

**Item 10 - Question Time**

To the Chair of the Care, Learning & Housing Committee/Chair of the Environment, Development & Infrastructure Committee

At Full Council on 27 June 2019, I highlighted serious issues with the Stagecoach school bus services. I was reassured that the Public Transport Team had received an improvement plan from the company.

After no signs of improvement this school year, my constituents in Beaully and Kirkhill are relieved to hear their Charleston Academy bus service will revert to the popular local bus company D&E Coaches next term; the Stagecoach contract having been terminated. However, parents in Struy, Kiltarlity, Hughton, Croachy, Farr and other villages in my Ward continue to express significant concerns about the safety and reliability of the Stagecoach school bus service and they have asked why their service hasn't also reverted to D&E Coaches.

It is hoped that the Highland Council recouped all or part of the cost of the terminated school bus contract in respect of the Beaully/Kirkhill to Charleston school service and that penalty clauses are being enforced in relation to continuing issues with the remaining school bus services contract.

In answer to my supplementary question about bus safety, I was advised that the Leader of the Council had contacted the Traffic Commissioner about safety concerns and that my request to introduce regular inspections of school buses would be considered.

I look forward to hearing from the Leader about the outcome of her discussions with the Traffic Commissioner and I'd like to ask what steps have been taken to introduce safety inspections on school buses?"

Response to Ms E Knox

It is confirmed that the contract for Beaully and Kirkhill school transport has been awarded to D&E Coaches with effect from 28 October.

The contract for Struy, Hughton and Kiltarlity has had far fewer defaults, with only one incident of late running attracting a penalty since Stagecoach took over the contract in January. We therefore have had no reason to terminate that contract.

However, Stagecoach revised the timetable for the Struy/Kiltarlity buses in August, giving more running time in the mornings. This has proved to be excessive and they have agreed to re-register the service to run 5 minutes later.

The only complaint which the Council's transport team have received from Croachy or Farr was about the timetabling of the Farr Primary School bus, and this was

resolved by a meeting between Stagecoach and the Head Teacher. If Members are aware of any concerns, they should be passed to contact the Transport team.

The default clause in our contracts is being enforced, using the scale of default points and liquidated damages (financial deductions) as set out in the contract. Timekeeping and reliability have been the predominant reasons for defaults.

The letter from the Leader to the Traffic Commissioner questioned the safety of vehicles, but we have not found evidence of buses being unsafe to operate. The letter did note our awareness that the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) had visited the Stagecoach premises given their role in working with the Traffic Commissioner to promote and enforce compliance, including by enforcing the law on legal standards and regulations of vehicles. The Traffic Commissioner has an important role in ensuring compliance with operator licences.

Following receipt of the letter from the Leader, the Traffic Commissioner's office contacted our Principal Transport Officer to ask for our log of contract defaults, which he supplied. To date we have had no further contact from her office.