

**Action notes from the HTST Member Policy Panel  
20 March 2020**

Present:

Members: Cllrs Clare, Wares, O'Quinn

Officers: Carolyn Bristow, Natasha Watson (via Skype), Lisa Brown

There was one member of the press and one member of the public also in attendance

Item	Discussion and agreed actions
Welcome and introductions	<p>Attendees introduced themselves.</p> <p>The meeting noted attendance at the panel today was reduced due to the current Coronavirus (Covid-19) situation. The panel would still be able to take views from Councillors missing into account.</p> <p>The panel voted to agree the panel should be held in public as the LGA report had already been released the evening before with a press release, therefore the panel felt there was no longer a foundation for them to consider the report in a private session. The Chair agreed to let the member of the press join as they are here.</p>
Minutes of the last meeting.	<p>The draft minutes from the previous meeting were shared (attached below) but it was agreed that these should be reviewed and adopted (subject to changes) at the next full meeting as many stakeholders were not present today to make comment.</p> <p align="center">             DRAFT Minutes of            HTST Member Policy         </p>
PaCC statement on the report	<p>On the morning of the meeting, PaCC emailed their statement of response on the report to the panel, attached below for information.</p> <p align="center">             FW HtST -            Independent Review         </p>
Main agenda item – LGA report on the Independent Review	<p>Cllr Clare reminded those present that the main purpose of the meeting today was to discuss the findings in the LGA independent review report and to consider what that means for the remainder of the Member Policy Panel meeting agendas.</p> <p>Cllrs present expressed disappointment in how the report was released, that they would have preferred to hold a meeting ahead of the report being released publicly.</p> <p>A discussion followed about the changes that had been made to a draft report with the LGA ahead of this final version being released. The panel understood that some factual corrections may have been</p>

	<p>shared directly with the LGA from PaCC – therefore they may need to ask them directly for those if they wish to see them.</p> <p>The Panel would like to see from officers the changes that were amended. This had been clarified by Georgina, who confirmed that a budget figure was shared with them that didn't feature in the draft. Natasha also confirmed that the LGA had circulated a draft to the group that participated in the 'kick off' meeting at the start of the review, for accuracy checks. This is standard practice with bodies such as the LGA, ahead of publishing a public version.</p> <p>The Panel only had access to the report (plus a copy of an internal officer report that the LGA make reference to) around 6pm the night before so there had been little time to read and digest beforehand.</p> <p>Before the report was looked at in detail Cllr Ware's shared his view that the report provides an overview of systematic and complete failure in this matter, and that it was predicted and preventable. He commended the LGA on a report that doesn't hold back. Cllr Clare added that she had felt reassured when she met with them as part of their review.</p> <p>Cllr Clare also thanked colleagues in the Conservative Group for raising these concerns early on, this demonstrated the importance of good opposition to ensure good decision making. Cllr Wares added that he was pleased that this was part of a process offering a voice to those who sometimes cannot express themselves. The panel felt that if matters get as far as needing to be tackled by Cllrs then a failing in the system had already occurred.</p> <p>It was agreed that each section of the report should be reviewed by the panel in turn.</p>
Executive summary:	<p>Cllr Clare by highlighting a finding she thought was one of the most significant, that advice offered by the legal team hadn't always been followed. She agreed with the report that Edge had a responsibility in what had happened, however they had raised the risk potential of the timeline involved. She also wanted to comment on the support given to PaCC, that we are lucky to have them in the city and she hopes they continue to get the support they need.</p> <p>Cllr O'Quinn agreed with the sentiments about PaCC and had been pleased to see Regan Delf back in the service area albeit temporarily to build on the relationship.</p> <p>There was a discussion about the lack of links / references to other documents / lack of some evidence in the report. Carolyn explained that when the LGA invited evidence submissions, it was done with a clear promise that these would be kept confidential. This enabled the LGA to get a full picture of what had happened and the impact</p>

	<p>on stakeholders.</p> <p>Cllr Wares felt a significant learning point in this to for the Council to put children and young people back at the centre of the service and understanding that transport is of huge significance to family lives. Families reported through this process that they felt the process around transport itself was designed to put families off.</p> <p>Cllr Wares informed that Panel that through a variety of FOI requests with the Council him and Cllr Mears had been able to compile an 80 page dossier on this matter and would be sharing it with the Chief Executive.</p> <p>Cllr O’Quinn was struck by the findings around the hasty pace of this work, she knows from her licensing role that the relationships with the taxi and transport trade were very important.</p> <p>There was general acknowledgment that one of the issues was that the Council were bringing elements of the service that was not fully understand back in-house.</p> <p>There was discussion around the previous Lead Member for CYP who when originally challenged with some of the concerns felt assured that all would go well.</p>
Main findings	<p><b>4.1. Procurement of consultants working on Home to School Transport Service</b></p> <p>The Panel discussed the difficulties found by the LGA around Edge being the only bidder for the consultancy work and the process of contracting them. Cllr Clare would be interested to explore further the Political oversight of that process – because of a change in Lead Member during this time it has been difficult to unpick in enough detail. Cllr Wares agreed that he felt there was a lack of due diligence around contracts and standing orders but would like to look in to this further.</p> <p>The Panel had questions about whether all elements of the financial contracting of Edge had been listed in the right places and about whether there was a potential for it to have totalled over £500K if the earlier stage one costs were taken in to account too.</p> <p>Cllr Wares felt there were some inaccuracies reporting by the LGA, around the date of contracting Edge, he felt it was completed before Pre Election Period began.</p> <p><b>4.2 The Dynamic Purchasing System and Procurement of Operators</b></p> <p>Cllr Clare highlighted the quote from a parent within the report that compared this process to purchasing of stationery.</p>

The panel discussed with the DPS would suitable to continue with. Cllr O'Quinn provided further assurance about the licensing process and how that ensures safeguarding matters are fully considered.

Cllr Wares wondered why the report hadn't covered some of the accusations from operators who had engaged in the bidding process and had questioned it. He felt their voice had not been heard fully in this process. Cllr O'Quinn repeated her thanks to Regan for clearly making good progress with the relationship with operators that had been heard at the previous meeting.

The panel expressed concern about whether element of the system was reliant on the goodwill of operators and wanted the service to ensure that was continued to be an area of focus.

The panel wanted to know what the thinking / plans were around the contracts for the operators in the city. They supported the service to look at extended contracts to provide operators with some security. This would enable to them to invest in their fleet and staff as needed. It was also raised that as and when neighbouring authorities open up procurement exercises for school transport there may be an attraction for operators to go elsewhere with their services. The Panel agreed that there was a very high standard of licensing in our city so the preference was to use B&H licensed vehicles for our local work.

The Panel agreed that an urgent recommendation for today would be to ask for an officer update on what the contract contracting position would be for the contracted operators, could this be extended to allow for security.

**Action: Officers to provide an update**

#### **4.3 – Implementation of the new system**

Cllr Clare had been struck by the thought of children 'getting lost' as part of this process.

The Panel agreed that part of their remaining work should be to look in more detail about what has happened and what is predicted around the budget.

Cllr Wares felt this section of the report was a list of safeguarding concerns and no apologies were strong enough for this. We must ensure the right risk assessments are carried out to ensure these children are protected.

Cllr O'Quinn said that everything this report supports the view that more time is needed to ensure that all matters are put right in the service. Any further service changes need to be discussed with PaCC and Amaze and consider the expertise within the operators

to support that. She wanted to thank all the staff who went above and beyond during the implementation and she recognised the work that was done by them. Cllr Wares supported this, that front line staff were under a lot of pressure.

#### **4.4 The Council's response to the disrupted delivery of the Home to School Transport Service**

Cllr Clare repeated the thanks given by the other panel members to the front line staff who worked hard to try and sort the difficulties in the service delivery out.

Cllr Wares raised his continued concern about this matter not yet appearing as a corporate risk.

**Action: officers to report back on the progress of that discussion.**

#### **4.5 Concerns and complaints**

Cllr Wares recognised the difficulty faced by the service during the implementation, to have been receiving such a high number of emails and phonecalls. He highlighted the part of the report that suggests parents felt the apology had not been given in a meaningful way. The panel agreed this matter could be overcome if the outcomes of revised service delivery continue to improve. The panel referred back to the officer report and presentation at the previous meeting that had seen integrity and a real shift in that trust.

Cllr Clare said she understood that Regan's time in the service had been extended.

The panel referred to an officer report from January 2020 which explored lessons learnt, prior to the LGA review. The LGA recognised work had been progressed there but further recognition needed by the council of the foreseeable failures.

Contracting of Edge was discussed again (in particular any exit agreements) and Natasha reminded the Panel that some matters were not yet able to be discussed in public. Cllr Clare asked that this be discussed in a future meeting, under a part 2 arrangement if necessary.

**ACTION: officers to ensure this is on a future meeting agenda.**

Cllr O'Quinn felt that the pace involved hadn't allowed for true coproduction and that needed to be rectified in future activities of this kind.

Cllr Wares felt there were ongoing questions about the licensing and contracts and the council's ability to ensure compliance to the

	blue book.
Key Recommendations from LGA report	<p>Recommendation 1: Clear, consistent and urgent communication to all stakeholders (carers, schools and settings etc.) about stability in the Home To School Transport (HTST) arrangements from this point onwards. The panel felt this was now in progress. Although Cllr Wares still had questions about the budget forecast and what that might mean for the service.</p> <p>Recommendations 4 &amp; 5: Review the HTST processes and streamline them / The Special Educational Needs (SEND) team and HTST team must work together more and share more information reducing the burden on parents to repeatedly provide the same information. The panel felt these were in progress based on the previous meeting's officer presentation.</p> <p>Recommendation 6: The council should ensure there is standardised and consistent training and performance expectation of drivers and Vehicle Passenger Assistants (VPAs) with monitoring. The panel felt this was in progress however Cllr Wares had some remaining questions about the type of training being offered. Were operators getting disability awareness training. Cllr O'Quinn had discussed the training need with Regan and was reassured things were moving in the right direction.</p> <p>The Panel all expressed concern about how the service can ensure the right things are in place to deliver well in September 2020 and would welcome an officer report covering that to a future meeting.</p> <p>All agreed that it was essential to engage well with the operators on the plans for September and to do so as early as possible.</p> <p>The panel discussed their ability to report back to June committee and it was thought they may need longer to hold their meetings and form their recommendations. There was also a discussion around how the recommendation implementation may be overseen.</p> <p>Cllr Clare wanted to see some advice from Leaders in terms of what the next few meetings needed to look like, given the current pandemic and stretch on stakeholder, Member and officer time.</p> <p>Cllr Clare recapped that the two urgent recommendations from today were to ask officers for an update on a) operators and the current contracting situation / support around COVID-19 and b) update on whether this matter would be held on the corporate risk register. Action: Officers to provide an update report on those two matters.</p>

Agenda and date of next meeting	<p>It was agreed that Cllr Clare would liaise with the Members of the Panel to agree a schedule of future agenda items.</p> <p>The next meeting date is to be confirmed and it was requested that even if still under COVID-19 restrictions we allow at least 90 minutes for the meeting as a minimum. It may be that technical options are explored for a virtual meeting.</p>
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