Improving Transport for Social Services Users
The Audit Commission promotes the best use of public money by ensuring the proper stewardship of public finances and by helping those responsible for public services to achieve economy, efficiency and effectiveness.

The Commission was established in 1983 to appoint and regulate the external auditors of local authorities in England and Wales. In 1990 its role was extended to include the NHS. In April 2000, the Commission was given additional responsibility for carrying out best value inspections of certain local government services and functions. Today its remit covers more than 13,000 bodies which between them spend nearly £100 billion of public money annually. The Commission operates independently and derives most of its income from the fees charged to audited bodies.

Auditors are appointed from District Audit and private accountancy firms to monitor public expenditure. Auditors were first appointed in the 1840s to inspect the accounts of authorities administering the Poor Law. Audits ensured that safeguards were in place against fraud and corruption and that local rates were being used for the purposes intended. These founding principles remain as relevant today as they were 150 years ago.

Public funds need to be used wisely as well as in accordance with the law, so today's auditors have to assess expenditure not just for probity and regularity, but also for value for money. The Commission's value-for-money studies examine public services objectively, often from the users' perspective. Its findings and recommendations are communicated through a wide range of publications and events.

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Preface

The Audit Commission has been examining transport arrangements made by local authorities and health bodies in England and Wales to allow people to access social services, education and health services. The work has focused on social services transport, home-to-school travel and non-emergency patient transport in the National Health Service.

A national report, *Going Places: Taking People to and from Education, Social Services and Healthcare,* which the Commission recently published, summarises the Commission’s overall findings and contains recommendations for action by central government and by senior managers in local government and the health service.

This handbook, *Improving Transport for Social Services Users,* contains detailed examples of good practice together with self-assessment checklists. It can be used by local authority officers who deal with policy on, and assessment for, social services transport; those who are arranging, managing and providing that transport; and those carrying out best value reviews of the service. It is based on findings from field visits to ten local authorities; focus groups with service users and their carers; findings from best value inspections carried out by the Audit Commission’s best value inspection service; reviews of local authority social services departments carried out jointly by the Social Services Inspectorate (SSI) and the Audit Commission; and individual SSI reports.

Further details of the research are given in the national report *Going Places.* Alongside this handbook, the Commission is issuing similar material on each of the other three areas examined in its study, mainstream home-to-school transport; home-to-school transport for children with special educational needs; and non-emergency patient transport.

The Commission is grateful to all who have helped, but, as always, responsibility for the contents of this handbook lies with the Commission alone.

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II Unless another source is given, quotes from service users and other stakeholders in this handbook are from Audit Commission focus groups or other interviews by the Commission.
Introduction

Local authorities have a duty under Section 2 of the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 to provide social services transport to day services. There is little comprehensive national data on expenditure. For example, the Department of Health amalgamates transport costs with catering and other expenditure when collecting data on expenditure on personal social services; and, in 1999/2000, a majority of English social services authorities did not identify these amalgamated costs on their returns to the Department. The financial arrangements within many authorities, especially where responsibilities are devolved to individual day centres, add to the difficulty of identifying expenditure. There is a similar paucity of data about the numbers carried. Among authorities visited by the Commission, expenditure in 1999/2000 varied from about £450,000 a year to about £2.8 million. Nationally, this, plus the data that is returned to the Department, suggests that social services transport is very likely to cost over £150 million a year and may cost over £200 million.

The users include some of the most vulnerable and deprived people in society. Social services transport helps to bring isolated and lonely people together for social and other activities. This can help to prevent poor morale and depression which can lead to a deterioration in health, which in turn may place extra demands on social services and the NHS.

This handbook draws together the good practice lessons from the Commission’s research under four themes:

- **Accessing and using social services transport.** This section describes how people receive social services transport and what it is like to use the service, reflecting the user focus that is now central to the provision of public services and to best value.

- **Balancing costs and service quality.** Financial pressures mean that many authorities are seeking to reduce, or to control increases in, their expenditure on social services transport. Affordability influences policy choice. This section discusses the options and the trade-offs that may exist between cost-saving and better service quality; it also covers options for linking the provision of transport arrangements for social services users with other transport such as home-to-school for children with special educational needs.

- **Managing the transport service.** This section discusses the roles of the policymakers and budgetholders. Getting the process right will help to prevent the budget control problems that have been common for social services transport provision. Though some of these reflect weaknesses in monitoring, others stem from poor budget setting processes. It also covers the role of the transport organiser – letting and managing contracts, or overseeing a service level agreement with an internal trading organisation (ITO) – and the role of the service provider, whether contractor or ITO. It shares some material with the equivalent sections in the Commission’s handbooks on mainstream home-to-school transport and home-to-school transport for children with special educational needs.

- **Achieving best value.** The material in the earlier sections will help authorities to assess how the service is currently performing. This section discusses other issues to consider when carrying out best value reviews and preparing implementation plans. It also shares some material with the equivalent sections in the Commission’s handbooks on mainstream home-to-school transport and home-to-school transport for children with special educational needs.
This treatment seeks to address the key issues of concern to stakeholders [BOX A].

Each of the sections ends with a comprehensive checklist which enables an authority to compare its own service provision with good practice from the Commission’s research. In some cases this may be seen as ‘ideal’ practice, which not all authorities currently achieve, but the checklists will help authorities to identify local priorities for action.
BOX A

What do stakeholders think about the service?

Service users

‘We have a good driver and friends on the bus. There’s a nice escort and she talks to me every morning.’

‘The escorts are very helpful – they see you right into the house.’

‘You need to get people here in time for classes. Sometimes you may not be in until 11.30 – and you’re going home at 3.00, so it’s pointless coming.’

‘One week they’re early, one week late – with the council you didn’t know what time to be ready.’

‘The main problems are timekeeping but it varies with different types of transport.’

‘I used to have a taxi social services paid for, then it didn’t turn up for me one day so my keyworker took me home. This happened twice. My sister took me in and I was getting dressed upstairs and my mum said the transport is here and we didn’t know it was coming – there was no communication or anything.’

‘[Some] drivers have mobiles – your best bet [if there’s a problem] is to contact the driver – if you have to go through the office and social services transport, who pass it on to [the operator] – messages don’t get through. If you don’t want to come in one day you might need to do that, or the vehicle may still turn up.’

‘You have one or two people in the bus – they know you have learning disabilities [and] they talk down to you – I turn around and look at them.’

‘When it was snowing, [the] coach was late. I had to walk to [the centre] – it took two hours but I knew where I was, I followed all the signs.’

‘I had to share with someone and this guy had a minor epileptic fit and the taxi driver panicked – he didn’t know what to do. We had to get help in the end. If I hadn’t been there...the driver nearly lost it.’

Focus group with day centre users

Carers

A focus group with people with severe learning difficulties and their carers raised a number of concerns:

• no radio contact on social service ‘white buses’, unlike on community transport ‘green buses’;
• daytime outings restricted by the availability of transport;
• an absence of medical information on board vehicles;
• taxis and buses sometimes late;
• a lack of driver and escort training – escorts may not know users;
• a need for more flexibility – for instance, if users need to come in to centres at different times;
• a lack of emergency backup and shortage of telephones, meaning that drivers and passenger assistants are unable to contact day centres in the event of an emergency – similarly, centres are unable to contact the social services vehicle;
• a general lack of communication between social services, day centres and transport;
• taxis that sometimes don’t know the correct address of the user, a particular problem when different drivers are used, also demonstrating a lack of information and proper liaison from the centre; and
• no plan for the user if the bus driver is absent.

Focus group with day centre users and their carers
Drivers views' included:

- a widespread perception that they played a care role in addition to driving the vehicles – many valued the assistance of escorts to meet the needs of users; those working as ‘driver attendants’ felt that they benefited from some social worker and healthcare assistant skills;
- a belief that they would benefit from more training, particularly in first aid, in order to be able to respond correctly when service users were taken ill; some drivers at one authority felt that attending a refresher course every three years was a long time to wait and believed annual refresher training would be better; and
- a comment that one driver on a social services vehicle compared unfavourably with the two staff on non-emergency PTS vehicles.

Interviews with drivers

Operators

One authority consulted 16 private hire contractors for its best value review and found that:

‘Two-thirds were either happy or satisfied with their contract conditions but fewer were satisfied with contract monitoring or communication with the authority. Half the contractors felt quite strongly that the playing field was not level. Some were vociferous about their feelings that large companies were faring better than smaller companies under the current system…’

‘The most frequently cited suggestions [for change] related to better co-ordination between education and social services – 69 per cent of those consulted requested that opening times of establishments be staggered to allow contractors to undertake work for both departments… Other suggestions included reviewing runs more often than annually, first aid training for drivers and improving the image of the vehicles … All companies questioned were willing to undertake MiDAS training if it was a contract condition… many also wanted more regular meetings – none did not wish for regular meetings.’

‘Most contractors felt that longer contracts were better suited to the facilitation of a quality service as they would be better able to plan purchases of new vehicles to fulfil contract conditions. This would be more financially viable if contractors could guarantee income for a longer period.’

One city council's best value review

Source: Audit Commission
1. Accessing and using social services transport

‘They gave me support when I first lost my sight and I have a remarkably good impression of them [social services transport staff].’

Visually impaired elderly man

1. The experience of users must be central to any review or attempt to improve transport services. This section looks at service users’ and other stakeholders’ experiences of accessing and using social services transport. It covers:

- **Assessment for social services transport.** Access to the service is the starting point. Arrangements fail users at the first hurdle if people do not receive transport when they should.

- **Safety.** While not always considered by service users, safety is fundamental to delivery of transport services. This section addresses the safety of vehicles and equipment; the use of passenger assistants or escorts; and driver and passenger assistant vetting and training. It also covers the information that drivers and passenger assistants need to ensure that they can adequately fulfil their responsibilities.

- **Quality and standards.** Quality issues and standards – including the comfort of the journey and its reliability and punctuality – make all the difference to user experiences of transport. In setting local quality standards, social services departments should take account of the views of users, their carers and other stakeholders.

- **Service flexibility.** Social services are moving towards individually designed packages of care. Transport arrangements need to respond to this.

**Assessment for social services transport**

‘The transport service understands that transport is an integral part of a care package.’

Senior social services manager, quoted in a Best Value Inspection Service report in one authority

2. Social services offer a range of care packages for which transport may be needed. In addition to providing day centres, they may run adult training centres, or centres targeted at specific user groups. There may be links with local colleges or employment schemes and with hospital-based centres for post-operative daycare and rehabilitation. Social services also often provide transport to school for ‘children looked after’ by the authority, and take children with special educational needs to respite care. Some users have long-term daily, or weekly, transport requirements; others may only need intensive or occasional short-term assistance. Managers need to have close links with education departments, further education institutions, health providers and local work schemes to address these varied needs.

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1 Those staff who accompany service user on vehicles are known as both passenger assistants and escorts.
3. Social services transport is usually provided without any specific assessment of need. Nevertheless, decisions to provide transport should be made as part of the assessment process for social care services and be re-examined regularly, for example, as part of an annual review of users’ needs. Clear, written local guidance on how to undertake assessment for transport services and on the procedures to follow will be helpful. In Carmarthenshire, social services transport officers visit people at home to assess their needs for transport. In 2002/03, the council is seeking to achieve this within three working days of referral. Clients are also reassessed systematically to address changes in their mobility.

4. Local authorities may charge for transport but, where they do so, the charges are usually included within charges for the social service being provided. For example, charges for transport to or from a day centre would be included in charges for the day centre. Some authorities have day centre charges for particular user groups, and typically levy a flat rate charge. The Commission’s report Charging with Care\(^4\), showed that approximately one-half of social services authorities charge for transport and of these, approximately one-half apply some form of means testing. Collecting charges can be a considerable administrative burden; some authorities report significant under-recovery.

5. Although transport can be important to both users and carers, it is also important, where appropriate and safe to do so, to seek to encourage the user’s self-confidence and independence. For instance, at one centre in the Midlands, some adults with moderate learning difficulties walk or take public transport to their day centres.

6. There needs to be close liaison on transport matters between social services and education where children are ‘looked after’ by the authority, for example, on transport for foster children, children receiving respite care and children who are taken into care at short notice. These arrangements need to cover both travel to social services and travel to and from school.

‘Support is also provided to users who need to learn how to travel and use different forms of transport.’

Report on a Joint Review of a Social Services Department by the SSI and the Audit Commission

‘It is not uncommon for children and young people to be placed away from their home communities across the county...there are very high transport costs as children are taken by taxi or other means to and from schools, and kept in touch with their parents...transport costs at approximately £250,000 annually represent over 10 per cent of the total placement budget, so have a major financial impact.’

Report of a Joint Review of a Social Services Department by the SSI and the Audit Commission

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1 Charging for social services is discussed in Charging with Care: How Councils Charge for Home Care, Audit Commission, 2000. The Commission has discussed the general principles of charging for council services in The Price is Right?: Charges for Council Services, Audit Commission, 1999.
Safety

7. Safety may be taken for granted by users, and only come to the fore when something goes wrong. However, while people travel in transport provided by, or arranged and paid for by local authorities, the council has a responsibility for their health and safety. This involves:

- checking vehicles and equipment;
- establishing safety arrangements and procedures;
- the use of passenger assistants;
- screening vehicle crews; and
- staff training.

Vehicles and equipment

8. The vehicles themselves and associated equipment – including seatbelts, wheelchair lifts and wheelchair restraints – must be safe and also comply with legal requirements. As well as having comprehensive fault-recording procedures, and daily safety checks before vehicles leave the depot, one London borough insists that its minibuses must have no known faults when brought in for routine servicing. This ensures that drivers do not store up faults for rectification during a service but instead have them dealt with immediately.

9. Checks and controls should cover contractors’ vehicles and equipment, including taxis and hired cars, as well as in-house operations. Vehicles and equipment also need to be operated correctly by properly trained staff; a simple error, such as failing to lock a wheelchair’s brakes before raising or lowering it on a tail-lift, could have disastrous consequences for a user.

‘There just isn’t room to put electric wheelchair clamps on in a crowded bus.’

Day centre user

10. Authorities should include in their contracts, as in Devon, the right to carry out unannounced, on-the-spot, sample checks on vehicles and equipment. Internal trading organisations (ITOs) should be treated similarly. Sanctions should be applied if there are persistent safety breaches. In extremis, authorities should be prepared to terminate contracts and re-tender routes. Some authorities use only an approved list of contractors to deliver the service, and carry out thorough checks on operators before adding them to their list. If this system is used, it should be straightforward for operators to join the scheme. Operators wishing to join, and who meet the authority’s requirements, should be added to the list without undue delay.

Arrangements and procedures

‘Inspectors were told of one service user who because of dementia had to be re-dressed by the driver. There was enough of a time lapse between the home carer leaving and the transport arriving for the service user to undress themselves.’

SSI inspection report on one authority

11. Safety procedures are essential, as is training on them. Formal risk assessments can help to identify the most appropriate arrangements [BOX B, overleaf]. There should also be systems to record who is picked up and for ensuring and recording that users are delivered
safely. Procedures should specify when crew are to accompany users from inside their homes to a seat on the vehicle and guidance on what to do if the user is not at a pick-up point, or if no one answers the door on a home-call or if the user is unable to leave home [BOX C]. There should be similar arrangements for return journeys and fallback arrangements if a carer is not at home to receive a user who should not be left unaccompanied. Particular care needs to be given to securing seatbelts. In some cases users may be exempt from wearing these on medical grounds. In Carmarthenshire, passengers refusing to wear belts are asked to sign a declaration that they have chosen not to use them. Some people who refuse to wear belts may be unable or unwilling to sign such forms. Authorities should keep appropriate records and only allow people to travel without belts after a risk assessment. Records need to be kept that all attempts have been made to secure compliance and a risk assessment made which concluded that the journey had to be made in this way. Staff should be briefed to deal with the situation and relatives or carers informed that the client is travelling without a seatbelt.

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**BOX B**

**Using risk assessments to identify problems**

‘[The social services user] suffers from autism … She is a young lady of 21 stone in weight and through her illness either seeks or shuns attention. Her behaviour can become disturbed and results in aggressive and occasionally violent episodes … Occasional violent behaviour [is a] risk to passengers/crew/other road users…

The likelihood of incidents … is high. The degree of injury varies from lacerations caused by scratching, to a risk of a more severe injury being caused if someone was struck by a heavy object such as a seat or being hit by broken glass.’

‘[The social services user] is a double amputee who weighs in excess of 24 stone and uses a heavy electric wheelchair.’

*Source: Risk assessments carried out by one authority’s transport service*

**BOX C**

**Ensuring users are appropriately looked after**

A social services vehicle called to collect an elderly user. On arrival it was apparent that the user was unwell. A neighbour was in attendance. The driver discussed the situation with the user and the neighbour, and did not leave to make the next call until he had satisfied himself there was no immediate danger, that he could usefully contribute nothing further, and that a medical practitioner had been contacted and was to make a home visit.

Fieldwork observation, Carmarthenshire County Council

*Source: Audit Commission*

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1 Legislation does not require seatbelts to be worn in the rear seats of large minibuses or coaches, where these are fitted.
12. Radios on vehicles, as at Lewisham and Carmarthenshire, or mobile phones, as in Derbyshire, will help to ensure rapid and effective communication between transport managers, social services staff, centres and carers. They also allow staff to seek help quickly if a user becomes unwell during a journey or if there is a breakdown or other emergency.

13. Users also need careful supervision when getting on and off the vehicle. Arrangements for, and the location of, disembarking and pick-up points at day centres need to pay particular attention to safety. Some authorities can improve their arrangements. Social services departments should work with their authorities’ traffic management and highways departments to improve traffic management and road safety in and around centres, for example, by improving entrance areas to assist vehicle access, or by taking traffic calming measures to improve safety for the people disembarking. In Worcestershire, the Perryfields Day Centre has well-designed vehicle loading and unloading bays which allow safe access to buildings for users.

**Use of passenger assistants**

‘Escorts are needed – some people have epileptic fits – [escorts] should be on any run with people who have fits.’

‘I have the same escort and driver every week. There were no escorts before – in the taxi – there was just the driver, and I was worried if I had an epileptic fit, and my mum was worried, so she rang social services and they said there was nothing they could do about it.’

Day centre users

14. Passenger assistants are not common on social services transport. However, drivers cannot supervise or assist their passengers while driving. The medical condition of some users, and the behaviour of others, means that, in some instances, the lack of passenger assistants may be placing safety at risk. Wherever necessary, therefore, users should be accompanied by suitably trained assistants who are aware of, and know how to respond to, individual user’s problems or difficulties and who can help to ensure users are travelling safely, for instance, by encouraging them to wear seatbelts. Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council is one authority that provides passenger assistants on all day services transport.

**Screening vehicle crews**

‘We were concerned that although council staff have undergone police checks, there was no system to ensure that this was equally applied to both agency staff and taxi drivers’. [The authority has since changed its arrangements]

Best Value Inspection Service report on one authority
15. Police checks on drivers, passenger assistants and other staff who come into contact with vulnerable children and adults are important and should follow the requirements introduced by the Protection of Children Act 1999 and the Care Standards Act 2000. In some cases, vehicle crews are not screened appropriately before taking up their duties. Where screening is needed, it should cover taxi drivers and hired-car drivers, and passenger assistants used on both types of vehicles, not simply drivers and assistants on minibuses. Agency and cover staff should also be vetted where they are regularly supervising vulnerable adults or children.

16. Current practices vary. In Merthyr Tydfil, social services police-check anyone who is to work with children. This includes voluntary drivers, who are not deployed until clearance is received. Nottingham City Council also police-checks volunteers, while Worcestershire County Council police-checks drivers and Derbyshire County Council requires that contractors’ drivers be police-checked.

17. Police checks can take a long time, creating pressures to allow new employees or agency staff to begin work before vetting has been completed. A high turnover among passenger assistants and drivers can increase the pressures to use unvetted and poorly trained stand-ins. Fieldwork has shown that some managers may view occasional use of unvetted staff as unavoidable if the service is to respond to unexpected severe short-term staffing difficulties. Precautions can then include re-allocating staff to routes so that unvetted staff do not work with children or vulnerable people, or ensuring that people who have not been vetted work in tandem with experienced, fully vetted staff, who know that their colleagues have not yet been cleared. Many authorities issue identity badges to drivers and passenger assistants. In Devon, staff who have not yet been fully vetted are issued with differently colour coded identity badges which are valid for only a short period.

18. Even where full police-checking is not necessary, authorities should have arrangements to ensure that drivers have valid driving licences. Photocard identification and staff uniforms can help to reassure carers and other staff that users are being collected by people from the transport service.

Staff training

‘The drivers do take care. I have always been fastened in by drivers.’

‘I couldn’t see properly because I’d only just had an eye operation a while ago and the escort let me tumble off the coach and never said anything.’

Day centre users and carers

‘You’re not carrying sacks of potatoes...you’re carrying people’

Best Value Inspection Service report on one authority

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I Section 7(1) of the Protection of Children Act 1999 requires employers to carry out pre-employment checks in regulated organisations concerned with ‘the supervision of children’. The Government is shortly expected to consult on guidance on the Care Standards Act 2000.

II This may change. The new Criminal Records Bureau, an executive agency of the Home Office, is offering disclosures of criminal record and other checks on employees from spring 2002. Local authorities and other employers will deal directly with the Bureau when vetting employees rather than asking individual police forces to carry out checks, and can already register with the service.
19. Well-trained vehicle crews are central to successful and safe transport services. Their behaviour can also make a big difference to users’ experiences during the journey. Training should be targeted to reflect the specific needs and mix of users and the range of duties being undertaken.

20. Some drivers and passenger assistants are unhappy with what they see as weaknesses in their understanding of users’ problems and of how to respond to them. A recent best value inspection report recommended action to address this issue in one authority [BOX D, overleaf]. While vehicle crews do not need to know the full medical history, a basic knowledge of the user’s illnesses, physical or other disabilities and behavioural problems, and how to respond correctly to them, is essential.

21. Training for emergencies, including fires and vehicle breakdown, is critical. Authorities providing this include Lewisham Borough Council, whose staff practice emergency vehicle evacuation procedures with the aid of a smoke machine. Training should also aim to increase crews’ awareness of and empathy with users’ needs; for example in Leeds, staff have been blindfolded during training sessions to increase their understanding of the challenges faced by people who are visually impaired.

22. Derbyshire County Council issues a code of duties and a handbook for drivers and passenger assistants. In Carmarthenshire, a vehicle and equipment familiarisation checklist is completed by the driver every six weeks. Carmarthenshire also makes significant use of volunteer transport and issues a guidance booklet to prospective and new volunteers. Suffolk County Council uses briefing packs for new taxi drivers and also has a driver’s code of good practice included in its contract information for transport operators. Its transport unit offers a driver training and assessment service to departments of the council.

23. One option covering driving and other issues is the Community Transport Association MiDAS course. Training can also be provided in-house; for example, Devon County Council requires that all drivers of vehicles with less than 16 seats, who do not hold a PSV licence, must attend the county’s driver training course. Devon also provides a Drivers’ Handbook for Transport Contracts to all drivers working under contract to it and a similar Handbook for the minority of drivers who are employed directly by the County Council. These cover other aspects of the work, as well as driving and vehicle safety. In Worcestershire, driver training covers disability awareness and dealing with difficult passengers. In addition, the Hereford and Worcestershire Ambulance Service and the County Council’s Passenger and Fleet Transport Unit are exploring joint training opportunities. The Council expects its staff to benefit from the better standard of training given to the crews of non-emergency patient transport.

**Quality and standards**

24. As well as considering basic issues such as punctuality and reliability, authorities should promote positive user experiences on the journey. In doing so, it is important to:

- involve and effectively communicate with stakeholders; and
- address journey quality – this involves ensuring that journey times are not overly long and that a reasonable standard of comfort is provided.
Involving stakeholders

25. Users’ views are integral to assessing and improving performance [EXHIBIT 1]. Other stakeholders, including carers, staff at centres, drivers, passenger assistants and contractors, can also offer useful input. Authorities need to use appropriate methods to consult with different users and with carers, some of whom may themselves have disabilities. Consultation also needs to take account of the linguistic diversity of the local area, for example, it may not be appropriate to assume that all those being surveyed can speak or read English. Authorities in Wales will need to consider Welsh language needs. It is also important to feed the results of consultation back to those consulted.

26. Options for surveying users and others include:

- questionnaires – which allow for easy comparison of findings – these may, however, be inappropriate for people who have learning difficulties or who have visual impairments. Makaton or text with clipart images may be more suitable for consultation and feedback for people with learning difficulties, in order to facilitate their understanding;

- one-to-one interviews – which will elicit detailed information on individual concerns on specific aspects of services; and

- group discussion – which will be more suitable for users who are better placed to discuss their views than to give them in writing.

The Central Office of Information’s Informability Manual[1] gives advice on making information accessible to different audiences, including people with sensory impairments and learning difficulties.

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EXHIBIT 1
Taking account of service stakeholders’ views
Stakeholders’ views are integral to assessing and improving performance.

Source: Audit Commission

27. User groups within day centres can also provide valuable input about transport. In Leeds, an access committee for people with disabilities puts users’ views to service managers. In Walsall, adults with moderate learning difficulties have formed a self-advocacy group; its members worked together to prepare a list of questions for managers about their transport service. In Worcestershire, users are involved in planning services through the Transport and Health Partnership. An ‘expert witness’ procedure enables people to input – in a way reminiscent of giving evidence to a parliamentary committee – to the Partnership.

28. Although consultation can be a powerful way of demonstrating user satisfaction, as well as of gaining insight into concerns, users’ views need to be interpreted carefully. For example, elderly or more vulnerable people may tend to be unwilling to complain about services, especially if they think they may incur the displeasure of the staff involved.

29. Complaints are another important way of identifying service failures. Officers in some authorities tend to discourage them, for example, by requiring that they are made in writing, to depress the numbers recorded and so present their service in a favourable light. Others recognise the benefits of capturing all comments about the service. For example, Devon County Council’s incident recording system seeks to capture all comments whether written or verbal, made face to face or over the telephone, including those which are not formal complaints.
Day-to-day communication with users and carers

‘Comments were made about the lack of communication in braille and in tape form – for example, about transport changes.’

Report of a Joint Review of a Social Services Department by the SSI and the Audit Commission

30. Social services departments can assist users and other stakeholders by providing clear information about the service. Again, they need to use the most appropriate means to communicate with different groups. Users and their carers also need a clear understanding of the part they play, such as the importance of being ready for collection at the right time. For example, Carmarthenshire County Council has drafted codes of practice for stakeholders. Users and carers also need to be able to contact the department to discuss any issues or concerns and should be provided with contact numbers for use when, for instance, transport fails to turn up. This should also include provision for out-of-hours contact. Where respite care is offered for children, parents and carers should be clear when and how to contact the social services department about transport and whether home-to-school travel will be dealt with by social services or the education department.

Journey quality

31. Focus groups reveal that people often regard a service as good if, as well as being safe, it is punctual and reliable, so that people arrive at their destinations on time, and avoid over-long or uncomfortable journeys or long waits at pick-up points. Users also have issues about ride quality and cleanliness perhaps best summed up as, ‘I don’t want to go in that dirty and rackety old coach’. Journey quality can thus be enhanced by ensuring that:

- transport is punctual and reliable;
- journey times, and waiting times, are not over-long; and
- a reasonable standard of comfort is provided.

Punctuality and reliability

‘There has been a high level of frustration for both staff and users due to the unreliability of the ageing council transport. Over the winter, starting problems with the vehicles have meant long delays in users being collected and arriving at the centre. This has played havoc with their daily programme and meant that some users have missed their weekly bathing slot.’

Report on a Joint Review of a Social Services Department by the SSI and the Audit Commission

32. Occasional punctuality problems and late arrivals may be unavoidable, for example, ones caused by unexpected roadworks. But regular late arrival is highly undesirable as it will involve either a shorter day in the centre or delays in returning users home. The latter may involve overtime costs for both centre and transport staff and anxiety for both users and carers waiting for them. Delays may also impact on other services if, for example, social services transport is operationally integrated with home-to-school transport for children with special educational needs.
33. The importance of punctuality may vary – for example, many elderly people living alone may not be concerned by delays in returning home, but other users may become anxious if their routine is upset or if they may be late for attending other activities [BOX E]. Punctuality and reliability should be monitored. One option is to carry out formal audits periodically, for example by surveying centres, or by unannounced observations.

**Journey times**

‘Existing transport services …[are] currently involving service users in spending [an] excessive amount of time on journeys.’

Report of a Joint Review of a Social Services Department by the SSI and the Audit Commission

‘Social services have to put the chair in with a strap – it takes about 10 minutes if I am transferring.’

Day centre user

34. Journeys should not be so long that they overtire users or exacerbate medical or behavioural difficulties. Some authorities have no formal policy on maximum permitted times. Where standards have been set, they range from as little as three-quarters of an hour to an hour and a half in some authorities. Any standards should take account of the time users wait for vehicles as well as time on board. Occasional exceptions, in which people’s journeys are longer than the authority’s standard permits, may be unavoidable but should be identified and authorised individually.

**BOX E**

Varying perceptions among service users

‘Most of us live alone. Why the panic [about what time we get back]?’

Elderly woman at a best value inspection focus group

‘I had to walk to the bottom of the cul-de-sac at five to eight and it [the bus] never came till five past nine and you’d get soaking wet.’

‘When I was starting [at college] they said be ready at 12.30 and I was sitting there and I had to have my dinner at 11.30. It was a warm day and I was sitting there waiting and waiting and my mum said it wasn’t good enough. She rang and they still didn’t turn up. I got there and the co-ordinator at college said, “Where have you been?” and I said I was waiting for him [the driver]. He didn’t speak much English and she said, “You, turn up on time” [signing – pointing to him and her watch]. The taxi was late again. The college courses I was on were very important – it was important I was there on time.’

Day centre users

Source: Audit Commission
35. The time taken for users to get on and off vehicles when they are picked up in the morning and set down in the evening can have a particular impact on journey times. When passengers travel in wheelchairs, the need to secure a chair before the vehicle departs can further add to the overall journey time. Ensuring that staff know, in advance, the types of wheelchair used by their passengers, have the most appropriate equipment for securing chairs, and the users travelling in them, and are well trained in securing people is not only, therefore, a safety requirement but may also help to speed up journeys.

‘I can get on – but some people can’t get the clamp round so they can’t come in …’

‘It’s discrimination [when you can’t fit in more than one electric wheelchair]… Social Services should be doing a bit more to get people into these resources – deprived of that because of the size of a wheelchair – it’s disgusting!’

Day centre users

36. One authority visited by the Commission had been using large coaches for its social services transport. These had problems, including long journey times and user pick-up points with no shelter. A change to smaller minibus provision, however, was widely welcomed by service users.

‘Community transport is doing me very well at the moment – it comes early to my house … I used to be on the big coaches and used to wait in the telephone box when it was raining. They used to breakdown. I used to telephone them and they’d say wait in the same spot and it was coming. Now I’m on the community transport it’s fine.’

Day centre user

37. Journeys can be uncomfortable if drivers do not show consideration for their passengers and other road users [BOX F]. Passengers may suffer if drivers repeatedly accelerate and brake sharply, or take corners at speed; lack of care when going over road humps can also be unpleasant. Driver training can address these issues. In winter, users can also feel uncomfortably cold if all the doors on a vehicle are left open for long periods, for example, while wheelchairs are loaded or unloaded. In summer, they may find the glare of direct sunlight unpleasant. Tinted glass or blinds on vehicles and heating or air conditioning can help. For example, Lewisham has tinted glass and fans on its coaches. The image projected by the service can also be important – some users may prefer not to travel in vehicles labelled as ‘ambulances’ or which have an institutional appearance.

38. Where pick-up points are used, shelter should be provided, wherever possible, so that bad weather doesn’t affect people waiting to be picked up. Seating arrangements can also impact upon the perceived quality of the journey and user’s behaviour. For example, allowing friends to sit together can make the journey more pleasant. Conversely, it will be best to separate users whose behaviours irritate each other; where user groups are mixed
inappropriately there can be unwelcome interactions (for example, hair pulling) and disruption. The appropriate use of equipment can impact particularly on the comfort of wheelchair users as well as on their safety.

39. Users and their carers may place particular value on the attitude and friendliness of drivers and passenger assistants and on continuity and stability in the arrangements [BOX G, overleaf]. Continuity will be especially important for some people, for example, people who are autistic. A user that does not use English as a first language may prefer to be accompanied by someone who speaks the language that he or she uses at home; sensitivity to religious and cultural needs can also be important. Responding to these needs and concerns will be easier if passenger assistants reflect the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of users. This may sometimes be difficult to achieve, but recruitment practices that successfully address diversity will help; changes to job specifications may also be needed, to ensure that passenger assistants include people with necessary linguistic or other skills.

**BOX F**

**Addressing the comfort of service users**

‘Seats are on the right hand side and I can’t wear a seatbelt because I can’t stand a seatbelt on my right shoulder – they need seats on the left.’

‘Clamps do damage the chairs – a clamp twists and weakens them – easy lock restraints are better. Where belts are strapped, there are no clamping points on electric wheelchairs. There should be points suitable for restraining – it would be easier for drivers. There have been times when clamps have come loose. When you put metal to metal you slide – you shouldn’t have clamps.’

‘Social Services drivers have been heard to remark, “The person who designed the layout should have come and tried it and saw the mess they made.” Older council vehicles were better for wheelchairs. Most of them now are buses – built on [a certain] van chassis – so the suspension leaves a lot to be desired – they’re more rigid and less comfortable, you feel all the bumps.’

Day centre users

*Source: Audit Commission*
40. Good communication with users who have communication difficulties is also important. For example, deaf people whose first language is sign language may value travelling with passenger assistants who use sign language. Where this is not possible, authorities should consider training key staff in basic signing (which can take as little as half a day) as this can make all the difference to service users. It may also be vital to ensure that at least basic communication can be achieved in emergencies or if the user is unwell.

**Service flexibility**

‘Younger people are increasingly seeking access to mainstream facilities and looking towards leisure, education, training and employment opportunities rather than traditional day services. Expanding transport resources is seen as critical in supporting users to access mainstream facilities.’

Report of a Joint Review of a Social Services Department by the SSI and the Audit Commission

41. As social services are increasingly tailored around users’ individual needs and lifestyles, more services may be delivered outside the normal Monday to Friday 9.00 am to 5.00 pm working week. Transport arrangements will need to change in response to this. The London Borough of Lewisham, for example, already provides transport support for midday and evening voluntary sector clubs. Carmarthenshire County Council has a loan scheme for voluntary organisations which allows them to use vehicles during evenings and weekends; it also works with Age Concern to provide day clubs [CASE STUDY 1].
Councils can answer the following questions to identify any gaps and priorities for action, and to inform policy development.

CASE STUDY 1

Encouraging flexibility: Carmarthenshire

Carmarthenshire County Council loans social services vehicles to voluntary organisations to use during evenings and weekends. These are usually grant-aided organisations whose drivers have been trained by the County Council and police vetted by the voluntary organisation or the County Council. Training includes basic driving awareness, familiarity with the tail-lift and safety features but not manual handling or first aid. Up to 30 drivers are included in the scheme. The loan vehicle must not leave the County.

Three mobile day clubs are provided for rural areas with no daycare facilities. These started as a partnership between Carmarthenshire County Council and Age Concern. They provide a level of care between lunch clubs and daycare centres and are managed and funded by Social Services. Their primary aim is to alleviate isolation and associated depression.

Source: Audit Commission

42. Councils can answer the following questions to identify any gaps and priorities for action, and to inform policy development.
## Assessment for social services transport

Are there clearly defined criteria on assessment for transport, which:

- cover all circumstances in which social services users receive transport?
- have been produced following consultation with users, carers and other stakeholders and which users and carers understand?
- set out the roles of social services departments and other council units in assessment and making arrangements?
- do not create cultural barriers to access?
- are reviewed in response to changes in local needs and provision?
- are also reviewed when national policy changes?
- have been agreed by elected members?
- in Wales, provide appropriate arrangements for Welsh language users?

Is this guidance followed?

Do users and carers receive timely details of how the authority will assess their need for transport?

Is assessment for transport re-examined regularly as part of a review of the user's needs?

Do decisions and reviews take account of users’ and families’ needs including, where safe and appropriate, the need to develop or maintain independence?

Are arrangements for dealing with complaints about decisions on whether to provide transport:

- clear and formally set out?
- understood by users and carers?
- agreed by elected members?
- followed?

Is there effective, on-going quality assurance of decisions on assessment?

Are there effective arrangements for communicating with users or carers for whom English is not a first language or who are not familiar with written English?

Are there effective arrangements for communicating with users and carers who have communication difficulties, including people who have learning difficulties or visual impairments?

### Safety

**Vehicles and equipment**

Are there effective systems for ensuring that all vehicles are well maintained, safe, taxed and insured?

Are there adequate systems for ensuring that other equipment is well maintained and safe?
### SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Are there adequate systems for ensuring that Section 19 vehicles carry a working fire extinguisher and properly stocked first aid kit?  

Do arrangements cover contractors’ vehicles, including taxis and hired-cars, and spares or stand-in vehicles used by contractors and taxi and hired-car operators?  

Has the authority considered having an ‘approved operators’ list for which specific inspections are carried out?  

Are operators informed of how to join any such scheme?  

Can they do so speedily if they meet its requirements?  

Is equipment required for transporting users available when required, so that journey starts are not delayed, waiting for equipment?  

### Arrangements and procedures

Does the allocation of users to particular types of vehicle – minibus; taxi etc – take account of their individual needs?  

Does the authority carry out formal risk assessments where necessary before arranging transport?  

If people refuse to wear seatbelts does the authority:  

- record this  
- only provide transport where it is lawful to travel without a seatbelt and after a risk assessment  
- notify relatives/carers/staff that the clients will not wear a seatbelt?  

Do staff on the vehicles know what to do and who to contact if someone becomes unwell while on a vehicle?  

Are vehicles equipped with mobile phones (or radios), with the same phone and phone number staying with a route even if the driver and/or passenger assistant changes?  

Are there procedures and training arrangements, which drivers, passenger assistants and staff in depots or the social services department understand, for:  

- recording the numbers and identities of the users picked up?  
- recording the numbers and identities of the users alighting at their destination?  
- recording and notifying centres of users who were not picked up (for example, who were not at the pick-up point)?  
- what to do when no one is at home to receive a user who should not be left unaccompanied?  

Do these work well?  

Do users, carers and centres know who to contact if there are problems with the service?  

Are users and carers notified of changes to contact arrangements in good time – for example, when routes are changed and mobile phones re-assigned or new ones brought into use?  

If pick-up points are used, do these reflect users’ capabilities to travel to them safely?  

Do any pick-up points used provide appropriate protection from inclement weather?
Within these constraints, do pick-up arrangements seek to encourage independence?  

Are pick-up and drop-off arrangements safe – for example, users board and leave vehicles from the kerb-side or rear not the road-side; users are supervised when boarding and leaving vehicles?  

Are the entrances to centres and parking facilities safe for the arrival and the disembarking and boarding of users?  

Are drop-off and pick-up arrangements at centres safe (for example, users do not leave vehicles until all engines are off; all users are supervised; users are not in danger from vehicles, whether social services transport or other traffic)?  

Are tail-lifts and ramps used correctly?  

Are wheelchair brakes on when lifts are used?  

Are wheelchairs and the users travelling in them secured correctly within vehicles?  

Are seat-belts used and correctly fastened during trips?  

When young children are being transported, are safe child seats used?  

Do drivers and passenger assistants, including ones provided by contractors, and including temporary or agency staff, have photocard identity badges?  

Do drivers and passenger assistants, including ones provided by contractors, and including temporary or agency staff, wear uniforms where required to do so?  

Does the authority regularly check that all drivers and passenger assistants provided by contractors display their identity badges?  

Are there effective arrangements for recording any accidents or incidents that do occur?  

Are arrangements, procedures and training subsequently reviewed and modified as necessary?  

Are there effective arrangements for identifying and responding to potential safety problems noticed by users, carers or staff on the vehicles?  

Do these procedures work well?  

Have safety arrangements emerged well from SSI reports on the authority and in recent Joint Reviews of it by SSI and the Audit Commission (for example, no criticisms of safety)?  

If SSI or Joint Reviews reports have drawn attention to problems, have the authority, centre managers and staff taken effective action to address the issues identified?  

Are users and carers satisfied with safety arrangements?  

Are centres satisfied with safety arrangements?  

If they are not, is action in hand to address their concerns?  

**Use of passenger assistants**  

Are decisions on whether to provide a passenger assistant based on the individual user’s health and safety requirements?  

Are the criteria to apply clear?
Do these criteria cover the range of services provided and the full range of user needs? [ ]

Do they also take account of the total number of users on a vehicle? [ ]

Do carers and centres understand them? [ ]

Are the criteria being applied? [ ]

**Screening vehicle crews**

Are there adequate arrangements to ensure that all drivers, including contractors’ drivers and taxi and hired-car drivers, temporary and agency drivers, are:

- security checked with police before they first carry children or vulnerable adults where required by the Protection of Children Act 1999 and the Care Standards Act 2000? [ ]

- in possession of a valid driving licences? [ ]

Are there adequate arrangements to ensure that all passenger assistants, including agency staff, are security checked with police before they begin their duties where required by the Protection of Children Act 1999 and the Care Standards Act 2000? [ ]

If any staff have not yet been fully security vetted, do they:

- work in tandem with experienced, fully security cleared staff? [ ]

- have different, short-life identity badges? [ ]

Is the authority satisfied that contractors’ drivers and taxi and hired car drivers who should be screened have been screened? [ ]

Do checks cover emergency and stand-in taxi and hired car drivers and contractors’ emergency and stand-in drivers where required by the legislation? [ ]

Where voluntary sector or volunteer drivers are in regular contact with children or vulnerable adults, are they police checked where required by the legislation? [ ]

**Staff training**

Are there effective arrangements to ensure that all drivers, including contractors’ drivers and all taxi and hired car drivers, temporary and agency drivers, are:

- trained before they start social services work? [ ]

- given written guidance on their duties? [ ]

- given necessary information about the needs of each user before they first carry that user? [ ]

- aware of procedures for reporting problems (for example, accidents/vehicle breakdown)? [ ]

Are there adequate arrangements for ensuring that all passenger assistants, including agency staff, are:

- trained before they begin their duties? [ ]

- given written guidance on their duties? [ ]

- given appropriate information on the disabilities and needs of each user before they first accompany that user? [ ]
A PRACTICAL HANDBOOK FOR MANAGERS • IMPROVING TRANSPORT FOR SOCIAL SERVICES USERS

SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

Does training for drivers and passenger assistants include elements on:

- first aid?
- customer care and disability awareness?
- fire and emergency procedures?
- vehicle safety?

Does the training and guidance cover other behaviour (for example, smoking on duty; behaviour when waiting for users)?

Are there adequate arrangements to ensure that all the staff who use equipment such as ramps and wheelchair lifts, including contractors’ staff and agency or temporary staff, have been trained in its use?

Where it is appropriate to use child seats, are there adequate arrangements to ensure that all staff, including volunteer drivers, have been trained to fit and use the equipment correctly?

Are there adequate arrangements for checking that contractors’ drivers and taxi and hired-car drivers have been trained and given written guidance on their duties?

Do these arrangements cover emergency and stand-in taxi and hired-car drivers and contractors’ emergency and stand-in drivers?

Are users and carers satisfied with driver and passenger assistant performance?

Are centres satisfied with driver and passenger assistant performance?

If they are not, is action in hand to address their concerns?

Quality and standards

Involving stakeholders

Has the authority consulted on its standards for service quality and customer care with:

- users?
- carers?
- other stakeholders (for example, day centres; its own frontline staff; contractors; contractors’ frontline staff)?

Are there effective arrangements for consulting users or carers for whom English is not a first language or who are not familiar with written English?

In Wales, are there appropriate arrangements to consult Welsh language users?

Are there effective arrangements for consulting users who have communication difficulties, for example people with learning difficulties or people who have hearing or visual impairments?

Are there effective arrangements for consulting carers who have communication difficulties?

Do surveys of stakeholders’ satisfaction form part of performance monitoring?

Does the authority report back on the results of consultation to those it has consulted?
**Day-to-day communication with users and carers**

Is there an information pack for users and carers setting out roles and responsibilities of the authority, centre, carer and user (with contact numbers if things go wrong)?

Are communication arrangements between users, carers, service providers, and the council clear and effective?

Do these arrangements deal satisfactorily with communication with user/carers:

- who do not speak English or who are not fluent in written English (including, in Wales, Welsh speakers)
- who themselves have learning or communication difficulties or sensory impairment

Is there a contact number for users, carers, drivers and passenger assistants for use if there are changes to routes or problems with late vehicles or breakdowns, particularly between 7.00 and 9.00 am and between 3.30 and 6.30 pm?

Are contact names and telephone numbers up to date?

Do communication arrangements allow users and carers to notify the transport service (either directly, via the centre or via the transport department) when they know in advance that a user will not be requiring transport (for example, because of sickness or a hospital appointment)?

Does the authority have a formal complaints system?

Are users and carers aware of how to complain?

Are complaints monitored?

Does the authority collect, analyse and act upon ‘informal’ comments (for example, ones made face-to-face to staff; ones made by telephone) as well as written complaints?

Is there a formal mechanism for raising problems about any particular route or operator that can feed into contract monitoring?

Are there formal standards for customer care?

Do these take full account of the results of consultation?

Is performance against these standards monitored regularly?

**Journey quality**

**Punctuality and reliability**

Do standards covering punctuality and reliability include:

- pick-up times from home?
- arrival at centres?
- pick-up from centres?
- arrival home?

Have these been set following consultation with users, carers and centres?

Is performance against them being monitored?
### Self-Assessment Checklist

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Questions</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are the standards being met?</td>
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<td>Do users consistently reach their destination on time?</td>
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<td>Have users and carers been asked whether they are satisfied with current performance?</td>
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<td><strong>Journey times</strong></td>
<td>Are travel times reasonable (journeys do not overtire users or exacerbate medical or behavioural difficulties)?</td>
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<td>Do standards cover journey times?</td>
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<td>Are any exceptional cases, where local geography prevents standards being met, individually identified and agreed by the social services department?</td>
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<td><strong>Journey comfort</strong></td>
<td>Do users travel in comfort (for example, conditions do not overtire them or exacerbate medical or behavioural difficulties)?</td>
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<td>Do standards cover journey quality?</td>
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**Service flexibility**

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<tr>
<td>Is the authority supporting services outside normal hours – for example, by providing transport to evening activities?</td>
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<td>Has the authority consulted appropriately about the need for flexible service hours for transport?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are transport arrangements sufficiently flexible?</td>
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2. Balancing costs and service quality

43. The previous section discussed service quality issues. However, transport has to be provided within financial constraints. Due to these pressures, many authorities are seeking to reduce, or to control increases in, their expenditure on social services transport. This section covers:

- *The context – increasing costs*: and the nature of transport cost increases and factors which contribute to these.

- *Strategic responses to cost pressures*: this can involve reviewing policies and provision; monitoring and benchmarking costs; improving procurement and provision, including jointly procuring and integrating services where appropriate.

- *Operational responses to cost pressures*: authorities need to examine route planning and scheduling; review their day-to-day management arrangements, to ensure staff and vehicles are used effectively; review their management of in-house transport; and review the use of taxis and hired cars.

44. This section also discusses the trade-offs that may exist between cost-saving and better service quality. These sometimes conflicting aims can be heightened by increasing demand and by above-inflation rises in transport costs. There are, nonetheless, opportunities to use resources more effectively. In some instances, however, authorities will need to identify whether possible cost savings and efficiency improvements may significantly reduce service quality and, if they do, whether this is acceptable.

**The context – increasing costs**

45. Local authority officers with transport responsibilities, and contractors, have argued that costs are rising in real terms. Reasons include:

- driver costs rising at a rate above inflation across the bus and coach industry;

- above inflation rises in fuel, insurance and other vehicle running costs;

- the extension to part-time staff of the same employment rights as full-time staff;

- changes to vehicle specifications, as a result of changing seat belt and clamping equipment specifications and regulations on how to secure wheelchairs within vehicles – the latter has also tended to reduce the number of wheelchairs carried by each vehicle;

- increased training costs as health and safety requirements lead to a greater focus on the provision of well-trained drivers and passenger assistants; and

- moves towards smaller vehicles because traffic-calming measures are making it difficult for larger vehicles to collect users from, and deliver them to, addresses in side streets. More user-focused social services provision is likely to add to this shift, as local authorities move away from rigidly programmed bulk provision of services.

**Strategic responses to cost pressures**

46. In responding to cost pressures, councils need to review their strategic approach to social services transport. They need to weigh the costs and benefits of different options, considering the implications of decisions in the wider policy context. For example, extending transport provision may promote social inclusion. Options include:

- fully considering transport costs when making major policy decisions about how and where to provide social services;
regularly monitoring and benchmarking costs and the pattern of service provision;

- improving how transport is procured and provided, for example by reviewing tender strategies;

- co-operating with others within the authority. Options include:
  - procuring services jointly with other parts of the council, such as education;
  - integrating provision of social services transport with transport services in other parts of the authority to allow service providers to, for example, share vehicle procurement costs and spare vehicles – this is an option when the service is provided in-house as well as when services are bought-in; and
  - full operational integration with other council transport services, for example, with transport for children with special educational needs; and

- co-operation with the National Health Service.

**Reviewing policies and provision**

*‘The saga of personal transport for disabled people illustrates the perils of ad-hoc solutions in the absence of a clear vision and strategy.’*

*‘The most striking feature of the accommodation is the uneven geographic spread... [A physical disabilities resource centre] is distant in an outlying area, which contributes to a £130,000 annual transport bill, 31 per cent of the total running costs. Similarly, [a community mental health centre] ... is in the far west of the borough, which entails long journeys for some users, made even longer by the unreliability of the transport.’*

47. Transport should be considered when making major policy decisions about how and where to provide social services. Decisions on the locations of day centres and other facilities, and on packages of care, have a direct impact on expenditure on transport. With a greater individual focus in service delivery from service providers, individual transport solutions become more important. One option is to consider whether to increase training in independent travel for those not able to do so currently. There may also be greater opportunities to offer direct payments to users who make their own arrangements – such as paying the petrol costs of a relative or carer.

**Monitoring and benchmarking costs**

48. The true cost and usage of social services transport is not always easy to identify. In some cases, record keeping is poor and does not allow analysis of the number of user journeys made each day or an overall understanding of the costs per passenger. Good monitoring can help to identify problems and opportunities for savings [CASE STUDY 2, overleaf].

49. Local benchmarking groups, where authorities monitor and benchmark costs alongside service standards and performance, will help them to assess their position. Benchmarking can also identify opportunities for savings, as well as improvements in efficiency. Regular reporting on expenditure to members will help to ensure that costs are contained within budget.
Improving procurement and provision

‘After comprehensive analysis of the issues, the service has been centralised but in a way that allows service units flexible access to vehicles. This has reduced travelling times for users, whose suggestions for further improvement are actively encouraged. The vehicles used are more appropriate to the users’ needs, while it has also been possible to make efficiency savings of £40,000 in reducing the need for vehicles to be hired from external providers.’

Report on a Joint Review of a Social Services Department by the SSI and the Audit Commission

CASE STUDY 2

Identifying opportunities for savings: Worcestershire

In Worcestershire, a key issue for social services was the number of ‘ad hoc’ journeys. Where an individual requires a taxi journey of 20–30 miles, this may cost up to £100 per day. Officers realised the importance of looking at specific cases and not just concentrating on the average cost per journey. A large number of these ‘ad-hoc’ journeys are to and from school. Worcestershire social services and education departments agreed a practice guidance statement for looked after children. In 1999/2000, the cost to social services of transporting children in care to school was £466,000; in 2000/2001, a stricter policy and better management brought the cost down to £285,000.

Source: Audit Commission

Social services transport can be provided by in-house ITOs, by contractors or by a mix of the two. There may also be significant use of volunteers. The pattern of provision varies across the country; for example, in London, ITO provision tends to be the norm, while many counties rely on contractors. Centralised procurement is usually preferable; allowing individual centres to make their own arrangements can be wasteful though centres should, of course, specify or agree the services being procured. When going to the market, authorities should monitor the number of bids received and tender prices and examine trends over time. They should compare the prices they pay to successful tenderers with the prices paid by other authorities. If they suspect cartel activity, they should seek advice from the Office of Fair Trading.
51. The best solutions to meeting local needs will vary from place to place, not least because of differences in the local market. Best value (discussed in Section 4) requires that councils embrace fair competition as a means of securing efficient and effective services. Market testing the service, or parts of it, from time to time offers one way of doing this [CASE STUDY 3]. One key decision is whether to put the whole operation to tender or to offer different contracts for individual routes or parts of the network. Another key decision involves the contract periods to use. The role played by community transport providers is also significant in some areas – for instance, they are used on a number of routes in Walsall. Authorities may prefer to retain some in-house capacity, as a defence against possible anti-competitive practices by suppliers. Even though the ITO may not bid for every contract, the possibility that it may bid can serve to destabilise a cartel. The ITO also gives a yardstick against which to judge bidders’ prices.

52. Authorities typically use three- or five-year contracts, let on a rolling programme under which one-third – or one-fifth – of the network is offered to tender each year. This helps to manage the annual tendering workload and provides successful contractors with a degree of certainty about future work. Careful selection of the package of routes offered each year – for example, routes serving particular geographical areas or particular centres – allows contractors to achieve economies of scale or other efficiencies and to offer prices for individual routes plus other, lower, prices if they win particular combinations of routes. A further option is to move to longer or open-ended contracts. These may attract more bidders and keener prices as well as encouraging suppliers to invest in transport, and may increase suppliers’ willingness to invest in new vehicles or staff training, but needs to be balanced against a potential loss of flexibility – for example, long contracts may lock councils into arrangements that increasingly fail to meet their needs, and which thus need to be renegotiated. In addition, a price that was competitive when a contract was let may become less so with time.

CASE STUDY 3

Using fair competition to improve efficiency: Merthyr Tydfil

Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council reduced in-house provision from approximately 60 per cent of its total social services transport to about 15 per cent. Its existing in-house operation was not managed locally and did not meet users’ needs – for example, users could arrive after 11.00 am and leave before 3.00 pm when they were attending what were meant to be all-day sessions. Contracting out has led to efficiency savings and the social services transport budget has been reduced by 10 per cent.

Source: Audit Commission
54. Periodic re-tendering may lead to changes in supplier when the existing contractor, or ITO, fails to retain a route. This in turn can lead to the changes in drivers or escorts that some users find disruptive. Three- or five-year contract periods reduce the frequency with which this may occur. Using in-house escorts, when provision of vehicles and drivers has been outsourced, is one way of maintaining some staffing continuity on services. Tenderers can be asked to bid to provide a stated minimum level of service quality but allowed also to quote for higher quality services. These may either be specified by the authority or be proposals initiated by bidders. Contracts need to allow for changes in the network within the contract period.

**Monitoring contracts and service level agreements**

55. Contract terms and contract management arrangements should also seek to ensure service quality. This can be done not only by specifying quality requirements, but by including, in the financial arrangements, incentives that reward service providers who meet or exceed these requirements and by then monitoring performance and applying the incentives. Service level agreements with ITOs should adopt a similar approach. Staffordshire Social Services is one authority that has clearly specified and implemented its quality requirements.

56. This alone, however, may not be sufficient to guarantee good services. Monitoring is also important. In Merthyr Tydfil, some of the authority’s payments to its contractors are linked to the outcome of the authority’s contract monitoring programme. In another authority, the SEN team had introduced a complaints monitoring system that includes the monitoring of telephone complaints. After three justified complaints the authority gives a warning and after three warnings, the operator may lose the route. This practice could be followed by social services departments.

**Co-operation within the authority**

57. Co-operation within the authority is one important way of improving efficiency. Options include co-operation on procurement; using the same providers for social services and other transport, so that providers can exploit economies of scale; and full operational integration of social services and other transport (for example, home-to-school transport for children with special educational needs).

**Jointly procuring services**

58. Letting and managing transport contracts involves specialist skills. Other parts of a council, for example education, also use transport services and require access to the same expertise. A number of authorities have therefore created council-wide transport co-ordinating units. Examples include Devon County Council [CASE STUDY 4]. Other authorities to take this route include Cheshire. Worcestershire formed an integrated Passenger and Fleet Transport Unit in 2000. Worcestershire’s Unit now manages social services transport, education transport and local bus services. The council’s objective was to rationalise provision, achieve better levels of service and more efficient use of resources. Such co-ordination can offer economies of scale and make more effective use of professional and technical transport skills. It can also ensure that different parts of an authority do not compete against each other in the market, driving up prices.
Integrating provision

59. Co-ordinated procurement allows authorities to offer packages of transport work that cover several services. Contractors can then identify opportunities to share resources across, for example, social services transport and transport for children with special educational needs, and reflect this in their prices. Authorities using in-house providers often achieve the same effect, as in many London boroughs, by allowing one ITO to provide services for both user groups. Costs may then be reduced by pooling spare vehicles, by sharing reserve drivers and by using joint vehicle leasing or maintenance contracts.

Operational integration

60. As well as jointly procuring transport services, some authorities have operationally integrated transport between some departments or, more rarely, across the entire authority. In Suffolk, an Education Transport ITO act as agent for some social services work via an SLA. Local social services managers – community and residential resource managers in provider units – liaise with transport providers day-to-day while education transport initiates and manages contracts. In London, work by District Audit has revealed the extent to which co-ordination of social services and special educational needs transport, and employing vehicles for a wide range of other purposes, improves vehicle utilisation [EXHIBIT 2].

61. Lewisham Borough Council’s operational integration of its social services and special educational needs transport services allows the same vehicles to be used for several types of work. In Derbyshire, transport operations remain within separate departments, but savings are achieved by close collaboration between departments and with community transport [CASE STUDY 5]. In Devon, the authority’s Transport Co-ordination Service identifies options for co-ordinating transport arrangements that offer savings both to the authority’s Education Arts and Libraries Department and to its Social Services Department. Both these user departments thus support the co-ordinated approach. Another advantage of

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CASE STUDY 4

Co-ordinating Transport Services: Devon

Devon County Council’s Transport Co-ordination Service:

- co-ordinates, manages and administers the provision of social services transport;
- provides similar services for home-to-school transport, for both ‘mainstream’ pupils and for pupils with special educational needs, including post-16 travel to education, on behalf of the authority’s Department of Education, Arts and Libraries;
- manages and arranges subsidised public transport (bus) services;
- provides support and advice for community transport schemes, working with operators, other public sector bodies and voluntary bodies;
- administers a concessionary fare scheme on behalf of district councils in Devon and Torbay unitary authority;
- co-ordinates and manages the county council’s vehicle fleet; and
- deals with contract compliance, including adherence to vehicle safety requirements, and provides driver training and identity badges for drivers and passenger assistants.

Source: Audit Commission

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Source: Audit Commission
EXHIBIT 2

Improving minibus utilisation

Borough B gets higher use from its vehicles than Borough A as it employs them for a wide range of purposes.

CASE STUDY 5

Integrating social services transport with other operations: Lewisham and Derbyshire

London Borough of Lewisham

Lewisham Passenger Services Unit is an internal trading organisation that provides transport for the Council’s Social Care and Health (that is, Social Services) and Education Departments. The Education work is all for children with special educational needs. Passenger Services also provides non-emergency patient transport for University Hospital, Lewisham and is providing the local Dial-a-Ride service as a pilot for the Commission for Accessible Transport. Passenger Services moves over 1,200 people a day, using vehicles ranging from estate cars to 45 seat coaches.

Lewisham integrated its transport arrangements for its existing Social Services Department and its then new Education Department when it became a local education authority in 1990, on abolition of the Inner London Education Authority. The times of Social Services day centre sessions were changed where necessary.

The service is still integrated. During the school year, vehicles pick-up children and deliver them to school before then carrying social services users. The reverse happens in the afternoon. The same drivers and attendants (that is, passenger assistants) work on the two runs, applying the same working practices and standards of care to both user groups.

Derbyshire County Council

In Derbyshire, social services routes to deeply rural parts of the authority are integrated with mainstream home-to-school, special educational needs and community transport. Transport for social services day centre visits is integrated with school journeys, lunch clubs and hospital or GP runs. Some vehicles are also used in the evening to transport rural based students to a local FE college. Home-to-school transport is integrated with the public bus network and with community transport.

Source: Audit Commission
operational integration is that, as at Lewisham, the same training and standards of care are used when dealing with social services users as for pupils with special educational needs. This can ensure equity for users, for instance in escorting practices. Commonly, authorities that do not co-ordinate social services and special educational needs transport apply inconsistent standards and approaches to escorting the two user groups.

62. Operational integration has brought major advantages in these cases. However, it needs to be introduced with care. Changes to day-centre – or special school – times, to ensure that this happens, can have major implications for social services staff, for teachers and other education staff, and for users and carers, so that consultation is essential. In one authority, social services had started day-centre sessions later, and shortened their length, so they can be served by vehicles that, earlier in the day, take children to special schools. Possible financial benefits thus need to be weighed against the other potential impacts of these changes. In addition, integration may sometimes create unwelcome interdependencies and reduce flexibility, for example, in the availability of vehicles at centres for daytime activities. A delay in a morning special school run, caused by heavy rush-hour traffic, might mean that a social services run starts late and that social services users arrive late at a day centre.

63. For these reasons, operational integration is sometimes unpopular with frontline social services staff, compared with alternatives in which vehicles are permanently allocated to individual centres. However, such dedicated vehicles can be poorly utilised and their costs sometimes difficult to identify within centres’ accounts. Frontline social services staff may not, therefore, realise just how much the authority is paying for flexibility.

Co-operation with health

64. Co-ordination with partners from the NHS offers another way forward. Working with the NHS is particularly worth considering given the changes taking place in the delivery of both health and social care – as well as the continued emergence of more individually focused packages of social care, joint commissioning of health and social care is expanding. Other changes in the NHS include, in England, the expected transfer of responsibility for commissioning non-emergency patient transport from hospitals to primary care trusts, changes to where medical services are delivered, individually booked patient appointment times and further amalgamations of ambulance services.

65. Suffolk County Council has achieved ‘Beacon’ status for co-operation with its local health authority. Suffolk is working to an integrated plan for health and social services, which has joint implications for transport. Projects jointly funded with health include a day centre for older persons located in a community hospital, with ancillary healthcare provided on site. The day-centre manager organises transport, including deployment of non-emergency patient transport ambulances and community buses. Co-ordination of transport provision has also been carried out in Staffordshire [CASE STUDY 6, overleaf]. Cross-sector co-operation is being developed in Worcestershire, by the local Health and Transport Partnership [CASE STUDY 7, overleaf].

66. Other options include, in suitable cases, use of social services transport rather than NHS non-emergency patient transport for the discharge of elderly people from hospital. Problems with transport can delay discharge, leading to bed blocking in the NHS. Discharges can often involve occupational therapists and social workers holding preliminary discharge-planning meetings with the user at the user’s home. Transport problems sometimes delay such pre-discharge home visits and also waste the time of social workers and other staff.
Operational responses to cost pressures

67. In addition to looking at strategic issues, authorities should be satisfied that their operational arrangements use resources well. Issues to examine include:

- improving the planning and scheduling of routes;
- helping providers to use staff and vehicles effectively;
- efficient management of in-house transport; and
- appropriate use of taxis and hired cars.

Each of these needs to be explored in consultation with users, carers, centre managers and other stakeholders.

Improving route planning and scheduling

68. Route planning is normally carried out in-house. To maximise efficiency, there need to be good links between officers making assessments and those scheduling, and allocating users to, transport. Some ad-hoc, in-year changes to arrangements are unavoidable, for example, when existing users change address or centre or need to change their days of attendance. However, continued long-term incremental change may eventually create a transport network that uses resources poorly. Regular re-examination of arrangements, to identify opportunities for rationalisation is essential, as is sensitivity to users’ needs when then making changes. Users, carers and other stakeholders should thus be consulted before making changes. Worcestershire is one county moving to more frequent re-appraisal of routes.

69. Successful network redesign will offer involve identifying and refining a number of options. Changes that increase technical efficiency – for example, by maximising seat utilisation – may be unacceptable if they have an adverse impact on service quality, particularly where they cause increased journey times. Changes in pick-up and drop-off times can have a major impact on users and carers; for example, a significantly later pick-up time might make it difficult for a carer to reach work on time. In addition, users and their carers can value staffing continuity. There are approaches that may help to address some of these difficulties, for example, splitting existing driver and escort teams so that users travelling on the new routes still know either the driver or the escort.

CASE STUDY 6
Integration of transport between social services and the NHS: Staffordshire

One hospital in Staffordshire has opened a day centre and rehabilitation facility jointly with the Social Services Department. About 60 people attend each weekday for physiotherapy and other services. Referrals are accepted on a quota basis from both social services and hospitals doctors, with the majority referred by the NHS to assist in post-operative recovery. The centre manager organises transport for all those coming in for daycare. Most of this is provided on social services wheelchair-accessible ‘blue ambulances’. A small number of users come in taxis provided by the NHS – these people are largely individuals who cannot easily be accommodated on the blue ambulance routes.

Source: Audit Commission
CASE STUDY 7

Integrated transport services: Worcestershire

A joint Worcestershire Health and Transport Partnership was formed in 1999 at the instigation of the County Council and Health Authority. By working together the partnership has substantially improved transport services in the area with significant funding being provided by both the County Council and the Health Authority. Changes in the acute health sector provided the catalyst for a stakeholder conference in November 1999, which identified the need to develop the partnership approach. Partners recognised that in some parts of rural Worcestershire there was a dearth of transport provision.

The joint group now includes a wide range of public, private, health and voluntary sector organisations including:

- Worcestershire County Council;
- Worcestershire Health Authority;
- Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Service;
- Wychavon Primary Care Group;
- Hereford and Worcester Chamber of Commerce;
- the local Community Council (representing community transport and the voluntary sector);
- Kidderminster and District Community Health Council; and
- bus operators.

The joint group was set up to develop a co-ordinated approach to transport which:

- produces harmony and synergy of Health and Local Government strategic policy;
- meets the objectives of The NHS Plan to promote partnership and collaboration;
- reduces duplication;
- achieves efficiency savings or service improvements;
- establishes a call centre for Worcestershire that manages community transport requests;
- provides access to premises which maintain health, which is crucial in terms of rural health; and
- achieves integration, enabling current organisational barriers to be addressed.

Consultants act as facilitators. Although the County Council and the Health Authority in Worcestershire were already pursuing joint working, their common interest in passenger transport was cemented by the need to consider access to hospital facilities. This has focused attention on how the route network can provide direct access to hospital sites. The Transport and Health Partnership has had initial discussions with Hereford and Worcester Ambulance Service to investigate closer working, and the potential for links between social services transport, non-emergency PTS, and community transport. Worcestershire’s Local Transport Plan has been developed in partnership through the Worcestershire Transport and Health Group. As an example of joint working with health, school nurses are being used to monitor the effectiveness of school travel plan initiatives.

Source: Audit Commission
70. Producing route schedules that consistently other high utilisation of vehicles and drivers is a skilled activity. In some authorities this task is undertaken by a nominated scheduler. However, it can be effective to make on-going ad hoc revisions to the initial schedules locally [CASE STUDY 8]. The advantages of imaginative thinking are illustrated by Worcestershire County Council, which is using one of its day-centres as a ‘bus depot’ for transfer between vehicles by users brought in from outlying areas before they go on to other centres. This reduces both travelling time for users and the number of vehicles used.

71. Many authorities still schedule manually. However, used appropriately, computer assisted scheduling systems – geographical information systems and other IT tools – can help improve design. For example, they can provide rapid on-screen display of where users live and the centres they attend, together with route options identified by schedulers, replacing the sometimes slow and cumbersome use of paper maps. Schedulers should not, therefore, view IT as a threat; it is a tool to assist them in doing a highly skilled job. Local knowledge – for example, of one-way systems or of traffic congestion blackspots in urban areas – is essential, as is the requirement to select approaches that are sensitive to the needs of users, carers and centres.

72. One authority visited by the Commission’s project team had a geographic information system but had not been using it to help with routing and scheduling. During the visit, the authority arranged for its schedulers to access the system for the first time. Within minutes, they were identifying inefficiencies and opportunities to rationalise and improve their existing arrangements. Worcestershire County Council is planning to make extensive use of IT and e-technology to help with its route planning [CASE STUDY 9].

**CASE STUDY 8**

Transport supervision and route planning: Carmarthenshire

In Carmarthenshire, day-to-day management of transport is devolved to senior drivers who are very familiar with the geographic area for which they are responsible and who deal with ad-hoc changes in routes and pick-up arrangements. The drivers are highly motivated in consequence. Vehicle utilisation is typically 75-85 per cent during weekday daytime operation.

*Source: Audit Commission*
Using resources effectively

73. Authorities should look at whether their transport arrangements allow service providers – whether in-house or contractors – to use staff and vehicles to good effect. For example, staggered session times at centres can allow more intensive use of transport; collective rather than door-step pick-up points, where appropriate, also allow better use of resources. Authorities, especially in urban areas, can consider whether to link routes exclusively to

CASE STUDY 9

Clean sheet scheduling and e-technology route planning: Worcestershire

Worcestershire County Council wants to undertake ‘clean sheet’ reviews of transport provision over the next five years. Officers plan to move to a culture of continual review.

In Worcestershire the local ambulance service already uses computer-assisted scheduling and planning. The county council has undertaken a detailed evaluation of the computer scheduling software currently available. A successful bid for funding for a computerised transport booking system compatible with both the County’s Passenger and Fleet Transport system and the Ambulance Trust system was submitted with the Local Transport Plan. The Ambulance Trust is undertaking a data capture exercise to investigate the potential for integrated scheduling. A sample of social services, special educational needs and non-emergency patient transport data is to be loaded to compare one week’s manual routes with the output from the County’s preferred package.

The Worcestershire Transport and Health Partnership has bid successfully for Invest-to-Save funding for ACTIVATE (Accessible & Co-ordinated Transport Initiatives Via Advanced Technology Enhancements). The central function of ACTIVATE is to implement a computer system that gives greater co-ordination of vehicles use across a number of organisations, including the County Council, community transport (dial-a-ride and voluntary car schemes) ambulance service and taxis. As well as using all available vehicles in the most effective way possible, it is intended to integrate their use with local public bus services.

Bookings and referrals for transport are to be made to a central point. The computer system will allocate journeys in the most efficient way, with the most appropriate vehicle despatched. Where a connection with a public bus service is required, the system will provide details of the connection and will inform both transport providers of the requirement.

A phased approach to implementation is planned. Initially a pilot phase will see the system used to manage a number of flexibly routed and feeder services, together with trials involving the County Council’s social services fleet, the ambulance service and the community transport sector. This is planned for completion in early 2002. Following testing, the system will be extended to special educational needs transport. The third stage will see the system extended to mainstream HTS transport. The co-ordinated travel management system will be backed by a state-of-the-art smartcard ticketing and billing system and linked information system introduced in conjunction with First Midland Red.

Source: Audit Commission
centres, so that a particular route serves only one centre, or to allow a route to deliver to and collect from two or more centres. The latter may sometimes improve vehicle utilisation but can have disadvantages. For example, the vehicle may need to deliver users at one of its centres earlier than would otherwise be necessary, to allow it to complete its last drop-off in time. Similarly, some evening pick-ups may be later than might otherwise be the case. Different centres might thus have different start and finish times. Such changes to times can have significant implications for users, carers and centre staff. Consultation will be necessary. Alternatively, for authorities with large rural catchments, a number of runs may be needed to bring users in to a centre. In Carmarthenshire, ‘first in, first out’ is operated so that all users spend about the same amount of time in the centre.

Managing in-house transport

74. Some local authorities use an in-house operation to provide some or all of their social services transport service. Different factors have prompted this approach. They include views that in-house provision:

- is cheaper than using externally contracted services or other means of purchasing transport;
- will help to ensure a competitive market and restrain contract price growth; or
- will allow the authority to meet service quality standards.

75. It is important to use these resources well. For example, Worcestershire reviewed use of its in house social services vehicles when transferring resources to its newly established Passenger and Fleet Transport Unit. It identified savings of £190,000.

76. The extent to which an authority can use vehicles and drivers during the middle of the day will also impact on in-house costs. Some councils have used their social services transport vehicles for trips in the middle of the day and, in some cases, to carry meals-on-wheels. Alternatively, passenger assistants and drivers can be employed by social services for additional duties – for example, to work as care assistants at day centres between their shifts on the vehicles.

77. Part-time or split-shift working is frequently used to manage costs. For example, in-house passenger assistants commonly work part-time and are not paid for the middle of the day. As discussed in the previous section, particular care may be needed to ensure that part-time staff are trained adequately. Female staff in particular find part-time or split-shift working an attractive employment opportunity. However, in some urban authorities split shifts for drivers can prove unworkable. If they find split shifts unattractive, bus driver shortages currently mean that alternative work may be readily available.

‘Central transport provides jobs for drivers – not a service for users.’

Report of a Joint Review of a Social Services Department by the SSI and the Audit Commission

78. Some authorities still need to do more to reach agreement with their staff sides on improvements to working practices and increased flexibility. In one authority a no-redundancy policy meant that it was arranging routes around driver numbers and consequently was over-resourced with both vehicles and drivers. Some authorities also have unacceptably high levels of sickness absence.
Poor morale can increase staff turnover, or sickness rates, driving up costs. Positively involving staff in the service and generating a sense of worth and professionalism will help to counteract this. To aid retention and improve morale, passenger assistants and drivers, including part-time staff, should be paid whenever they attend managerial briefings as well as for attending formal training. These events should be at times that part-time staff find convenient to attend.

‘We are the forgotten people.’

Member of vehicle crew quoted in one Best Value Inspection Service report

In organising passenger assistants, authorities need to plan for whether they are to join vehicles at depots in the morning, and return in them in the evening, or be picked up and dropped off by vehicles en route from and to depots. The latter may help to reduce the time and cost to passenger assistants of travelling to work but this advantage needs to be set against the extent to which it may distort network planning and reduce vehicle utilisation. Some authorities, such as Lewisham, insist that passenger assistants report for duty at the depot at the start of the day, and sign off at the end of their shift in the evening. They believe this helps to ensure that passenger assistants are properly briefed, managed and supervised and creates a sense of belonging and professionalism among staff. These arrangements are also a defence against possible ‘ghost employee’ frauds.

Reviewing where vehicles are kept overnight offers other opportunities for savings, as garaging some securely in satellite depots, close to pick-up and drop-off points or drivers’ homes, may also improve effectiveness; in Carmarthenshire, vehicles are left overnight at driver’s homes, which provides significant time and mileage savings. In this case, in contrast to Lewisham, passenger assistants join vehicles away from depots, illustrating how different arrangements suit differing local circumstances.

Whatever operational arrangements are used, drivers and escorts should be supervised effectively. In Staffordshire, each member of driving and escorting staff has a formal supervision plan with his or her line manager. Overtime is managed proactively. The authority has agreed changes with the staff side to reduce historical guaranteed overtime. Elsewhere, ‘lead drivers’ on transport to schools for children with special educational needs act in an supervisory capacity, supporting other drivers and ensuring vehicle maintenance is addressed and co-ordinated. They also raise any problems with, and provide input to, the managers of the transport section. Similar approaches can be used for social services transport.

Reviewing use of taxis and hired-cars

Some users’ journeys may be such that they are difficult to accommodate economically on an existing route. In addition, some in-year changes in the numbers of users to be carried, and the places they travel between, can also be difficult to accommodate within the existing route network. Thirdly, some people’s needs or behaviours mean that it is best that they do not travel with other users. Taxis and hired cars thus have an important role to play in meeting needs. They can also be used for respite care, and for ad hoc and emergency cover. However, they are usually substantially more expensive than dedicated minibus services. Regular reviews of routes should therefore seek to identify and remove their unnecessary use.
Where they are used, it is important that an authority makes effective and accountable use of its purchasing power. Many councils are spending hundreds of thousands of pounds a year in their local taxi and hire car market. Continued large-scale spot hire is unlikely to be cost effective. Following its best value review of transport, Lewisham is one authority that has been re-appraising its arrangements. Co-ordination of purchasing across departments, and the use of formal contracts, is likely to help authorities obtain better prices, and to help also to ensure that service quality is achieved. Contracts can include call-off prices for services required at short notice, as well as prices for scheduled work. Ad hoc purchasing also increases the dangers of corruption; formal contracting procedures, in line with the authority’s standing orders, provide defences against this.

Use of volunteer drivers to help deliver the service may be a cost-effective alternative to taxis or hired cars for some authorities. For example, Merthyr Tydfil’s social services department uses volunteer drivers for children and adult services.

This section looked at the tensions between controlling expenditure and improving service quality. Where cost savings are made, authorities may be able to invest in improving services. The questions in the following checklist will help councils to balance these tensions.
2 Balancing costs and service quality

**The context – increasing costs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is the authority monitoring the overall cost of social services transport over time, to monitor trends?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the authority monitoring trends in tender prices and in-house costs for social services transport?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has the authority separately analysed recently re-tendered contracts to identify trends?</td>
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**Strategic responses to cost pressures**

**Reviewing policies and provision**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has the authority considered the impact on social services transport when reviewing its policies (for example, the development of individual care packages)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has the authority considered the impact on social services transport when reviewing its provision (for example, the location of centres and other facilities)?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Has the authority consulted users, carers and other stakeholders before introducing significant changes that will impact upon them?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Has the authority informed all stakeholders of changes in policy once these are agreed?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Monitoring and benchmarking costs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do members responsible for the scrutiny of social services transport:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• review cost and other data, benchmarked against other authorities, at least annually?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• know how competitive costs are, compared to alternative provision?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do officers managing social services transport:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• know the costs and unit costs of each type of social services transport – for example, in-house minibuses; contractors’ minibuses; taxis, etc?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• know the split between different types of transport used (that is, the percentage of users carried by each type of transport)?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the authority have a set of local cost-based performance indicators?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Improving procurement and provision**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has the authority considered a range of options for providing social services transport?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Has the service been exposed to fair competition?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have market testing and contract letting been in accordance with the council’s standing orders?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>If the authority has evidence of cartel activity, has this been reported to the Office of Fair Trading?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Do contracts, or a service level agreements (SLA) with an Internal trading organisation, allow for changes to the network within the contract period?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are operators given the option of offering an enhanced level of service, as well as quoting for the core service level specified by the council, when they tender for work?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Monitoring contracts and service level agreements</strong></td>
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<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Are there arrangements to try to maintain staffing continuity, in appropriate cases, when contracts change – for example, when a change in staffing may severely disturb a user?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do contract and service level agreement terms reflect the authority's agreed quality standards?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do they include incentives that encourage providers to meet or exceed these standards?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the incentive regime used?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is performance against standards monitored regularly and reported to the social services department and to members?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are complaints monitored by the social services department and reported upon to members?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the authority satisfied with current contract monitoring arrangements?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Do performance measurement and complaints monitoring inform continuous service improvement?</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Co-operation within the authority</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do the authority use, or has it examined, other ways of improving efficiency by:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• jointly procuring services across departments?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• integrating provision across departments?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• operationally integrating its arrangements with other departments?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have decisions been made after consultation with users, carers and other stakeholders?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Have any decisions taken account of the potential impact on users, carers and centres?</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Co-operation with health</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Do the authority use, or has it examined, other ways of improving efficiency by working in partnership with NHS bodies (or other outside bodies, for example, community transport organisations)?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Operational responses to cost pressures</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Operate arrangements made in consultation with users, carers, centre managers and other stakeholders?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Improving route planning and scheduling</strong></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does transport allocation – that is, placing a user on a particular vehicle or route – take account of both current and likely future vehicle occupancy?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the authority regularly (for example, annually) review the entire route network to identify potential savings and efficiency improvements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do redesigns also take account of issues that concern users, carers and centres?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the authority consult with users, carers and centres before making major changes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has the authority examined ‘bus-depot’ arrangements?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does the authority use computer-assisted scheduling or other IT support?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Self-Assessment Checklist

If it does not, has it examined the option – for example, visited councils that use it; arranged for limited trial use?

### Using resources effectively

Has the authority explored options for reducing costs and improving efficiency, such as:

- staggering session times, to allow more intensive use of vehicles?
- full day, rather than separate half-day sessions, where appropriate?
- collective rather than door-step collection points, where safe and appropriate to do so?

### Managing in-house transport

Are drivers and vehicles well-utilised by:

- making other use of in-house vehicles in the middle of the day?
- finding other work for in-house drivers during the day?
- appropriate use of part-time or split shift working – for example, for in-house passenger assistants?
- use of satellite garages?

Are sickness levels managed effectively?

Are drivers and passenger assistants supervised effectively?

Is staff turnover, and the reasons for it, monitored?

Are staff made to feel part of the team, to improve morale and address potential turnover and sickness problems?

### Reviewing use of taxis and hired-cars

Do annual or other regular redesigns of the route network seek to minimise the use of taxis and hired-cars, within the constraints imposed by the authority’s quality standards?

Has the authority gone formally to contract for taxi and hired-car services?

Are the taxi and hired-car firms used from the authority’s approved list of contractors?

Do contracts cover other use of taxis and hired-cars as well as for social services transport?

Do contracts cover prices for ad-hoc, short-notice work as well as regular, scheduled journeys?

Does the authority co-ordinate purchasing of taxis and hired-cars across departments, including Taxicard, special educational needs, officer and member use of taxis and hired-cars, as well as social services?

Has contract letting been in accord with standing orders?

When undertaking work for the authority, are taxi and hired-car drivers asked to enter start and finish mileage on receipts as well as cost?

Have volunteer drivers (or mileage payments to carers) been considered as an alternative to use of taxis and hired-cars?
3. Managing the transport service

Clarifying roles and responsibilities

87. The user’s needs and preferences lie at the heart of effective transport services. There are four other key roles in delivering an efficient, well-managed and user-focused transport service for social services [EXHIBIT 3]:

- the policymakers;
- the budgetholder;
- the transport organiser; and
- the transport provider.

88. Effective communication and performance management are essential. Before an authority can perform effectively, responsibilities need to be clearly allocated and good liaison established between those involved. For instance, if the budgetholder within the social services department is not also directly responsible for transport procurement, there should be regular contact between the relevant post holders.

Policy making

“We never argue about the big issue but we all spend 15 hours on a small budget like door-to-door transport.”

Concillors quoted in a report on a Joint Review of a Social Services Department by the SSI and the Audit Commission

89. Elected members, supported by senior officers, set the overall policy framework and the budget within which a social services department provides transport. For example, the types of social services to provide – such as packages of care that are designed around the needs of individual users – the location and role of day centres, assessment criteria for day services and the geographical areas served by centres will all impact on the demand for transport and the type of services provided. Members should be well informed about expenditure and should ensure that it is monitored effectively. They should also set or agree performance and quality standards for the transport service.

Budget holding and setting

90. It is important that senior managers in social services know what transport is costing, to help them manage resources and to decide whether they are being used efficiently. Expenditure control problems, usually linked to weaknesses in budget setting and monitoring, are common. Improved monitoring is essential. Irrespective of how transport is arranged and provided, the social services department should always, therefore, have clear, reliable and up-to-date information on expenditure.

91. Where the budget is devolved to individual centres, the department still needs clear arrangements for monitoring expenditure and reporting on this to more senior managers, particularly if budget holding and service procurement are separate. Staffordshire social services has established clear lines of responsibility for transport and achieved a balance between central and local control. As routine day-to-day decisions are made at the day
Providing and managing transport
There are four key roles; feedback is essential.

Source: Audit Commission

centre, the central transport co-ordinator has more time available for planning improvements to transport. A proactive and ongoing review of social services transport costs has been achieved. The authority has thus made savings which have at least partly offset significant rises in tender prices.
92. Better monitoring, though important, cannot remedy unrealistic budget setting. Authorities need more realistically to link policies and budgets [EXHIBIT 4].

EXHIBIT 4

Making the links between policies and budgets

Authorities need to link policies and budgets more realistically.

Source: Audit Commission
Overspend pressures are particularly likely if budgets are set by broad-brush, top-down adjustments to last year’s budget. It is preferable to forecast demand, taking into account user numbers, demographics and needs and any significant changes expected in these. The budget will also need to take account of changes to the pattern of care, of how and where it is provided, changes to assessment policies and any additional quality requirements the social services department wishes to introduce. Lastly, cost pressures should be reflected by including likely inflation in tender prices or other transport costs. Even where this bottom-up approach produces figures that seem incompatible with overall budgetary constraints, potential problems will be identified earlier, allowing a managed response.

Organising transport

The organiser acts as the budgetholder’s agent. The organiser receives transport requirements – service standards and details of users and the locations between which they must travel. The organiser then plans, arranges and manages the necessary transport. This function is normally carried out in-house, although some authorities are examining possible outsourcing in their best value reviews of transport.

Even when budgets are held by centre managers, transport arrangements can be made by a central organiser – a transport co-ordinator – acting on their behalf. The central organiser may be a transport unit within social services, or may be a transport co-ordinating unit elsewhere in the authority. In some cases, where transport is provided by an ITO, the ITO acts as the organiser.

As discussed in the last section, the in-house organiser may be located outside the social services department, and may also be arranging transport for other departments or units within the authority. Difficulties can occur if the organiser’s responsibilities are not clear, or if the organiser is not providing relevant, accurate and timely information to the budgetholder. Good feedback is essential to help the budgetholder to manage the current year’s social services transport expenditure, to set future years’ budgets and to reveal whether service standards are being met. A clear delineation of the organiser’s role through a service level agreement (SLA) will help to avoid problems. The SLA should cover responsibilities for performance monitoring, and the handling of complaints, as well as financial monitoring. Shared IT and regular liaison meetings can also help [CASE STUDY 10].
Providing transport

97. The transport itself may be provided by an internal trading organisation, by contractors, including taxi or private car-hire operators, or by a mixture of external and in-house provision. In some cases, an ITO may pass part of the work on to taxi or private car-hire operators or other external providers, especially for emergency cover and to meet respite care or other ad hoc transport requests. In other instances, particularly in rural settings, authorities may choose to reimburse carers for providing transport. For example in Worcestershire, carers are paid the volunteer mileage rate when they transport a user to a day centre. Other authorities pay mileage to volunteer drivers.

98. When the service is provided in-house, the organiser and provider roles can sometimes be blurred. One officer may act both as the transport organiser and as the ITO manager. This creates potential conflicts of interest and attendant risks. If, for example, cost pressures within the ITO lead to a decline in service quality, who is to identify this and report to the budgetholder and policymakers? Similarly, it may be difficult to go to the market, and so demonstrate that an authority has embraced fair competition, if all the expertise in transport provision lies within the ITO.

99. This is not to say that, when provision is in-house, there should always be a separate full-time transport organiser role, separate from an ITO. But social services departments using ITOs should recognise the potential dangers of supplier capture. They should ensure that they have specified the information which they require, that they receive it and have confidence in its accuracy. They should also be prepared to seek third party advice, for example from consultants, where appropriate and necessary.

* * *

100. Clarity over roles and responsibilities is fundamental to ensuring effective service delivery. The following questions should help managers to check that these are in place.

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CASE STUDY 10

Clariying responsibilities: Devon

Devon County Council’s Social Services Department has a formal, written ‘Working Agreement’ (that is, a service level agreement) with the County’s Transport Co-ordinating Service.

Devon has recently upgraded its Transport Management System (TRAMS) which is used to manage both social services transport and education transport and to produce tickets for both contract and local bus and train services.

This Windows based system contains details of users, the centres they attend, the routes on which they travel, their pick-up times and points, the contracts for these routes and the contractors used. The system can be accessed by both social services, for example, when setting up users’ details on the system, and by the Transport Co-ordinating Service, when allocating users to particular vehicles and routes.

The Transport Co-ordination Service lets and manages transport contracts. It provides social services with monthly expenditure breakdowns that highlight deviations from budget profile, give the reasons for this and the reprojected impact on year-end outturn.

Source: Audit Commission
Managing the transport service

Clarifying roles and responsibilities

Do current arrangements clearly identify who:

- sets policies?
- sets the social services transport budget?
- consults with users, carers and other stakeholders about service quality, standards and performance?
- sets safety and service quality standards?
- identifies whether a user has specific transport needs?
- decides which centre a user is to attend?
- holds the social services transport budget?
- decides whether a user is eligible for transport?
- decides whether a user is to be escorted?
- arranges transport, letting contracts or entering into SLAs with in-house providers?
- assigns users to particular vehicles and routes?
- provides transport?
- provides passenger assistants?
- liaises with contractors or ITOs?
- monitors performance?

Policy making

At member level, does a single cabinet member/portfolio holder or committee have responsibility for all aspects of the service?

Have members set a separately identifiable budget for social services transport?

Do members receive regular reports on expenditure and how it compares to budget?

Have members set or agreed quality standards?

Do members receive regular reports on performance against quality standards?

Does performance measurement inform continuous service improvement?

Budget holding and setting

Does a single officer in the social services department have overall managerial responsibility for the service, covering assessment, decisions in individual cases, expenditure and quality of service issues – even if day-to-day operational responsibilities are dealt with by other officers?

Does the person with overall responsibility for the assessment decision also have overall responsibility for the budget for social services transport?
## Self-Assessment Checklist

**Is information about transport costs considered when making decisions about where users will receive services?**

**Are trade-offs between expenditure on transport and other uses of funds – for example, using savings on transport costs to fund other user support services – considered when making decisions about services?**

**Is the budget for social services transport generated using reliable assumptions about:**

- the impact of any known changes to assessment policy?
- demographics and patterns of need and any changes expected in the numbers of users as a result?
- expected discharges from hospitals?
- the impact of any changes to service quality requirements?
- any planned changes to care packages, facilities or the organisation of centres?
- tender prices?
- other transport costs?

**Is the transport budget profiled to take account of seasonal variations in expenditure?**

**Is outturn regularly and frequently monitored against the budget profile by the budgetholder?**

**Are possible overspends identified, and acted upon, during the year, as they develop?**

### Organising transport

If another part of the authority – or a contractor – is organising transport on behalf of the Social Services Department, have the organiser’s role and responsibilities been clearly and formally defined in a service level agreement or contract?

**Does the agreement or contract cover performance monitoring including:**

- what is to be monitored?
- who will monitor?
- who will receive monitoring information?
- when it is to be provided?

**Are these arrangements working?**

**Is the manager responsible for social services transport receiving regular and accurate performance monitoring information?**

**Does the SLA or contract cover the timely provision of financial information?**

**Does the budget-holder receive accurate and timely financial information?**

**Does the transport organiser know how the provider is performing against quality standards?**
## Self-Assessment Checklist

### Providing transport

Has the authority or organiser reviewed the mix of provision (for example, in-house, contractor, taxi and hired-car)?

Are the provider’s duties and responsibilities clearly and formally defined – for example, in a service level agreement or contract?

Does the agreement or contract cover performance monitoring including:

- what is to be monitored?
- who will monitor?
- who will receive monitoring information?
- when it is to be provided?

If the service is provided by an internal trading organisation whose manager is also acting as transport organiser, is the budgetholder:

- receiving sufficient timely and accurate information to form a true view of how the service is performing?
- able to access independent advice when considering or carrying out market tests?
- able to access independent advice when otherwise appropriate or necessary?
4. Achieving best value

101. When reviewing social services transport, authorities will need to decide their terms of reference, to apply the four Cs and to draw up an implementation plan. The rest of this section discusses these issues. For more general advice on how to carry out successful best value reviews, authorities should refer to Changing Gear: Audit Commission Best Value Annual Statement 2001.¹

102. Reviews may be followed by best value inspections by the Audit Commission’s best value inspection service. Newham Borough Council’s service was assessed as ‘good’ and ‘likely to improve’ in 2000. A follow-up inspection in July 2001 concluded that the service had improved since it was originally inspected. It also found that it was likely to continue to improve. Cheshire County Council [CASE STUDY 11] also received a ‘good’ and ‘likely to improve’ rating. Other best value inspection reports can be found at the Commission’s best value inspection website.Ⅱ

Setting terms of reference for best value reviews

‘[The best value review of transport] is reconsidering options about the most effective division of responsibility and the nature of the contractual relationship with service directorates.’

‘Stop-gap arrangements have been made to provide more reliable transport but the problem illustrates how best value reviews will require a neutral appraisal of the merits of contracts with in-house as opposed to external services. There are also issues for users, which should be addressed in the review.’

Reports on Joint Reviews of two Social Services Departments by the SSI and the Audit Commission

103. The scope of a best value review is important in focusing the review team’s time and effort. In general, best value reviews should tackle the most important issues for a local community, with review teams being clear about the problems to which they are seeking to find solutions before they begin.


Ⅱ www.bestvalueinspections.gov.uk.
CASE STUDY 11

Improving services: Cheshire

Cheshire’s Transport Co-ordination Service (TCS) carries 2,300 Social Services users between their homes and day centres at a cost of £3 million per year, using 60-70 vehicles from a combined fleet of 250 provided directly by TCS and private contractors.

The best value inspection found that Cheshire County Council Transport Co-ordination Service provides a good (two star) service based on the strengths of:
1. good practice and innovation;
2. the high regard of its customers;
3. its comparative performance; and
4. its cost-consciousness.

The service was found to be likely to improve. The judgement was based on:
1. a thorough Best Value Review, whose conclusions feed through to an ambitious improvement plan;
2. the service’s track record of innovation and improvement; and
3. the Council’s corporate frameworks for performance review.

One senior manager said:

‘TCS understands that transport is an integral part of a care package and is willing to tackle difficult problems…. [TCS has] responded well to the changing nature of the service’.

Specific comments referring to social services transport in the inspection report included:

‘Social Services senior managers praised TCS’s ability to use Service Level Agreement funding effectively and to attract funding from elsewhere. TCS works very closely with these user departments at central and local levels. Working relationships are very good, and have been further enhanced by the appointment of dedicated transport managers for each of Education and Social Services, a development which is greatly appreciated by the two departments … Although driver training extends only to the in-house fleet, TCS has issued a code of conduct for drivers of contracted vehicles.’

One example of innovation highlighted was the development of guidelines for the carriage of passengers in wheelchairs; these have since become national guidelines.

104. In reviewing social services transport, authorities need to consider a number of alternative approaches. One option is specifically to review social services transport. Another is to examine social services transport as part of a wider review of transport arrangements. Authorities preferring this approach include Newham, Cheshire, Tower Hamlets, Oldham, Hounslow, Coventry and Barking and Dagenham. There are strong arguments in its favour if the social services transport organiser is also organising transport for other council departments or if social services transport is operationally integrated with other transport services. And, where arrangements are not currently integrated, the approach allows councils to consider the option.

105. User departments should actively contribute and play a full part in best value reviews. For this reason, transport reviews — whether of social services transport alone or of social services transport and other transport services — may best be performed as part of, or shortly after, reviews of the services that the transport supports. Covering the transport service as part of a wider review has the additional advantage of making it more likely that future plans for transport take account of:

- demographic changes;
- expected changes in the numbers of users;
- changes in the profile of their needs;
- changes in how social services are provided, such as a move to individual user-focused care packages;
- development of joint commissioning for healthcare and social care;
- policies on maintaining users’ independence;
- changes to take into account how public transport is becoming increasingly accessible to people with disabilities in response to the Disability Discrimination Act; and
- decisions about the future location of centres and other facilities.

106. Within the terms of reference, authorities should ensure they are addressing all key issues, for instance, covering access to the service as well as quality standards. It may be appropriate, where transport services are provided in-house, also to include vehicle maintenance and other depot functions in a review. Alternatively, depot functions can be reviewed after social services transport and other transport services have been examined. Examining depot functions before reviewing transport services may be inadvisable; the safety, service-quality and other requirements of transport services are key inputs to any review of depot functions.

**Applying the four Cs**

107. Councils must apply the four Cs of best value to every review, using them as a framework for improving the service and as an integral part of the review process:

- **challenging** why and how a service is being provided;
- **comparing** their performance with that of others (including organisations in the private and voluntary sectors);
- **consulting** with users and other key stakeholders (including in this case, carers) as well as local taxpayers and the wider business community; and
- **embracing fair competition** as a means of securing efficient and effective services.
108. Best value inspections suggest that, in general, the four Cs are treated reactively and are seen as processes in their own right rather than being integral parts of the review process. The four Cs should be used as a framework for improving the service. The second part of the checklist following this section lists specific questions that authorities can use when applying the four Cs to social services transport.

**Challenging current approaches**

109. Challenge involves a willingness to go back to first principles, taking a clean sheet of paper, and asking what a service is for and how it is best provided. An authority needs to consider the underlying rationale for its social services transport arrangements and the alternative ways in which they might be provided. It should be willing to question existing commitments, including reviewing contract terms where this is appropriate. DETR Circular 10/99 includes a requirement that the review team includes an external member to provide an external perspective to challenge (and sets out other guidance for conducting reviews).

**Comparisons with others**

110. Comparisons can include examinations of:
- access arrangements and transport assessment policies;
- demand, for example, the numbers and percentages of users in particular service categories;
- comparisons of user numbers transported, including the mix and percentage of provision (in-house or contractor, minibus and taxi);
- financial comparisons, including expenditure on social services transport; and this expenditure as a percentage of the total expenditure on transport and of the total expenditure on social services;
- efficiency comparisons, for example comparisons of the unit cost (for example, annual spend per user or cost per day per user); similar comparisons but by mode of travel (for example, minibus, taxi or hired car); comparisons of the percentage of the expenditure that is on taxis and hired cars; and of measures of how well transport is used, such as the percentage of vehicle seats occupied;
- comparisons of policy, including service quality; and
- comparisons of the service quality achieved.

111. Consistency of definition is essential to allow meaningful comparisons. However, collecting consistent data on financial and other resources, including the number of people using transport, can be difficult to obtain. For example, an authority’s social services department may be looking after some children who have special educational needs, either in the longer term or because the authority is providing short-term respite care. In some instances, social services budgets may bear the cost of taking such children to and from school; in others the cost may fall on the special educational needs transport budget. Accounting treatments also differ, for example, the treatment of overheads, meaning that some cost variations between authorities reflect these rather than differences in operational

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practice. More work is, therefore, needed by many authorities to provide consistent data for financial and other comparisons. Consequently, benchmarking clubs such as LAPTOP, the 'core cities' group and groups within the Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers have an important role to play in best value.

112. Financial comparisons should thus be used with care. They are best made in tandem with comparisons of policies and service quality, both of which can influence cost. Results also need to be interpreted in the light of local circumstances, as costs are influenced by factors that are outside the control of those responsible for arranging, managing and providing the transport. These include:

- rurality and sparcity of population – relatively long journeys and a high use of taxis and hired cars, both of which drive up transport costs, may be unavoidable in some rural areas;
- users’ needs;
- the locations of day centres and other facilities;
- local traffic congestion; and
- other local factors, including the local transport market.

In exploring the reasons for variations, councils should challenge the explanations offered for differences, rather than accept them at face value.

Consulting stakeholders

113. The essence of best value is to improve services. Those best placed to provide information on the quality of service are existing and potential users, their carers and other stakeholders, including centres, drivers, passenger assistants and contractors [CASE STUDY 12]. Frontline staff will contribute an important perspective on how the transport service is perceived and valued and how it can be improved. Advice from external experts can add another important perspective. Authorities that have adopted the good practices described in earlier sections of this guide will already have in place mechanisms that regularly provide them with this information.

CASE STUDY 12

Consulting with stakeholders: Suffolk

Suffolk County Council included transport in user questionnaires during its best value review of day services. The best value review also included an advocacy group to help to identify users’ views on transport. Some issues about inequality of provision were highlighted. Access to services was linked to the availability of day services, rather than the needs of individual users. The authority also found that within its children’s services, potential for independent travel was being stifled by over-protective parents.

The authority’s best value review of learning disability daycare identified successes in assisting customers to provide their own transport.

Source: Audit Commission

I  LAPTOP – the London Authorities Passengers Transport Operational Panel – is a benchmarking club of local authority transport managers from across London.

II  The ‘core cities’ group is a benchmarking group of metropolitan and other urban authorities.
Embracing fair competition

114. Fair competition is central to demonstrating that a service is being delivered efficiently, within the constraints imposed by an authority’s quality standards. In England, reference should be made to DETR Circular 10/99 for guidance. This suggests that the main options for service delivery include:

- cessation of the service in whole or in part;
- transfer of the service to another provider;
- joint commissioning or delivery of the service;
- externalisation of the service (with no in-house bid);
- creation of a public-private partnership, such as a joint venture company;
- market testing of all or part of the service; and
- restructuring of the in-house service or the re-negotiation of an existing contract.

In Wales, guidance is set out in NAW Circular 14/2000.

115. Councils that have adopted the good practices discussed in earlier sections of this handbook will have many of the necessary components for embracing fair competition in place already.

Implementing review recommendations

116. A best value review should identify not just what needs to be done to improve the service but how the changes are to be made. Members need to be signed up to the proposals. The review report should include an improvement plan that meets the familiar SMART criteria. The plan should be supported by a robust performance management framework.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific</th>
<th>The expected outcomes are clear as are responsibilities for achieving them</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Measurable</td>
<td>Managers and staff know when they have achieved the outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agreed</td>
<td>Managers and staff know what is to be done by whom and by when and have signed up to the targets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Realistic</td>
<td>Those involved believe that the targets, though challenging, are achievable within the time limits and resources available</td>
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<tr>
<td>Timebound</td>
<td>There are agreed completion dates or points at which progress will be reviewed</td>
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117. The Commission’s best value inspectors have been critical of best value plans that fail to meet such criteria, judging it ‘unlikely’ that they will lead to service improvement [BOX H].
The first part of the following checklist will help authorities to ensure that they are addressing the four Cs and to deliver an action plan for improvement. The second checklist provides more detailed questions for authorities reviewing social services transport.

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**BOX H**

**Best Value Inspection Service report on a best value review of transport**

The report concluded that the service was unlikely to improve. The Inspector commented that:

‘A best value review should produce an improvement plan that sets out what needs to improve, why and how that improvement will be delivered. It should contain targets which are not only challenging but also designed to demonstrate and ensure the continuous improvement necessary to put the service among the top 25 per cent of councils within five years...

The [council’s] plan assigns broad accountabilities and timescales to specific tasks, but the targets are not SMART. Points identified in the plan for improvement are not expanded in terms of:

- specific actions to be taken to achieve the required changes;
- how progress will be measured and what the success criteria are;
- detailed responsibilities to lead on and contribute to each item;
- realistic assessments of financial and time resources required; and
- milestones to reach target dates for completion...

Some deadlines [in the council’s plan] …are vague …The lack of performance management is also of concern to us. There are no formal structures and mechanisms identified to ensure implementation, monitoring and adjustment of the plan. No individual or group is clearly identified as having responsibility for ensuring that action points and timetables are met; or as having authority to ensure that the different departments do what they have to do, or that they have the money to do it...

‘Crucially, officers at key decision-making levels in departments do not universally support the action plan. Social services officers told us the action plan was seen as “just a set of recommendations” which “needs another column, with the detail of what’s actually been agreed subsequently” ‘.

Source: Audit Commission

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118. The first part of the following checklist will help authorities to ensure that they are addressing the four Cs and to deliver an action plan for improvement. The second checklist provides more detailed questions for authorities reviewing social services transport.
### 1. Current arrangements

#### Setting terms of reference for best value reviews

Has the authority considered a range of options when setting terms of reference, including:

- covering social services transport as part of a wider review of social care?
- covering social services transport with a wider review of transport, for example one also covering transport for children with special educational needs?
- reviewing social services transport by itself?

Has the authority considered the sequence in which to carry out transport and other reviews – for example, so that transport reviews are informed by wider policy; so that transport reviews inform workshop or depot reviews?

Is the authority following Government guidance set out in DETR Circular 10/99 or, in Wales, NAW Circular 14/2000?

Is the review outcome rather than process focused that is, concentrating on how to improve services rather than on process for its own sake?

Are elected members fully involved with and committed to the review?

Is the social services department, as the department with the policy remit, fully involved with the review?

If the review also covers other types of transport, for example, education transport, are the user departments for that transport also fully involved?

Is the transport organiser fully involved?

Is any in-house provider involved?

Are contractors involved?

Is the timescale realistic?

Has the authority ensured as wide a scope for the review as is practical?

If the authority charges for transport services, has the authority reviewed the charging arrangements taking account of the general principles set out in the Audit Commission report *The Price is Right?* and the advice on charging for home care in *Charging with Care*?

Has the authority considered how the review links to the Local Transport Plan and other linked strategic plans?

#### Applying the four Cs

Is the review challenging current approaches, taking a ‘blank sheet of paper’ approach?

Is the review making appropriate comparisons with others?

Do these comparisons cover:

- demand?
SELF-ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

- expenditures?
- efficiency measures?
- policy and service standards?
- service quality?
- how the service is managed, organised and provided?

Is the authority working with others to ensure that it uses consistent definitions when comparing cost and other data?

Are cost comparisons interpreted in the light of:

- comparisons of policy, service standards and service quality?
- local circumstances?

Has the authority used performance indicators to identify areas where social services transport is not performing well, and then carried out further research to identify the reasons why?

Has the authority consulted:

- users and carers?
- social services centres?
- drivers and escorts?
- contractors?
- other stakeholders?

Has the authority overcome any linguistic or other barriers to effective consultation?

Has the authority used appropriate methods to consult with people who have learning difficulties or sensory impairment?

Has it provided effective feedback to consultees, overcoming linguistic and other barriers and taking account of the needs of people with learning difficulties or sensory impairments?

Can the authority demonstrate that its current arrangements for providing the service are competitive, within the constraints of its quality standards?

**Implementing review recommendations**

Have members agreed the proposals?

Is there a SMART implementation plan, that is, one that is:

- **Specific** (the expected outcomes are clear as are responsibilities for achieving them)?
- **Measurable** (managers and staff know when they have achieved the outcomes)?
- **Agreed** (managers and staff know what is to be done, by whom and by when and have signed up to the targets)?
- **Realistic** (those involved believe that the targets, though challenging, are achievable within the time limits and resources available)?
SELF–ASSESSMENT CHECKLIST

- Timebound (there are agreed completion dates or points at which progress will be reviewed)?
  - Has the plan been costed to cover:
    - the resources required to manage implementation?
    - the direct costs of implementation?
  - Have the necessary staff and resources been provided?
  - Is achievement against targets being monitored as part of a robust performance management system?

2. Reviewing social services transport using the four Cs

Challenging current approaches

What are the authority’s statutory obligations?

Does the authority:

- communicate effectively with users and carers?
- need to do more to ensure that vehicles equipment and procedures are safe?
- need to improve quality of service, including reliability and comfort?

What impact will the changes to social care arrangements have on the service, as care is increasingly provided in people’s homes?

How are numbers of users at specific centres likely to change?

How are the numbers and locations of day centres likely to alter?

Is the number of users of social services transport likely to change?

What impact will the Disability Discrimination Act have on the service, as public transport increasingly becomes accessible to people with disabilities?

What impact will working increasingly with health have on commissioning arrangements for the transport service?

What implications do changes have for expenditure on social services transport and for how the authority organises the service?

Does the authority need to:

- alter transport arrangements in response to change?
- be more flexibility?
- improve the cost effectiveness of social services transport?
- change its policies on assessment for social services transport?
- change how it meets transport needs?

Is the authority paying enough attention to equalities issues?
## Self-Assessment Checklist

Are there any language issues or cultural sensitivities to which the authority should respond?

Does the authority need to make any changes to arrangements in order to respond to the social services and related transport needs of asylum seekers or refugees?

What mix of provision – minibuses; taxi, etc – is the authority using?

What criteria have led to this mix?

Are the criteria still appropriate?

Is the mix still appropriate?

Are existing escorting arrangements good enough?

Are drivers (in-house drivers, contractors’ drivers, taxi and hired-car drivers, including stand-in and replacement drivers) sufficiently trained and vetted as required by the Protection of Children Act 1999 and the Care Standards Act 2000?

Are passenger assistants (in-house staff, agency staff, assistants provided by contractors, and stand-in and replacement) sufficiently trained and vetted as required by the legislation?

Does the authority need to improve how it sets budgets?

Does it need to improve how it monitors and manages the service?

### Comparisons with others

How do other authorities approach transport for social services users?

Is the review making appropriate comparisons with others?

How do social services transport:

- policies;
- arrangements for deciding on, and reviewing, assessment;
- service delivery (including the mix of methods – minibus; taxi, etc);
- escorting criteria;
- training and vetting of passenger assistants and drivers;
- arrangements for ensuring passengers’ safety;
- service standards, including standards for comfort and reliability;
- arrangements for consulting users/carers/social services centres/other stakeholders;
- budget setting;
- management and performance monitoring; and
- costs and performance;

compare with those of other authorities?

How do quality standards, costs and performance compare with other transport operations – for example, home-to-school transport?
Does the authority need to do more work with other authorities, to develop consistent and comparable measures of cost and performance?

Are cost comparisons interpreted in the light of:

- comparisons of policy, service standards and service quality; and
- local circumstances?

**Consulting stakeholders**

What do:

- users;
- carers;
- centre managers and staff;
- drivers and passenger assistants;
- contractors; and
- other stakeholders,

think about:

- policies;
- service standards;
- quality of service, including safety, comfort and reliability;
- what is working well; and
- what needs to be improved?

How can the authority further involve users and their carers, staff and contractors in planning and implementing improvements to the transport service?

Has the authority considered the needs of potential users as well as existing users of the service?

Has consultation revealed any linguistic, cultural or religious barriers to access to the service that need to be addressed?

How is the authority going to feedback decisions made following consultation to the people and organisations consulted?

How can the authority develop relationships with stakeholders to promote an ongoing dialogue?

Has the authority considered introducing a system to monitor ‘compliments and complaints’?

**Embracing fair competition**

Which of the options for future service delivery, listed in DETR Circular 10/99, does the authority intend to follow?

Do comparisons of cost, service standards and performance suggest that these are in line with those of other authorities?
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Answer</th>
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<tr>
<td>How much of the service has been exposed to competition and how recently?</td>
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<td>Is there a potentially increased role for the voluntary sector?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Would the authority obtain a better service, or reduce costs with no loss of service quality, if more of the service were to be put to competition or to be provided by external suppliers?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the authority need to change its contract tender strategy to ensure a greater number of, or more competitive, bids?</td>
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<td>Could the authority alter contract periods or move away from fixed term periods?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Could work be packaged differently, either offering smaller packages (such as individual routes or small groups of routes, to encourage bids from smaller suppliers and entry into the market) or larger packages (for example, in conjunction with education or other work, to offer suppliers opportunities for economies of scale)?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Could savings be made without compromising service quality, or quality improved without increasing cost, if the authority integrated user-side social services transport functions – for example, arranging and managing transport provision – or provision of social services transport with special educational needs transport?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>How much, in total, is council-funded work worth to the local taxi/private hire market?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Does the authority use taxis and hired-cars for other work (for example, travel by officers and members; to carry education service users)?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the authority also funding a Taxicard scheme?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Is the authority fully exploiting its purchasing power in the taxi and hired-car market to obtain keen prices?</td>
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## Conclusion

119. The Commission national report, *Going Places* describes what central government can do to improve the framework within which local authorities work. *Going Places* also summarises the actions that councils can take to improve both social services transport and home-to-school transport within the current framework as shown in the table below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LOCAL AUTHORITIES SHOULD:</th>
<th>THIS WILL:</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Improve user-focus</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consult with service users and their parents/carers and with other stakeholders such as schools and social services centres</td>
<td>Identify whether current arrangements meet user needs and, if they do not, what improvements are needed to create quality, user-focused arrangements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that services meet health and safety and other legal requirements and also reflect the results of consultation. (Councils should work to national quality standards once these have been set by central Government, enhancing these locally if they choose, so that they reflect local needs and priorities)</td>
<td>Help to ensure that services are safe and meet users’ needs and expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work with schools and transport providers to address vandalism and bullying on mainstream home-to-school transport, considering whether it is necessary in appropriate cases to place passenger assistants on vehicles</td>
<td>Reduce vandalism and bullying, making bus-based travel to school more attractive to pupils and parents. This will reduce operators’ losses to vandalism, and so help to control contract prices. Improved pupil behaviour will also make driving school buses less stressful, helping to address driver shortages and associated wage pressures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ensure that drivers and passenger assistants are properly trained and screened</td>
<td>Help to meet health and safety obligations and improve customer care</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Take account of the wider policy context</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Examine arrangements in the context of wider policies on access to, and the location of, education facilities and social services, when carrying out best value reviews</td>
<td>Ensure that best value reviews are not focused narrowly on technical aspects of transport but that they also address fundamental questions about why transport services are needed and about who is to use them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consider policies and arrangements in the context of social inclusion, wider environmental policies, broader transport policies and the health and fitness agenda</td>
<td>Integrate approaches with broader transport and travel policies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work with others</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Consider whether there is scope to improve access, efficiency, effectiveness and customer focus, for example by working in partnership. Options include greater co-operation across departments within the authority, working with PTEs (in the metropolitan areas), with community transport bodies from the voluntary sector and with health bodies</td>
<td>Identify opportunities to provide customers with integrated, user-focused services or to use resources more efficiently</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Review funding</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Set realistic budgets that reflect demand and the authority’s service standards, and monitor expenditure regularly and effectively</td>
<td>Take account of service standards when setting budgets and reduce the likelihood of budget overspends</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Improve efficiency</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Review the use of IT, route planning and scheduling and the use of taxis and hired-cars</td>
<td>Release resources to fund improvements in quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Improve how the services are managed</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Clearly delineate transport roles, especially when transport is provided in-house</td>
<td>Help ensure that client departments are setting and monitoring performance against quality standards. It will also help with budget setting and monitoring</td>
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<tr>
<td>Monitor performance more effectively</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use contracts or service level agreements that encourage service providers to meet and exceed safety and quality standards</td>
<td>Help to ensure that safety and quality standards are met</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Plan for change</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Review how transport requirements and funding need to change in response to the challenges ahead</td>
<td>Ensure that transport arrangements respond to increased joint commissioning of health and social care, to other changes in social care (such as individually designed care packages) and to changes in education (such as greater specialisation by schools and a greater emphasis on after-school activities)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Audit Commission*
Local authorities have already done much to provide good transport services for social services users. There are opportunities to improve this still further. Users should be at the centre of the service and their views taken into account in framing and assessing policies and performance. It is important that those dealing with policy and service provision in social services departments work with their authorities’ transport managers, that they provide strategic direction to the service and they seek, receive and, where necessary, act upon, information about how the service is performing. This should include realistic budget setting and monitoring, and paying full attention to safety and to service quality – for example, reliability, journey times and comfort – as well as costs and efficiency, to ensure delivery of a holistic, user-focused service. It is also important that they begin to plan for the changes ahead, including more individually defined user-focused services and the expansion of joint provision of health and social care.
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Delivering Results  
The fifth overview report of the Joint Review Team tackles the main issues that are challenging social services and hopes to offer advice on how they can be tackled. It draws on findings from Joint Reviews in England and Wales in the last year, and reviews the progress made since 1996, to share analysis and learning with the aim of supporting councils in the challenges they face. The report is written primarily to inform councillors and managers of social care services, but will be relevant to those working in related areas and interested members of the community.

Charging With Care  
How Councils Charge for Home Care
Charging with Care explores the variations in home-care charging. It looks at why these variations occur and the consequences of different charging arrangements for users. This report also examines what councils can do to improve the way they manage their charges, and shows how best value reviews provide an opportunity to improve their design and management. Charging with Care will help to inform the wider debate surrounding the funding of long-term care.

The Special School Run  
Reviewing Special Educational Needs Transport in London
There are useful lessons to be learnt nationally from this London-based study examining special educational needs (SEN) transport. This report focuses on helping authorities to improve their home-to-school transport for children with SEN. It includes comparative information on policies, arrangements and costs across London and a self-assessment checklist.

The Audit Commission has produced a number of reports covering issues related to police services and general management. The following may be of interest to readers of this report:

To order Audit Commission publications or request a catalogue, please telephone 0800 502030, or write to Audit Commission, PO Box 99, Wetherby LS23 7JA.
Social services transport enables many people to attend local day centres and other social services facilities and costs local authorities over £150 million a year. While often seen as diverting resources from services, transport is essential to allow people to access facilities, and thus plays an important role in promoting social inclusion. This, in turn, helps to prevent or reduce the depression people might feel if they were unable to meet others, and can provide respite for their carers.

The users of this transport, include elderly people and adults with learning and communication difficulties. Some needing to travel in wheelchair-accessible vehicles. They and other need supervision and support from passenger assistants. While many people are happy with their service, others have concerns. These include unprofessional behaviour such as rudeness and swearing by some drivers and passenger assistants. Service standards also vary. Staff are not always fully trained, screened by the police when they should be, or made aware of the needs of the people they carry, all of which can have serious implications for passengers' safety.

There are opportunities for greater co-ordination of arrangements between different departments within councils and between councils and other transport providers. Arrangements also need to respond to the challenges of the wider policy agenda, including the joint commissioning of health and social care, the increasing individual focus in delivering care packages, and the impact of the Disability Discrimination Act.

This handbook sets out ideas to help managers responsible for policy on, and access to, social services facilities and those organising and providing the transport and included a series of self-assessment checklists and examples of good practice.

Three other handbooks in this series offer guidance on other transport services – travel to mainstream schools, special schools and health care. The overall issues raised are also addressed in a national report, Going Places: Taking People to and from Education, Social Services and Health Care. This suggests how central government can help local authorities by reviewing the framework within which they work.