU to re-profile transport allocations to meet shifting demand and to allow the early sale of more “spare seats.”

4.2.6 This supports the strategy of moving customer contact off the peak demand during the first few weeks in September and allowing a significant number of customer transactions to be concluded in advance. This benefits both the customer and the Council.

## **4.3 Communication**

4.3.1 Meetings with the secondary schools have continued to be held with the focus very much being on September planning and the issuing of a transport ‘Travel Pack’ to the new Year 7 pupils. ‘Travel Packs’ continue to contribute positively to the communication of transport arrangements for the new year 7 pupils.

4.3.2 The packs are handed to pupils during their transition visit to their new secondary school in June / July and contain key items and pieces of information such as; their bus pass, a letter for their parent explaining transport arrangements and providing contact details, ‘No Pass No Travel’ poster, and a booklet on safe travel on school transport.

- 4.3.3 A further development to the pack for the 2013 academic year was the inclusion of a seatbelt leaflet to prepare pupils for the new seatbelt legislation which is coming into force from October 2014.
- 4.3.4 Incoming year 7 pupils continue to receive a reminder letter advising them of transport arrangements in August; primary pupils continue to receive reminder letters if they have changed schools or if their transport arrangements have changed.
- 4.3.5 Meetings with primary schools were also held for the first time, the focus of these meetings was to share information and to promote health and safety in the use of seatbelts and ensuring that pupils travel on the correct vehicles.
- 4.3.6 The number of individual letters posted to mainstream pupils in preparation for September 2013 was 995, compared with 1039 for 2012. This is a reduction of 4%
- 4.3.7 For SEN transport, the established practice of drivers and escorts visiting families to introduce themselves ahead of the start of term was again adhered to, wherever new or changed transport arrangements were being implemented. This practice is reassuring for parents and pupils and allows familiarisation and confirmation of arrangements for transport for the first day of the new school year.
- 4.3.8 Prior to the commencement of the 2013/14 academic year;
- growth in demand for transport at some schools and decline in the number of eligible pupils in other schools meant that a major routing and scheduling exercise was required to match capacity with demand. The route changes involved reallocating transport for 445 mainstream pupils. Initial communication was via e-mail to impacted schools, advising them of changes, details of those affected and the routing information. Letters were sent to each parent advising them of the reason for the reallocation and providing them details of travel arrangements for the 2013 academic year. The reallocation was successful, all pupils travelled on their new bus in September which removed the risk of overcrowding.
  - a change in the SEN pupil statementing process meant that 34 late applications for SEN transport were received at the start of the summer holidays. This unexpected late additional demand was accommodated by amending existing contracts and tendering for new contracts via the SEN Framework contract and the e-auction process. Even though this was unexpected and outside of the normal September planning process, all late requests were dealt with and all drivers and escorts visited the new pupils prior to them commencing school. The revised arrangements operated without incident.

- There were a series of contractual and taxi licensing issues at the start of term due to a number transport operator failures. As a result, three transport operators ceased trading or had their contracts terminated. Problems were mitigated by company takeovers, pupil transfers or by the setting up of emergency contracts. This affected 24 contracts, transporting 346 pupils. All new information was highlighted on the Council's web site as well as being communicated via Twitter.

## **5 START OF THE ACADEMIC YEAR**

5.1 The start of the school year was once again phased over several days between the 2nd and 5<sup>th</sup> of September. This allowed a smooth transition into the term with the busiest days being Tuesday 3rd and Wednesday 4<sup>th</sup> of September.

5.1.2 A risk was highlighted regarding capacity on one route with the potential for overcrowding. In order to mitigate the risk, a mini bus was mobilised to deal with potential issues. In practice, there was excess demand and the minibus was utilised to transport the surplus pupils whilst they were reallocated to alternative transport.

5.1.3 Robust enforcement of the "No Pass No Travel" approach has meant that there has been increased activity by pupils/parents to ensure compliance ahead of and during the start of the new school year.

5.1.4 In terms of context, the relative success of the school transport arrangements for this year are probably best considered by comparing and contrasting levels of customer contact with the last two years. The Council's Corporate Customer Relationship Management (herein referred to as CRM) system holds details of customer contact.

### **5.2 Customer Relationship Management**

5.2.1 The communication strategy was designed to reduce the need for public contact by providing sufficient information via available channels to enable the public to understand transport arrangements and policies without having to telephone the Council.

5.2.2 The Graphs at Appendix A highlights the number and type of CRM's generated.

5.2.3 From these graphs some direct comparisons can be made between relative performance and effectiveness of arrangements between this year and the previous years of 2011 and 2012.

5.2.4 It is notable that levels of contact year on year now follow remarkably similar patterns and despite major rescheduling, late SEN changes and operator disruptions, customer contact is similar to previous years. This

demonstrates that the service is stable and performing to a consistent high standard.

5.2.5 Investigation reveals that within the CRM categories most areas are consistent with recent years;

- Lost/Stolen Bus Passes – 91 (2012) v 89 (2013) (2% decrease)
- Seat Purchase – 108 (2012) v 109 (2013) (1% increase)
- General enquires – 61 (2012) v 75 (2013) (23% increase)
- Change of Circumstances – 15 (2012) v 30 (2013) (100% increase)

Change of circumstances would cover issues such as pupils moving house and requiring changes to transport, general enquiries would include college transport which has experienced increased demand.

## **6. COLLEGE TRANSPORT**

6.1 Since the opening of the new Coleg y Cymoedd campus at Nantgarw, there has been a notable increase in the number of students attending college rather than staying at their school to continue their studies into years 12 and 13.

## **7. NEW INITIATIVES INTRODUCED**

7.1 Members are asked to note the following new initiatives that have been successfully implemented or continued:

- Commissioning of Cynon Valley 6<sup>th</sup> Form consortium transport delivering £40,000 annual saving on the previously school managed service (second year of operation).
- Commissioning of Rhondda 6<sup>th</sup> Form consortium transport delivering £11,480 annual saving on the previously school managed service. (second year of operation).
- Commissioning of 6<sup>th</sup> Form consortium transport for Ysgol Llanhari, Ysgol Gyfun Cymer and Ysgol Gyfun Llangynwyd £33,800 annual costs (new operation implemented September 2013).
- Commissioning of primary school swimming transport delivering an average saving per head of £7.12 (second year of operation).

## **8. FUTURE CHALLENGES**

8.1 New seatbelt legislation will come into force from October 2014. This new legislation will require all pupils to wear a seatbelt at all times whilst traveling on school transport. Enforcement of this new legislation in ensuring that pupils comply with this new legislation is envisaged to be problematic, pro-active work is being done with the school and operators to pre-empt some of the anticipated issues.

- 8.2 The Council is engaged with the Regional Transport Consortium Sewta and promoting and coordinating all aspects of transportation, including collaboration. Within the regional context, sub-regional collaboration is being explored with neighboring authorities including Merthyr, Bridgend, and Vale of Glamorgan Council's to deliver more efficient passenger transport.

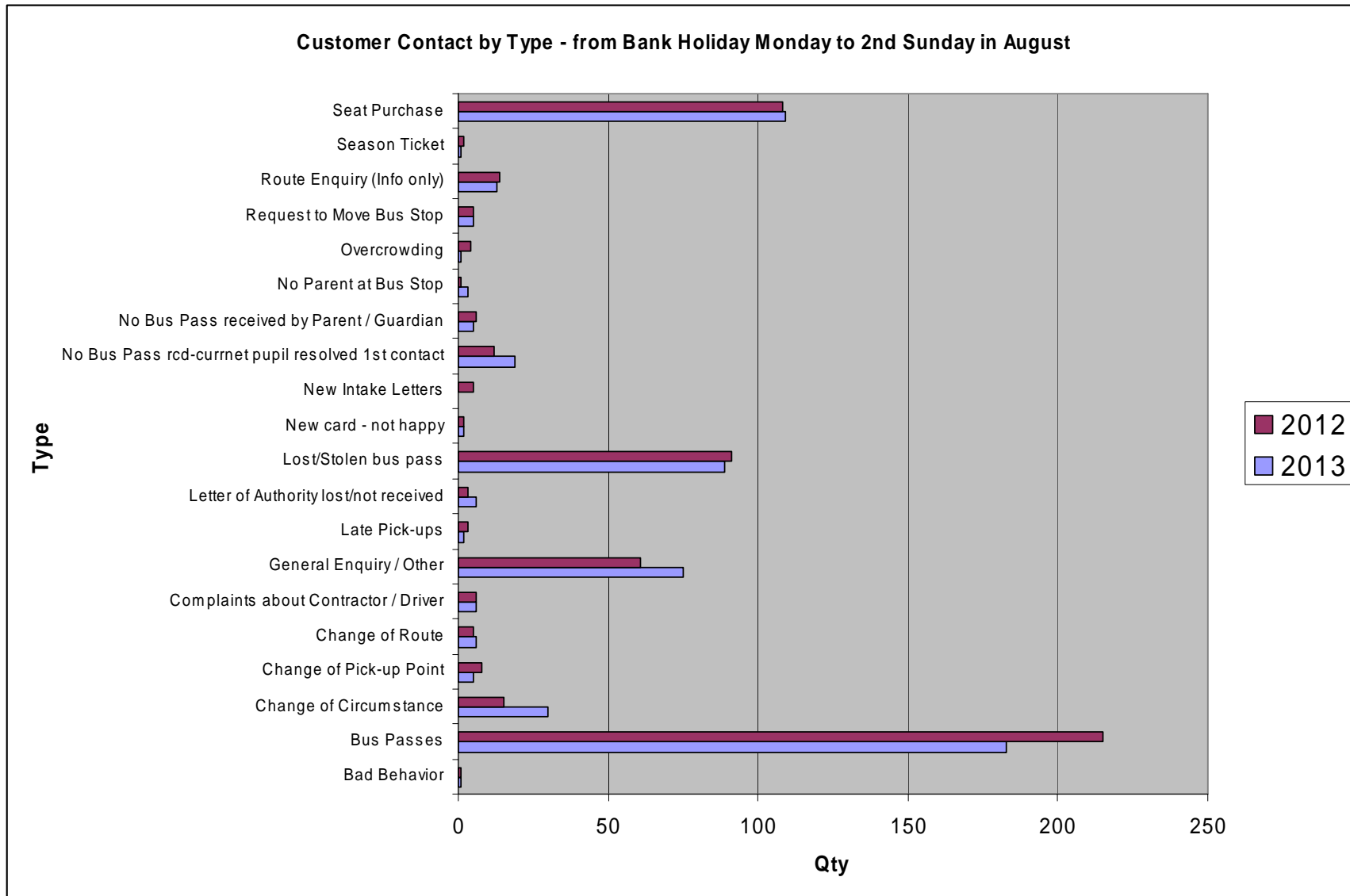
## **9 CONCLUSION**

- 9.1 The ITU has delivered an effective transport service for the start of the 2013 academic year which continues to build on the solid foundations of previous years. Given the scale of disruption ahead of and in the lead-in and start to the new term, it is clear that 2013 sets a new benchmark for future service delivery.
- 9.2 In general the level of advance planning and the communication strategy has yet again allowed a very smooth transition into the start of the new academic year and this is illustrated by the limited operational issues experienced.
- 9.3 From an operational perspective there have been very few issues to deal with other than the higher volume of day-to day activities. The ITU returned to "business as usual" status during the later part of the first week of the new term.
- 9.4 The ITU makes efficient use of the customer services facilities offered via the one4all, call centre and web teams to reduce the need for direct specialist contact and has been able to effectively deliver this service by utilising resources wholly within the ITU.
- 9.5 The ITU will continue to learn lessons and evolve processes;
- A lessons learned session will be held with staff. These have been held in previous years and have assisted in informing further changes to processes, communications and project planning
  - A frequently asked question web page is to be created for providing advice on the sale of spare seats service
  - A meeting is to be held with the call centre to further refine the scripting to allow for more customer calls to be satisfactorily dealt with at the first point of contact
  - A lessons learned meeting is to be held with ELL colleagues, in particular to review the SEN issues encountered this year to ensure all transport requests are received well in advance of the end of this academic year

## **10. RECOMMENDATION**

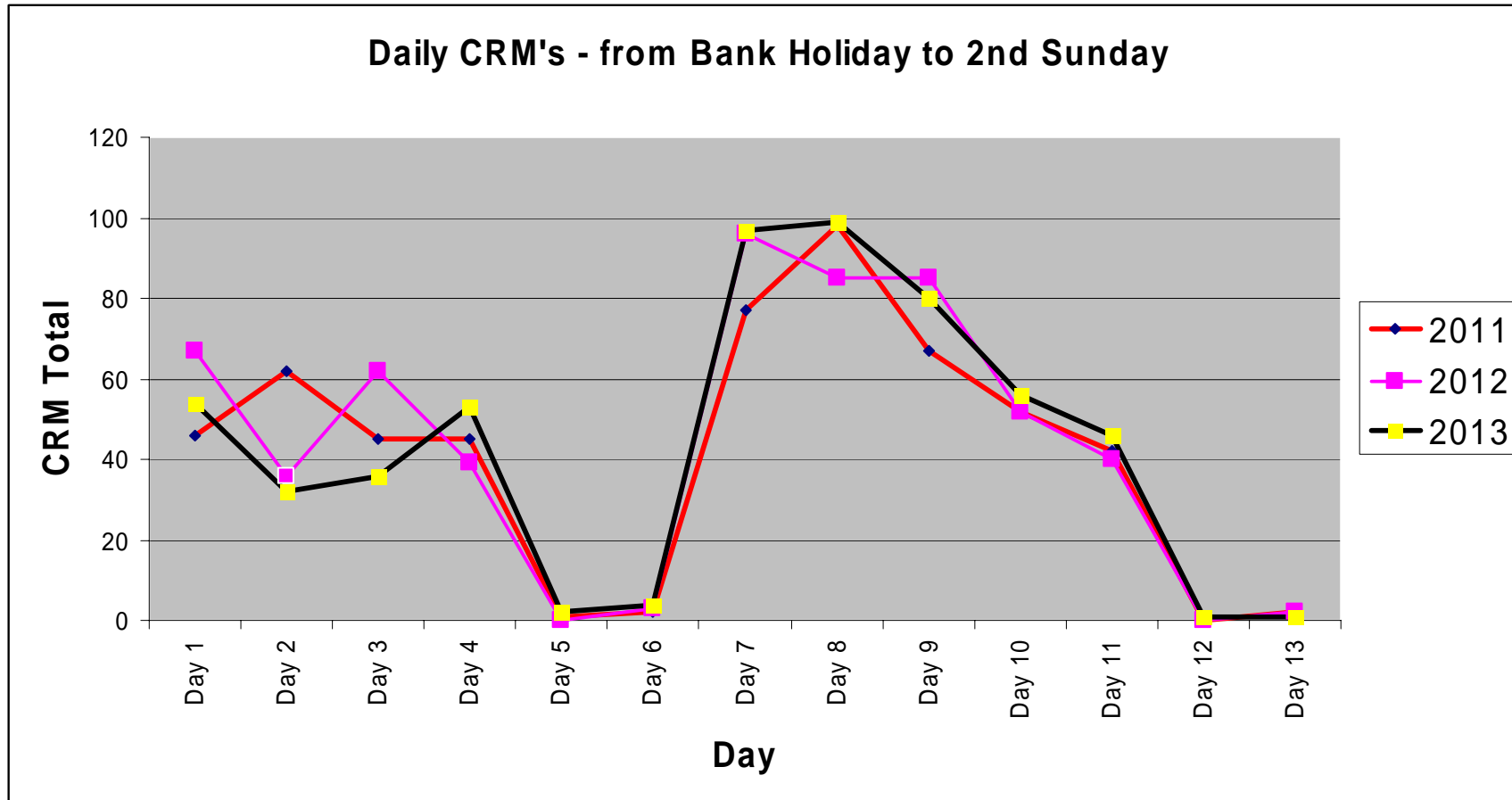
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