

LONDON BOROUGH OF MERTON

REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS ARISING FROM

A SCRUTINY REVIEW OF

MERTON COUNCIL'S

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT SERVICE

MARCH 2010



FOREWORD BY REVIEW CHAIR

Dear Reader,

First of all, I would like to thank all members and officers associated with the Panel, and in particular the co-optees who have all made valuable contributions to the review.

The opportunity to meet so many of the people who use Merton's day centres and to discuss the transport service they receive has proved to be an enjoyable experience, as well as being very informative. Undertaking this piece of work has made me realise how important it is to provide transportation for this vulnerable group of residents, so that they may enjoy a full and enriched life. It is also important to provide a service that is fit for purpose and presents best value for money.

It is with these aims in mind that we offer this report to the Cabinet, so that it can take on board the comments and recommendations that have been made in this report and, where appropriate, commission further work where necessary.

Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender

Chair of Review Task Group

Chair of Healthier Communities and Older People Scrutiny Panel

**MEMBERSHIP OF REVIEW TASK GROUP
(Members of the Healthier Communities and Older People Scrutiny Panel)**

Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender (Chair)
Councillor Sheila Knight (Vice-chair)
Councillor Margaret Brierly
Councillor Jeremy Bruce
Councillor Peter McCabe
Councillor Denise March
Councillor Dennis Pearce
Councillor Gregory Udeh

Co-opted representatives:-

Myrtle Agutter
Laura Johnson
Saleem Sheikh

Acknowledgements:

The Panel would like to express its thanks and appreciation to all those who contributed to this review. In particular, thanks goes to the staff and clients in the day centres around the borough, who made the task group members welcome. Also thanks to the Learning Disability Carers Group, who dedicated part of a monthly meeting to the issue of transport.

All views received throughout the review have remained anonymous and have been considered and taken into account when drawing up this report and the recommendations.

For further information relating to the review, please contact:

The Scrutiny Team
London Borough of Merton,
Chief Executive's Department
9th floor Civic Centre
London Road
Morden, Surrey SM4 5DX
Tel: 020 8545 3390; E-Mail: scrutiny@merton.gov.uk

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following key recommendations have emerged from the review:-

Rec No.	Recommendation	To be actioned by:
1	That effective channels of communication be maintained between drivers and clients, so that in the event of delay in picking up clients, they are made aware of the delay and the likely revised pick-up time.	Merton Transport Service
2	That the rotas for picking up and dropping off clients at day centres be rotated periodically, to make the system fairer and to share the burden of time spent on the vehicles and time missed at day centres.	Merton Transport Service
3	That Merton Transport Service investigates the potential for drivers and vehicles to be offered during the daytime to Merton's day centres in order for day trips to be resumed.	Merton Transport Service
4	That clients' concerns about impending personalised budgets be acknowledged and that strong advice, guidance and support be on hand when these are introduced, in order to help people make informed choices and decisions about the services they purchase.	Merton Adult Services
5	That, in order to ensure full social inclusion with regard to the transport service provided by the Council, a proper protocol on use of seatbelt extensions is established as part of health and safety policy, so that advice and guidance on use of seatbelt extensions is applied consistently and operated to the benefit of service users.	Merton Transport Service
6	That clear lines of accountability and regular monitoring of the service are established, to ensure an effective service is delivered and strong customer service skills are in evidence.	Merton Transport Service
7	That a comprehensive system for sharing information between carers, drivers, escorts and day centre staff is developed, to help keep carers and clients up to date.	Merton Transport Service/Merton Adult Services
8	That there should be continuity in the use of escorts wherever possible and that the potential for using day centre staff as escorts be explored.	Merton Transport Service/Merton Adult Services
9	That, in order to reflect the important role that escorts fulfil, disability awareness training is made mandatory for all escorts and that their training provides them with the tools to tailor the service to users' needs.	Merton Transport Service
10	That consideration be given to examining the merits of undertaking a competitive tendering process with regard to the council's transport service.	Environment and Regeneration Department
11	That work should be undertaken to develop stronger links and channels of communication between Merton Transport Services and different local transport providers with the aim of maximising use of resources and improving community transport provision for users.	Merton Transport Service

Scrutiny Review Report on Merton's Community Transport Services

12	That the Merton Transport Service Manager establishes a dialogue with local NHS trusts, to explore ways to maximise the sharing of transport resources to benefit patients, particularly during periods of peak demand and activity.	Merton Transport Service Manager
13	That the review report be forwarded to LINK Merton, with a request that the LINK considers engaging with local hospitals' non- urgent patient transport units, in order to develop channels of communication and develop closer working.	Scrutiny Team
14	That this scrutiny review report and the external review report are considered by Cabinet at the same time, to ensure there is an inclusive approach to the outcomes of both pieces of work.	Cabinet

The Healthier Communities and Older People Scrutiny Panel will monitor progress with implementation of these recommendations, subject to acceptance by the Executive in 2010.

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 In June 2009, Merton's Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel considered a range of potential issues to be included in its 2009/10 scrutiny work programme, including topics for scrutiny review.
- 1.2 Community transport services emerged as an issue of concern, in light of some councillors having heard of problems from users of Merton's day centres who use Merton Council's transport service, or other service providers to attend the day centres, such as Dial-a Ride and Merton Community Transport.
- 1.3 The Healthier Communities and Older People Overview and Scrutiny Panel appointed Councillor Gilli Lewis-Lavender to chair a review task group, which would comprise all Panel members and the co-optees, so that the whole Panel membership could be involved in the work whenever possible.
- 1.4 The Panel agreed its scope and terms of reference in July 2009 – see Appendix A.
- 1.5 The councillors acknowledged that an inter-departmental review of the Council's passenger transport service was also being conducted during 2009, with a main focus on improving efficiency and maximising use of existing resources. As this in-house review did not include any engagement with service users, the councillors agreed that the scrutiny review should conduct a comprehensive face-to-face engagement process through visits to all the day centres in Merton. The findings of the in-house review would then be taken into account when drawing up scrutiny recommendations.
- 1.6 As part of the review, the task group felt it was also necessary to revisit the findings of two earlier scrutiny review work which had focused on community transport issues, namely a review of older people's day care provision in 2001, which made a recommendation relating to transport provision and a review of SEN transport undertaken in 2002, which included engaging with parents of children with special educational needs on the transport used to convey them to school.
- 1.7 The scrutiny review of older people's day care in 2001, recommended that a commitment should be given to utilising the spare capacity in drivers' time to the benefit of adult social care clients and that consideration should be given *'to unlocking the potential of Merton's transport fleet, by staggering activities within the day centres throughout the day, possibly allowing centres to stay open later and utilise the vehicles when they are not busy. The Transport Manager needs to be included from the beginning.'* It was also recommended *'that a simple questionnaire, with a few suggestions for trips, together with an explanatory letter, be prepared and distributed to day centres, including those in the voluntary sector, to take advantage of spare capacity within transport.'*

- 1.8 The review in 2001 also looked at day care for other adults and recommended *'that transport to day centres should be urgently reviewed to reduce journey times and provide more flexibility in the days and times available for users and their carers; also that issues surrounding Council-run transport should be a high priority when considering the Best Value Review Programme.'*
- 1.9 It is revealing that the issues leading to the above recommendations have emerged again during this scrutiny review, indicating that little, if any, progress has been made to improve the Authority's transport service for its users. The in-house inter-departmental review mentioned in paragraph 1.4 above indicates that the Authority acknowledges the need to review its passenger transport provision and the scrutiny review focus on the service user perspective has drawn out the same issues as before.
- 1.10 There were 14 recommendations arising from the scrutiny review of transport arrangements for SEN students in 2002. The key areas of concern which emerged at this time included the need for more efficient communication between parents and the Transport Service, issues of health and safety relating to drivers and escorts, as well as transport equipment, and the reliability of cab companies generally.
- 1.11 The current review of transport has not focused on SEN transport services, but the importance of effective communication channels has been raised again, as well as the need to provide safe transport for users. Nevertheless, given the importance of SEN transport for those who use it, the Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel reviewed and produced a report on SEN statementing, which included looking at the data relating to SEN transport, the journeys undertaken both in the borough and out of borough and the costs involved. This has served to show the level of transport usage in this area and the cost (335 pupils being transported at a cost of nearly £2.5m).

2. TASK GROUP EVIDENCE GATHERING

- 2.1 A timetable of local witness sessions was drawn up to take forward the review. It was agreed that the first step should be to meet with Merton Council's Transport Service Manager and a meeting was held with Helen Catling on 22nd July 2009.

First task group meeting July 2009 with Merton Transport Services Manager

- 2.2 The task group was advised that the recommendations from the 2002 review of SEN Transport had been largely implemented, but that there was no mixed use between adults and children at the same time. The main development had been through cross-borough working between the boroughs of Merton and Sutton, with shared use of cabs. This was not the case for adult social care service users though.
- 2.3 Minicabs transport 174 SEN children, some in twos, threes or fours - using 150 cabs, largely to out-borough schools. There is a robust process, with every child reviewed to establish whether they are still eligible and some savings have been made. Nevertheless, the service is still expensive to resource.
- 2.4 With regard to older young people aged 16+ years, they are transported to college and travel training is provided where appropriate, to provide a measure of independence. There is an issue around SEN pupils being able to take part in mainstream activities such as breakfast clubs and after school clubs and it is understandable that they wish to be involved. But this can be a problem for the transport service. Whilst under the 'Every Child Matters' agenda, there are rights regarding access to services and inclusion, widening the flexibility in the transport service can result in additional costs. It may sometimes be more cost-effective to provide a car to the parents, but licensing the driver can be an issue. Also, a number of out-borough pupils come in to Merton's special schools.
- 2.5 The task group also considered transport services for adults and older people, including the impact of new legislation which will result in the introduction of personal budgets for adult social care service users from April 2011. It was clear that there would be still be some need for a transport service, but also there would be more flexibility for service users due to choice on how to use allocated funds. So there could be savings to be made in the future, through being able to reduce the transport fleet if users' choice of service results in less demand.
- 2.6 Councillor Pearce advised that Friends in St Helier (FISH) use Merton Transport buses and there are no problems, except that it can be difficult to physically get the bus out of the depot, due to other vehicles blocking in the bus and lack of co-operation to move vehicles out of the way. The Transport Manager agreed that the site at Garth Road in Morden has a major space problem and there is now dedicated parking areas for the fleet organised according to travel timings.

- 2.7 The issue of wasted time was raised, in terms of early pick ups at 2.30pm. This was highlighted during the previous review of day care, as well as the need to make use of spare transport capacity. The task group was advised by Merton Transport Manager that not all the drivers are full time employees, but are part-time/term-time only. She accepted that ideally ad hoc work such as trips and outings should be provided, as shopping trips etc promoted more independence. In fact, drivers have been based at some day centres for the last two years, which should potentially give some scope for a more flexible service. *(Subsequent examination by the task group of data relating to hours worked by drivers revealed that the majority of adult social care drivers were in fact employed on a full time basis – see paragraph 3.12 and Recommendation 3 of this report).*
- 2.8 There was general discussion about the use of taxi services, shopmobility schemes and Merton Community Transport (MCT) which is a voluntary sector organisation, which also provides 'Scootability'. Helen Catling advised that Merton Transport don't use MCT, although efforts have been made to forge links. There are no links with Dial-A-Ride either and so it seems that the whole system is quite confusing, with different agencies competing for the same work.
- 2.9 With regard to CRB checks, drivers and escorts needed different checks for working with children and adults and all Merton Transport's drivers are checked appropriately. The standard is to have one enhanced CRB checked person on each round and no couples are allowed to work on the vehicle together. Some adult journeys do not require escorts, but some SEN children require 2 escorts.
- 2.10 The Transport Manager confirmed that attempts had been made to link up with non-urgent hospital patient transport in the past, for example with St George's Hospital, which provides health services to the majority of Merton residents. The aim was to seek ways to provide more flexibility in the transport resources available and reduce waiting times, as generally the hospital's peak time is Merton Transport Service down-time. However, no real progress had been made in this area. The task group confirmed that it would seek to forge links with local hospitals as part of the review process (see paragraph 4.25 of this report for more details).
- 2.11 The issue of travel training for social services clients was raised, to enable them to use public transport. Whilst being an aspirational aim, it was accepted that this will never be a feasible option for many clients due to their needs.
- 2.12 The training which drivers who work with disabled people receive was considered. This training includes drivers being put in the position of a disabled person, by using glasses to give the effect of a visual impairment and the use of a wheelchair being raised on a tailgate, to demonstrate the lack of mobility for wheelchair users to steady themselves. The task group agreed that such training was essential for drivers providing a community transport service.

- 2.13 The Task Group also considered information on transport costs and core routes in a report produced in 2007, which had formed part of a wider budget report at that time. It was confirmed that Merton Transport now has its own fuelling system and that fuel was purchased in bulk to reduce costs. It was acknowledged that some routes were longer than others and that road works in the borough could result in transport delays. Councillors took the view that nobody should be on a bus for more than one hour, but the actual standard maximum time is 1.5 hours. (On the other hand, it became evident when speaking to service users during the day centre visits, which are detailed in the next chapter, that many see the journey as part of the day's activity and a social opportunity to chat – although generally people just want to get home as quickly as possible at the end of the day).
- 2.14 At this task group meeting, reference was made to the views of the Older People's Wellbeing Network which had considered transport policy in February 2009. One of the task group co-optees is a member of the Network and she acknowledged that the views expressed were from representatives of service users, rather than users themselves, but the task group agreed to take account of the Network's conclusions. The Network emphasised that it had two key principles relating to transport services:-
- ❑ That transport is a corporate responsibility
 - ❑ That the contrast of needs across and within user groups are recognised at all time
- 2.15 The Older People's Wellbeing Network expressed a number of concerns including issues relating to the following areas:-
- Assessment process and need for an appeal mechanism
 - Affordability, confidence, reliability and accessibility
 - Prevention and promotion of independence
 - Alternative transport service provision
 - Availability of information and advice

3. VISITS TO DAY CENTRES AND USER ENGAGEMENT

- 3.1 As already mentioned, in order to maximise public engagement during the review, the Task Group agreed to visit all the day centres in the borough to meet clients who use Merton Council transport services. Councillors agreed to share the visits between them, with two or three people making each visit to meet service users and staff. A survey form was devised for use by people who missed the visits, or who preferred not to speak directly to councillors. Although the survey form was used as the basis of questions during visits, the clients and day centre staff had the opportunity for wider discussion about transport services.
- 3.2 Arrangements were made for visits to the following day centres, which between them cater for older people, people with learning disability, sensory impairment, dementia and physical disability, with visits to be conducted from July to October 2009:-
- All Saints Day Centre
 - High Path Community Resource Centre
 - Woodlands Day Centre
 - Eastway Day Centre
 - Freshfields/Jan Malinowski Centre
 - Wimbledon Guild of Social Welfare
 - The Cumberland Day Centre
 - The Guardian Centre (Merton Vision)
 - Friends in St Helier (FISH) Lunch Club
 - Taylor Road (Asian Elderly)
- 3.3 In total, over 150 people were engaged with directly during visits to the above and a small number of additional survey forms were submitted by people who were not present during a visit. Day centre staff were also encouraged to give their views on transport services during the visits, which were largely organised as focus group sessions.

Views of service users submitting a survey form

- 3.4 Appendix B contains the survey form used for the review, which was advertised in *My Merton* borough magazine and on the Council's website, as well as in *Merton Connected*, (the Merton Voluntary Service Council newsletter). It was agreed to keep the survey form fairly short and to allow space for ideas to improve community transport services. Sixteen survey forms were received from service users or their carers who had not been able to contribute their views during the visits. All comments received were treated in confidence and no respondents' names were recorded.
- 3.5 Respondee were asked to name the day centre they used and to indicate how many times per week they attended. The number of forms completed and returned was small, largely due to the fact that so many service users were consulted directly during the visits. Clients of All Saints Day Centre submitted 13 forms, one form was received relating to the Jan Malinowski Centre, one for High Path Resource Centre and one for Freshfields Day

Centre. Individual weekly attendance at the centres ranged from one to five times per week.

- 3.6 With regard to Question 3 of the survey, where specific questions about the quality of transport provision were posed, the following scores emerged from the 16 forms submitted:-

Criteria:-	Very Good	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very Poor	Not scored	Percentage 'very good' or 'good'
<i>a. the general condition of the transport vehicle</i>	2	13	1				94%
<i>b. the helpfulness of the driver/escort</i>	6	10					100%
<i>c. the punctuality of the transport in picking up and dropping off</i>	2	11	1		1	1	81%
<i>d. the cleanliness of the vehicle</i>	1	14		1			94%
<i>e. the feeling of safety while on the vehicle</i>	2	13				1	94%
<i>f. the level of comfort on the vehicle</i>		12	2	1		1	75%

- 3.7 Clearly, survey responses from only 16 people cannot form the basis of conclusive findings. However, a far greater number of clients (153 people) were engaged with directly during the task group's visits, and the questions posed during the visits were based on those in the survey form. These visits provided a stronger and clearer set of views about community transport services (paragraph 3.9 onwards below refers).

- 3.8 The above results generally show good levels of satisfaction with all aspects of the transport provision, although there are a few 'poor' or 'very poor' scores relating to punctuality, cleanliness and comfort.

Views of service users from visits to day centres

- 3.9 The majority of service users engaged with during day centre visits were very positive about the cleanliness and general condition of the vehicles, and about the helpfulness of the drivers and escorts, particularly as the regular drivers got to know the transport users. However, this reduced when agency drivers were used, as they did not know the clients in the way that the regular drivers did and so were not used to the level of help required to get on and off the vehicles.

- 3.10 There was a wider variation of opinion with regard to punctuality expressed during the visits. Many of the 153 people engaged with during visits were generally happy with the timeliness of pick ups for travelling to the day

centres and for pick ups for return journeys home. People largely accepted that traffic and road works made exact timings impossible sometimes. Nevertheless some people's experience on the punctuality of transport was poor or very poor overall and they were often kept waiting without knowing what was happening, or when or if they would even be picked up.

Recommendation 1 : That effective channels of communication be maintained between drivers and clients, so that in the event of delay in picking up clients, they are made aware of the delay and the likely revised pick-up time.

- 3.11 There was discussion about the length of time people are sitting in transit on the vehicles. One or two people said that they were on the bus for around an hour and a half sometimes. However, many people interviewed saw the time spent on the bus as a part of the day and a social opportunity to chat. The suggestion was made that the pick up and drop off rotas could be varied periodically to make it fairer. This would mean that it would not always be the same people having to leave the centre early and thus miss out on the end of the day's activities, and it would not always be the same clients spending the longest time on the vehicles.

Recommendation 2 : That the rotas for picking up and dropping off clients at day centres be rotated periodically, to make the system fairer and to share the burden of time spent on the vehicles and time missed at day centres.

- 3.12 People advised the councillors during the visits that they missed the opportunity to go on day trips using the community transport. The Manager of Freshfields advised that he could organise visits because he used his own drivers and therefore had more flexibility, but generally the use of day trips had disappeared. The task group had been advised by Merton's Transport Manager at the very first task group in July 2009 that most of the drivers were employed only on a part-time basis, making opportunities for additional transport use during the day very limited. The councillors requested to see the data relating to numbers of full-time and part-time drivers. This data in fact showed that, whilst the drivers for the special schools and SEN runs in the borough were nearly all employed on a part-time/term-time only basis, the drivers on the day centre runs were employed almost exclusively on a full-time, i.e. 35 hours per week, basis. So the original advice given was not accurate. The spreadsheets indicated that drivers do carry out other work in between the pick-up and drop-off periods. This therefore indicated that there is some potential capacity for day trips to be arranged periodically.

Recommendation 3 : That Merton Transport Service investigates the potential for drivers and vehicles to be offered during the daytime to Merton's day centres in order for day trips to be resumed.

- 3.13 Many of the day centre users were aware of the proposals to introduce personalised budgets and some were concerned about how to make the best choices. They emphasised the need for strong advice and guidance

to be available when personalised budgets are introduced from April 2011.

Recommendation 4 : That clients' concerns about impending personalised budgets be acknowledged and that strong advice, guidance and support be on hand when these are introduced, in order to help people make informed choices and decisions about the services they purchase.

- 3.14 During the visit to Wimbledon Guild of Social Welfare in September 2009, a specific issue arose around the need for some people to use seatbelt extensions, where the normal seatbelt does not fit properly. One client who needed to use an extension had been told that the Council would not provide one and the transport driver had been advised that there were health and safety issues relating to extensions, as they had not been properly tested. Despite the client having a note from her GP to exempt her from having to wear a seatbelt, the driver was concerned to let her travel without using a seatbelt. When the client used community transport to other day centres, there were no such issues with the drivers. The task group members on this visit were concerned that there appeared to be a disparity in how clients needing seatbelt extensions were treated, especially as the Guild had purchased extensions for passengers using their community buses and the cost was minimal. The client herself had also offered to pay for the extension personally but this had been refused. The task group members expressed some disquiet about potential social exclusion due to this disparity and suggested that clarification and a proper protocol was necessary.

Recommendation 5 : That, in order to ensure full social inclusion with regard to the transport service provided by the Council, a proper protocol on use of seatbelt extensions is established as part of health and safety policy, so that advice and guidance on use of seatbelt extensions is applied consistently and operated to the benefit of service users.

4. EVIDENCE FROM OTHER LOCAL WITNESSES

- 4.1 In addition to speaking to direct users of community transport, the task group decided to engage with some relatives and carers of people who rely on the transport services.

The Learning Disability Carers Group

- 4.2 A Task Group member attended a meeting of Merton's Learning Disability Carers Group in November 2009 where the views and concerns about transport from the carers' perspective were discussed with 14 carers and 2 officers from Mencap. Merton's Cabinet Member for Adult Care Services and Health was also present at the meeting.
- 4.3 The carers emphasised the point that good transport services are crucial for people with learning difficulties and their carers. They need services that are dependable, safe and punctual. Carers need to be able to rely on the transport service so that they can plan their time (work commitments, health appointments and other activities).
- 4.4 An unreliable service will have a number of adverse consequences for service users with learning difficulties. For example,
- Those for whom routine is important will find it difficult to cope with unexpected change and this may affect their behaviour for the rest of the day.
 - They may miss activity sessions at the day centre – this is also disruptive for the day centre.
 - They may end up spending a very long time on the bus.
- 4.5 Some general comments were made about the current service:
- "When it works well it is very good, when it goes wrong it's disastrous!"
 - It is rather inflexible in terms of timing (see next paragraph below) and routes – one young service user has just moved a short distance from Merton into Sutton and is now ineligible to use the service even though it is called Merton and Sutton Transport.
 - It seems to be expensive for Social Services, especially in relation to making any changes to the service.
 - Previous route changes have led to a shortening of time spent at the day centre, in some cases by 1-2 hours, which has been difficult for day centres and for carers too.
 - Merton Transport buses are too wide for some of the routes.
 - There were no strong views on service providers – though Merton Community Transport does have a good reputation locally.
- 4.6 Timing issues were discussed and it emerged that the last changes to the routes have resulted in some service users being collected as early as 7am (meaning that the particular carer has to start getting the person ready at 6am). Also, making sure that they are home in case the bus arrives

unexpectedly early is a cause of stress for carers. One carer had experienced her son being brought back at 3.05pm – this must have been caused by the bus leaving the day centre before the agreed time (buses are supposed to start loading at 2.45 and leave at 3. The general consensus among carers was that the buses often leave at 2.45pm. The carers wondered whose responsibility it is to enforce the agreed time – is it the transport service or the day centre?

- 4.7 One particular carer who submitted a survey form expressed real concerns about how the council's transport service is managed and highlighted the chaos that occurs in her experience when regular staff go on annual leave and holiday cover is used. This respondent also flagged up the apparent lack of accountability in management of the service, and apparent lack of competency in customer services.

Recommendation 6 : That clear lines of accountability and regular monitoring of the service are established, to ensure an effective service is delivered and strong customer service skills are in evidence.

- 4.8 Carers advised generally that they dislike the use of agency staff, but accepted that it is sometimes necessary. However, at such times there needs to be very effective communication in evidence between the service provider and the clients. Whilst, escorts are provided with mobile phones, they don't always use them to relay information to service users, for example in cases of vehicle breakdown or delay in transit. Lack of information adds to the stress experienced by clients.
(Note: Recommendation 1 in this report deals with the need for effective communication – see paragraph 3.10).

- 4.9 Carers indicated that they would also like to see information being shared by all concerned and for information on anything of note that has happened during the day that might impact on the care of the service user to be recorded. For example, carers were unsure what would happen if there was no-one at home when the bus arrived at the service user's home – one carer thought the service user would be taken to a care home. Another carer said that she works erratic hours and has found the transport service and individual escorts very helpful in varying the service provided in response to her phone calls. Another carer said that her son is collected at 7.10am and that the transport service had asked her if that time would be alright – which it is as the client is an early riser and enjoys being on the bus. However, it was generally agreed that this would not suit everyone and that the ideal would be for routes to be planned around need. So comprehensive sharing of information would help to keep carers and clients in the picture.

Recommendation 7 : That a comprehensive system for sharing information between carers, drivers, escorts and day centre staff is developed, to help keep carers and clients up to date.

- 4.10 There was also some concern expressed about the impact that changed route times had on the amount of time available to day centres for planned

activities. (Recommendation 2 – paragraph 3.11 also refers to this concern). Carers emphasised that activities are very important in giving service users a structured format to the day and time as the centres should be maximised, rather than just passing the time sitting in a centre.

- 4.11 There was a focus on the use of escorts. Carers regard the escorts as essential to the service – many service users would not be able to use the service if there wasn't an escort. The escort is also central to the quality of the service. The attitude of the escort often sets the tone for the day for the service user and a friendly, welcoming start is what carers want to see. "can make or break a day." It is important that the escort knows each service user and that both permanent and agency escorts have access to information about the service user's needs and carer contact details so that a personal service is provided and emergencies are responded to appropriately. Use of agency staff for escorts was disliked due to the importance of continuity for this client group and the worry over how an emergency would be handled.

Recommendation 8: That there should be continuity in the use of escorts wherever possible and that the potential for using day centre staff as escorts be explored.

- 4.12 On the whole, the carers considered that the escorts provided a good service. However, they remarked that a number of the escorts lacked disability awareness training (a point made by the carer submitting the online form). Another issue raised by carers was that the escorts were not supposed to leave the bus, but many do in order to escort the service users safely between bus and home – for which carers are very grateful, but which shows that the service is perhaps not entirely designed with the service user's needs in mind.

Recommendation 9 : That, in order to reflect the important role that escorts fulfil, disability awareness training is made mandatory for all escorts and that their training provides them with the tools to tailor the service to users' needs.

Merton Community Transport

- 4.13 The task group also engaged with the local community transport provider, based in Mitcham, Merton Community Transport (MCT), as some of the clients engaged with during the visits indicated that they had used other providers on occasion, including MCT.
- 4.14 The Task Group was informed that MCT provides up to four buses and drivers for Dial-A-Ride (DAR), including one female driver as DAR have difficulty recruiting female drivers. It was explained that DAR moved to a London-wide base, rather than borough based, to reflect the TfL model, but this has not worked well as local knowledge is lacking in the system. This fact may help explain the adverse press report referred to in paragraph 4.12 below. DAR has reported an increase in user numbers, and struggling to provide a good service. Other boroughs' community transport schemes apparently have contracts with DAR too.

4.15 MCT is a charity based organisation, grant funded by Merton Council but also receives funding from other sources and funding streams and turnover is almost £1m pa. The service is designed to be flexible, for example there is:-

- A Merton Scootability Project
- An Excursion Club
- Group transport
- An individual transport service
- An area bus – West Side Common
- Minibus management including pooling

4.16 The task group was particularly interested in the Scootability Project, which enables an individual to hire a scooter for £5 and then be charged 40p per mile. The scooter is delivered to the user and is flexible to the needs of the user (an example was where a disabled veteran was able to use a scooter to take part in the Remembrance Day service and parade. A free assessment on ability to use the scooter is provided and there is a buddying scheme. Nobody is given a scooter to use unless they can manage to handle it properly. Some people do fail the assessment which involves a scooter assault course with cones and a 'live' run. Even though some large shopping precincts provide scooters, people become familiar with their local service and in any case, it is not always guaranteed that scooters will be available at a shopping centre at any given time. Overnight loan of scooters is also possible as long as there is appropriate overnight storage available.

4.17 MCT has picked up training for people who purchase their own scooter and MCT is sometimes passed old scooters to make use of. Scooters are not provided for other organisations to share – it is a service for an individual. People can also undertake the training/assessment before they decide which scooter to buy for themselves. As scooter can cost between £2k and £4k plus insurance and so people can make use of MCT advice and guidance. Members discussed the possibility of scooters being provided for care homes, to help get people out and about. MCT suggested this could be a future project as there would be an element of risk involved, unless an escort was provided.

4.18 With regard to the Excursion Club, regular excursions are organised, including to Deen City Farm and Bluewater. The Excursion Club enables trips to the coast etc. – a converted minibus with 8 scooters was purchased from Devon County Council, MCT services are not free unlike DAR, but people was security and reliability.

4.19 MCT was voted one of the best urban community transport schemes in 2008 and Fitzroy Dawson is a director on the Community Transport Association Board, which enables him to promote Merton. He uses the Merton Compact to work together with other groups and maximise funding opportunities. The Council funds MCT in part, but MCT has to look elsewhere for additional revenue.

- 4.20 Users' views are taken seriously – e.g. complaints about the suspension on a special new vehicle resulted in adjustments being made to improve comfort for users. MCT currently owns 15 vehicles including the special one, with 20+ drivers, none of which are full time paid employees – as it is more cost effective to pay for doing shifts and drive-time only. This system is different to Merton Council which employs some full time drivers. But the Council provides a statutory based service- i.e. school runs and then day centres. Six of the drivers are on contract with DAR Monday to Friday. So the Council's transport services and MCT are two different 'animals'.
- 4.21 MCT has no central site for vehicles and other voluntary sector organisations help with providing parking space, e.g. Merton MIND and the Guardian Centre. Unfortunately, MCT headquarters at Justin Plaza in Mitcham do not meet accessibility criteria.
- 4.22 Councils can tender for other transport services – Merton Council Transport has in the past won a contract with London Borough of Sutton for example. So potentially Merton Council could put its transport service out to tender and another council or community provider could win the contract to provide transport services. The task group's view was that the merits of an open competitive tendering process should be examined with regard to the transport service.

Recommendation 10 : That consideration be given to examining the merits of undertaking a competitive tendering process with regard to the council's transport service.

- 4.23 The key criteria for a transport service is that it needs innovation in order to provide a good service and meet user needs. Flexibility is a key factor – e.g. willingness to vary a route, or try to introduce routes locally. The task group members agreed that the Council's service should not feel it is in competition with MCT, which runs a different type of service, but there could be learning points from good practice and transport services should provide value for money and not be wasteful, regardless of who provides them and that there should be more efforts to develop much better communication channels between different local providers of transport services, rather than continuing to work separately.

Recommendation 11 : That work should be undertaken to develop stronger links and channels of communication between Merton Transport Services and different local transport providers with the aim of maximising use of resources and improving community transport provision for users.

Dial-A-Ride (DAR)

- 4.24 Several people engaged with during the day centre visits indicated that they had used Dial-A-Ride (DAR) on occasion with varying degrees of reliability. Efforts were made to invite DAR representatives to a task group meeting, but without success. A local press article in November 2009 caused some concerns about the service, as it reported a large increase in

unmet demand for trips (the number of rejected journeys had risen to 150,000 a year, with 400 users per day failing to get the journeys they want)¹. DAR were asked to respond to the concerns raised in the article but no response was submitted to the task group.

Local NHS Trusts – Non Urgent Patient Transport Services

- 4.25 As part of the review, the task group agreed that it would be useful to engage with local NHS hospitals' non-urgent patient transport services, to determine any capacity for sharing of transport resources to cover peak demand periods to the benefit of transport users. The task group devised a short survey form for this purpose (See Appendix C). During the first task group meeting in July 2009, Merton's Transport Manager had advised councillors that she had tried to forge links with the patient transport units of local hospitals but without success. Again, the task group expressed concern at the apparent lack of communication channels between different local transport providers, as indicated in paragraph 4.23 and Recommendation 11.
- 4.26 The NHS Patient Transport Survey revealed that service users are regularly surveyed on the non-urgent patient transport service to determine levels of satisfaction with the service provided. The survey also indicated that there is a peak of demand and therefore a need for additional transport support from 1pm to 5pm, largely to assist with hospital ward discharges. St George's Hospital NHS Trust advised that it undertakes 8,500 journeys a month and additional resources would certainly help to reduce waiting times. However, as the Trust has an external contract in place for its non-urgent patient transport, there would need to be close discussions on any sharing of resources to cover the peak times. There is a target waiting time of 60 minutes to be seated on a vehicle ready to be transported (45 minutes for renal patients). From the survey it appears that few patients actually miss their appointments due to late transport.
- 4.27 Epsom & St Helier Hospitals NHS Trust advised that patients have to have a medical need to qualify for transport and so community transport would be useful for those who fall outside of the criteria, but who have a social need. It was suggested that, as is being done in other parts of the country by primary care trusts and community transport services, the establishment of a call centre would be able to direct patients to the appropriate transport service.

Recommendation 12 : That the Merton Transport Service Manager establishes a dialogue with local NHS trusts, to explore ways to maximise the sharing of transport resources to benefit patients, particularly during periods of peak demand and activity.

¹ BBC NEWS; www.bbc.co.uk/go/pr/fr/-1/hi/england/london/8274337.stm

5. KEY FINDINGS

- 5.1 Without exception, virtually all service users engaged with during the visits to day centres emphasised that a transport service was an absolute lifeline to them. People were totally reliant on transport to give them the ability to get to their day centre, to meet other people and take part in activities. Without such a service, they were certain that they would find themselves isolated and essentially housebound, which would have a detrimental effect on their well-being. A very few day centres users said that they in fact made their own way to the centre, either walking or on public transport, but they pointed out that their ability to attend 'under their own steam' might very easily be limited in the future, and that they would then hope to be able to receive a community transport service to help them continue to attend the centre.
- 5.2 As referred to in paragraph 1.5 of this report, a departmental review of Merton council's passenger transport service has been running concurrently with the scrutiny review. The in-house review remit was not to focus on any user engagement, but to concentrate on looking at best use of transport resources and efficiency in delivery of the service. The Task Group met with the Cabinet Members for Environment and Leisure, and Adult Care Services and Health in March 2010, to discuss the findings of the scrutiny review and the recommendations being put forward. At this meeting, there was also consideration of the draft report of passenger transport services review undertaken for the Environment and Regeneration Department by an external specialist public transport consultancy, TAS.
- 5.3 The Task Group acknowledged the findings of the external consultant report and in particular noted those outcomes which concurred with the conclusions of the scrutiny review work. In particular the Task Group:-
- Expressed concern at the low average percentage of productive hours for drivers identified in the external report as 56.6% for full time drivers (which supports Recommendation 3 in the scrutiny report - for drivers and vehicles to be offered to day centres during the daytime for trips etc).
 - Acknowledged that with the introduction of personalised budgets for social services clients, transport providers will need to ensure their services are robust and demonstrate value-for-money, which will require effective management and organisation of the service.
 - Supported the suggestions that potential exists to establish a form of partnership between the local authority and community-based transport operators as a consortium.
 - Welcomed the focus on the opportunity for Merton Council transport services to engage with non-urgent patient transport services to maximise use of resources and improve the patient experience (which concurs with Recommendation 12 in this report - for a dialogue to be established with local NHS trusts). A member of LINK Merton, as a co-opted member of the Task Group, suggested that the Chair of Healthier Communities and Older People Scrutiny Panel could submit a request to the LINK for it to

consider engaging with local hospitals' non- urgent patient transport units to help break down communication barriers.

Recommendations 13 : That the review report be forwarded to LINK Merton, with a request that the LINK considers engaging with local hospitals' non- urgent patient transport units, in order to develop channels of communication and develop closer working.

- 5.4 Given the range of outcomes from both this report and the external review report, the Task Group suggested to the Cabinet members that the report from TAS is considered by Cabinet at the same time as the Scrutiny Review Report, to provide thorough consideration of all the outcomes. This was accepted as a sensible approach to take.

Recommendation 14 : That this scrutiny review report and the external review report are considered by Cabinet at the same time, to ensure there is an inclusive approach to the outcomes of both pieces of work.

- 5.5 At the conclusion of the Task Group meeting, the Cabinet Members indicated their broad support for the outcomes of the scrutiny review.

6. CONCLUSIONS/NEXT STEPS

- 6.1 The scrutiny recommendations contained in this report do not seek additional resources to be allocated to council transport services, but to work towards better communication between stakeholders and wider flexibility in the use of existing resources available. They focus on building on what works well, and improving communication between the various local transport service providers.
- 6.2 The key areas recommended for change, as highlighted in the recommendations in this report, are:-
- ✓ Flexibility in the client pick up and drop off times
 - ✓ Better communication between service provider and user on a day to day basis
 - ✓ Proper training for all drivers and escorts
 - ✓ Potential for day trips to take up slack times
 - ✓ Liaison with NHS non-urgent patient transport cover for peak times to fully utilise transport resources
- 6.3 Once the final report has been agreed by the Healthier Communities and Older People Scrutiny Panel, it will be presented to the Cabinet for approval and agreement to implement the recommendations through development of an action plan. The Healthier Communities and Older People Scrutiny Panel will then have a continuing role in monitoring progress towards implementing the agreed actions within the timeframe as set in the action plan.

Other scrutiny reviews used as background information:-

Worthing Borough Council – Overview and Scrutiny Panel for Other Issues –
'Report on Community Transport 2007-2008 Municipal Year'

City and County of Swansea – Health Social Care & Well Being Scrutiny Board –
'Social Services Transport Review' December 2008

Appendix A

Review Scope

Title of Review	Merton Council's Community Transport Service
Task group members	All Members of the Healthier Communities & Older People Scrutiny Panel including co-optees
Outline purpose of review	To assess the community transport service from the service user perspective, and to make recommendations to improve the service, making best use of the resources available. To contribute evidence to the officer review of transport being undertaken during 2009 by the Transport Section of Environment and Regeneration.
Expected timescale (possible no. of meetings?)	To hold task group meetings and make visits from July to November. To draw up a draft report by the end of December 2009, for progressing through the democratic process from January 2010 onwards.
Terms of reference	To engage with service users of the community transport service provided by L B Merton To identify and learn from best practice in community transport services from other local authorities To scrutinise local NHS trusts on patient transport To link into the Departmental Review of transport To undertake an Equalities Impact Assessment
Key areas of enquiry	Evaluation of current community transport provision and user satisfaction Identify opportunities to maximise use of existing transport provision to improve the service for users Opportunity to scrutinise patient transport services in local NHS trusts Learn from best practice in other local authorities
Equalities Impact Assessment	Undertake and publish a Needs Impact Assessment as part of the review
How review could be publicised	In <i>'My Merton'</i> , through invitations to witness sessions, on the Scrutiny web page. Through a user survey form distributed in the day centres or on the transport vehicles.
Possible witnesses (for written or oral evidence) e.g. Council officers, individual residents, community groups, partner organisations, other interested stakeholders, other external organisations	L B Merton's Head of Community Care Merton SEN Manager Community transport service users in Merton Local NHS trusts' patient transport Day centres Guardian Centre Other local authorities' transport service providers including SEN transport

Potential barriers/risks/constraints	Existing and competing workload demands of those who will be delivering the project; Lack of budget provision to deliver upon recommendations if agreed by Cabinet/Partners Recommendations representing Value for Money Duplication of activities being undertaken by other work groups/partners –this review aims to engage with service users, this will complement, rather than duplicate the work of the officer review group.
Expected outcomes and how they will be monitored (all linked to Merton's vision and strategic objectives)	To make recommendations to improve the community transport service currently provided and make best use of the resources available. Outcomes to be monitored through Executive Response and Accompanying Action Plan once agreed by Cabinet.
Possible sources of information/evidence	Outcomes of reviews conducted elsewhere Best practice in other authorities Beacon Councils Improvement and Development Agency Engagement with community transport service users
Co-option	The Panel's 3 co-optees form part of the task group. A member of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Panel has been invited to join the task group to provide a cross cutting focus on transport service users.
Scrutiny Team lead	Scrutiny Team: Barbara Jarvis, Scrutiny Officer
Relevant Review Officer(s)	Terry Hutt – Head of Community Care Helen Catling – Merton Transport Manager Janet Martin – Head of Education

Scrutiny Review of Community Transport Services:- Survey

(Please tick relevant boxes and provide additional comments if you wish).

1. Please give the name of the Day Centre you use in the box below:

2. How many times a week do you use community transport to get to the Day Centre?

(Insert a figure in the box)

times each week

3. Please rate the transport provided for you against the following criteria:-

Criteria:-	<i>Very Good</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Adequate</i>	<i>Poor</i>	<i>Very Poor</i>
a. The general condition of the transport vehicle					
b. The helpfulness of the driver/escort					
c. The punctuality of the transport in picking up/dropping off					
d. The cleanliness of the vehicle					
e. The feeling of safety while on the vehicle					
f. The level of comfort on the vehicle					

(Tick one box for each criteria)

4. If you had the money to pay for your own transport, do you think you would choose a different transport provider, or continue to use the same transport as you do now? (Tick one box)

I would choose a different transport provider :

I would continue to use the same transport :

5. If you have any suggestions for ways to improve the community transport service, please outline them here:-

6. Please provide any other comments you wish to make on the transport service here:-

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Contact Details:-

Barbara Jarvis, Scrutiny Officer
L B Merton, 9th floor Civic Centre
London Road
Morden
Surrey SM4 5DX

Tel: 020 8545 3390;
Email: barbara.jarvis@merton.gov.uk

London Borough of Merton Scrutiny Review of Community Transport Services:- Survey of NHS Hospital Trusts' Non Urgent Patient Transport Services

1. Do you undertake a survey of user views with regard to patient transport services in your Trust? (Please tick relevant box)

Yes:

No:

If 'Yes', how often do you undertake the user survey?

2. Do you have a specific complaints system relating to patient transport services?

Yes:

No:

If 'Yes', can you advise what percentage of complaints relate to late transport pick-ups?

3. As part of the booking system used for non-urgent patient transport, do you prioritise service users in any way?

Yes:

No:

If 'Yes', can you give brief details of how you prioritise the transport?

4. From your monitoring of service performance, can you provide information, or comment on, the following :-

- a. How many patients using transport to the hospital miss their appointment due to a late pick-up (over a one year period)?

- b. What is the average length of time a patient waits in the hospital for transport to take him/her home?**

- c. Are there any times of the day when there is a peak in demand for patient transport, either to or from the hospital, which puts pressure on the hospital transport service?**

- 5. Part of Merton Council's Scrutiny Review of Community Transport is to seek to identify ways to improve its transport service for users and to maximise use of resources through the linking up of transport services where possible. Please give your views on the potential for hospital patient transport being enhanced, by employing local authority vehicles and drivers for parts of the day when there are peaks in demand or lack of cover?**

- 6. Please provide any other comments you wish to make on patient transport services here:-**

Thank you for taking the time to complete this survey.

Contact Details:-

Barbara Jarvis, Scrutiny Officer
L B Merton, 9th floor Civic Centre
London Road
Morden
Surrey SM4 5DX
Tel: 020 8545 3390; Email: barbara.jarvis@merton.gov.uk