

Appendix 2

OFFICER RESPONSE TO THE FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE MEMBERS' POLICY PANEL

1. This report presents an initial response to the recommendations in the report of the Members' Policy Panel.
2. Officers will respond in more detail to the findings and recommendations of the Members' Policy Panel once these have been considered in full.
3. The full response to the recommendations will be captured in an up-dated and extended action plan, which will be overseen by the Home to School Transport (HTST) Governance Board and will be presented with a progress report as part of the next HTST report to Children, Young People and Skills Committee in the Spring of 2020.
4. The extended action plan will be co-produced with the Parent Carers' Council (PaCC) and signed off by the Governance Board by the end of the Autumn term 2020.
5. Officers accept the findings and recommendations of the Members' Policy Panel and wish to thank Members for their work in providing support and challenge to the developing service over this critical time.
6. Our thanks also are extended to the Parent Carers' Council (PaCC) representatives, transport providers and Headteacher who gave freely of their time to feedback on experiences in the summer and autumn of 2019 and who all made valued suggestions for improvement.
7. Officers particularly appreciate the challenge and support from PaCC, who have worked intensively with the service on improvements as part of co-production arrangements over the past several months.
8. The council very much regrets the disruption, distress, loss of schooling and upset caused to families and other stakeholders over the autumn term of 2019 in particular, apologises unreservedly again to families, schools and transport providers, and is determined that lessons are learned such that these failings will not occur again.
9. The service is pleased to be able to report on substantial progress over the past several months in improving the service and to evidence this with a very positive response to a recent survey of parents/ carers on arrangements for transport in September 2020.
10. An update on all aspects of service, plus priorities for further improvement, is included in this report.

11. Meantime, a summary headline response to the four themes in the findings of the Members' Policy Panel is detailed below.

1 Theme 1: Governance and Oversight

Panel recommendations:

Council wide:

- *Systems change - The panel were concerned with all the evidence that this was not a well-managed systems change project. The council are recommended (perhaps via a recommendation to Audit and Standards Committee) to consider how the learning from this is captured and incorporated into corporate processes as a matter of urgency, to include the need for sufficient lead in time for any future significant service change.*
- *Risk register - Council officers need to ensure robust change management by adding significant projects to the relevant risk registers and to take swifter action in future when requests are made for additions to risk registers by councillors*
- *Co-production - The panel have seen, through the service improvements over the span of their meetings, that meaningful coproduction on key services such as this is essential. The panel recommends that all projects of this scale and significance in future have a well-resourced commitment to coproduction with stakeholders both throughout the planning and implementation and also through being part of the governance of overseeing future governance of the area of work.*
- *Financial modelling - Future change programmes need a more robust financial modelling approach in future. Some work was done on high-level comparator budgets but there was little drilling down into the detail to understand the validity and relevance of the high-level comparisons.*
- *Access to information - The council should review processes for councillors to obtain information when legitimate reasons are provided.*
- *Procurement review - In March this year, significant concerns were raised with the Council's Chief Executive regarding the consultancy contract to advise and support the Council on the HTST procurement process. In June the Chief Executive was asked to obtain an independent review of the HtST procurement process to ensure transparency and accountability. Subsequently the matter was referred to an external Barrister for review and advice and Counsel has provided his preliminary draft advice. Given that these are matters of governance, rather than service, and given their vital importance, the Panel has determined that they would be better dealt with by the Audit & Standards Committee which met on 27 October to consider the recommendation of this Panel that a cross party panel with an Independent Person, is set up as a matter of urgency.*

Service specific

- *Committee Oversight - In 6 months' time, a brief progress update paper on the service should be provided to the CYPs Committee, with a full progress update being provided on an annual basis thereafter. This fuller update should include: an update on the service improvement action plan, parent/carers feedback on the service, procurement plans and the budget position.*

Officer response on Governance recommendations:

- 1.1 The council accepts the findings of the Members' Policy Panel in this area and is committed to learn lessons from past failings in respect of the service.
- 1.2 It is accepted that a lack of proper oversight, plus inadequacies in project planning and the construction of a business plan, were significant factors in the issues that arose in the summer/ autumn of 2019.
- 1.3 Now there is a monthly HTST Governance Group with representation from the Parent Carers' Council (PaCC) and schools to oversee the work of the service.
- 1.4 Any future changes to the service will be proposed and implemented within a strong governance structure, with full community consultation and co-production, and on the basis of a robust project and business management structure and realistic time scales for full consultation and implementation.
- 1.5 The service's co-production agreement with PaCC will ensure families are fully involved in all future planning and recommendations.
- 1.6 Any significant proposed changes and related financial matters will be subject to the approval of the Families, Children and Learning Modernisation Board.
- 1.7 Currently the service remains on the corporate risk register, and risks, plus mitigating actions, are subject to regular review.
- 1.8 An update report will be presented to CYPS Committee in six months-time on progress made with the Members' Policy Panel recommendations.

2 Theme 2: Stakeholder Feedback

Panel recommendations:

Council-wide:

- *Key performance indicators (KPIs) - The introduction of KPIs on service-user satisfaction and as providers of the service, the council remains ambitious about its targets.*
- *Complaints processes - The council must ensure that complaints processes and procedures for parents and carers allow and encourage open and frank feedback, emphasising that feedback can be made without prejudice to services entitled to, received or being offered.*
- *Member panels - Future Member panels of this type should learn from the strong stakeholder voice model used here. Constitutional Working Group should consider how further guidance can be drafted as to assist future member panels.*

Service specific:

- *Service feedback - Feedback from schools and operators should be regularly sought and acted upon – in a transparent way*

Officer response on Stakeholder recommendations

- 2.1 Officers accept the Panel's findings in this area and accept that changes to procurement processes in the summer and autumn of 2019 did not meet expected standards in terms of proper consultation, particularly with respect to children, young people and families.
- 2.2 The current service is committed to full consultation and partnership working with all stakeholders and has worked hard to regain the trust and confidence of families, transport providers and schools.
- 2.3 The HTST transport service has conducted surveys of school satisfaction with the service (July 2020) and parent/ carer satisfaction with September arrangements (September 2020).
- 2.4 Both surveys indicated very high levels of satisfaction from those responding (schools 100%, parents and carers 91%) with corresponding very low levels of concern. These, alongside comments by parents, carers, children and young people are detailed in the service update below.
- 2.5 However, the service is aware that a minority of potential respondents only have completed survey responses and a plan is needed with PaCC to reach a wider group of parents and carers.
- 2.6 The service needs to develop an integrated and regular schedule for obtaining feedback from all stakeholders, giving a 360-degree perspective, and for acting on concerns or suggestions for improvement. This will be a key part of the role of the Quality, Compliance and Contract Manager post once recruited.
- 2.7 A commitment has been given that stakeholder feedback will be obtained regularly in an open and transparent way.

3 Theme 3: Procurement

Panel recommendations:

Council-wide:

- *Exploring options - The council can and should be encouraged to meet its statutory obligations in different ways, for example, by paying parents (based on mileage or by giving each a personal budget) or by exploring delegating some budgets to schools. However, it is the panel's view that in order for operators to invest in delivering a high-quality service they need assurance that the contracts will run (subject to good contract management) for the duration of their term.*
- *System change - There is a point of learning for the whole council around whether there is enough lead-in time to properly plan for and achieve major systems change, including time for relevant committees to be consulted. For HTST this should include the annual procurement of each route, contracts being issued and the start of the autumn term.*

Service specific:

- *Future contractual changes – the CYPS committee will receive a future detailed report on possible new contractual arrangements for this service, which are fully co-produced with key stakeholders and that clearly seek the views and input of current providers. This model must include full considerations around sustainability and environmental impacts on the city. Any future contractual changes need to be considered with sufficient lead in time to be capable of delivery at the start a new academic year avoiding an over reliance on preparations over the summer holiday period.*

Officer response on Procurement recommendations:

- 3.1 Officers accept the findings of the Members' Policy Panel with respect to considering future procurement and related arrangements for securing HTST services.
- 3.2 The current four-year framework contract with transport providers has just under three years left to run.
- 3.3 Subject to agreement at CYPS Committee, a review of procurement arrangements will be organised.
- 3.4 If at the end of this review, changes of significance are proposed, these will be formulated within a sound governance and project management structure, in full consultation with stakeholders and with realistic lead-in times for any changes to be made.
- 3.5 The view of the service is that the amended way the procurement and tendering system is working now is at least satisfactory and providing much improved value for money, even within the context of extra vehicles for social distancing.
- 3.6 The council has heard the concerns of transport providers, who feel the current framework contract does not give them to the security they need to invest in new vehicles.
- 3.7 The council very much wishes providers to invest in the size and type of vehicles needed and to consider environmental impacts in doing so.
- 3.8 The service accepts that new ways of working should be explored. The service already offers mileage payments to many parents and personal budgets to a small number but agrees these options could be extended further.
- 3.9 The service is committed to the introduction of independent travel training, providing that a budget can be secured for this initiative.

3.10 A full report on suggested future methods of procuring Home to School Transport Services will be taken to a future meeting of the CYPS Committee.

4 Theme 4: Continuous Improvement and Improving Outcomes

Panel recommendations:

Council-wide:

- *Contract management - Robust contract management arrangements to be in place to ensure compliance with key standards (For HTST this means training, DBS and full compliance with the council's Blue Book etc). The panel welcomes the idea of a contract management board being established to manage contracts.*

Service specific:

- *Governance board - Transport Governance Board to continue and to oversee the HTST Improvement Action Plan and ensure continuous service improvement.*
- *Wider SEND planning - Process review of how transport needs are woven into Education, Health and Care plans and the work of SEND (given HTST sits outside the SEND team). The panel would like to see greater collaboration between these two areas with agreed roles and responsibilities.*
- *Route allocation review – Implementing an expanded value for money tool which embeds quality considerations alongside financial information when considering bids or making route allocations.*
- *Alternative arrangements - Alternative HTST arrangements are to be explored such as personal budgets; Independent Travel Training; mileage allowances.*
- *Home to School Transport policy - Reviewing and co-production of the Home to School Transport Policy, which was last agreed by members in 2015. Timing – to be in place before the formal re-procurement of the service begins. [New Government Guidance](#) is expected – consultation closed in October 2019. This will cover how to review the council's local policy. Separate post-16 guidance is also expected.*
- *Route returns - Route returns and other significant issues with operators must be recorded in a robust manner to allow scrutiny, analysis and improved service delivery.*
- *Future liaison - HTST should ensure close liaison between the service, schools and operators to ensure that pupils are not disadvantaged by reduced education time.*
- *HTST should ensure close liaison between the service, schools and operators to ensure that decisions by HTST do not create budget pressures on the schools.*
- *Incident reporting - HTST should create a robust procedure for incident reporting and a summary of incidences (complying with GDPR legislation) should be included with the reports to CYPS Committee recommended elsewhere in this report.*
- *Vehicle checks – HTST to ensure that appropriate vehicle checks are regularly and routinely carried out.*

Officer response to Service Improvement recommendations:

- 4.1 Officers accept the Panel's findings in respect of continuous improvement and improving outcomes.
- 4.2 Systems in use by the service up to and including 2019 have been reviewed and those causing concern have been changed or updated in consultation with PaCC, with new systems introduced.
- 4.3 Further details of changes to systems are including in the report to this committee on the progress of the HTST service.
- 4.4 A comprehensive new online training programme has been developed and a system for ensuring compliance with training requirements has been developed also.
- 4.5 Termly contract management meetings are held with contractors against the Key Performance Indicators in the contract.
- 4.6 Links between the HTST and SEND teams have been strengthened with termly meetings between senior officers in both. A senior member of the SEND team joins the Transport Panel also, where decisions are made on transport eligibility.
- 4.7 The Transport Panel now also includes a worker from Amaze representing parent/ carers.
- 4.8 The service is currently recruiting to the post of HTST SEND Officer. The appointee will be responsible for liaison between the teams, with families, providers, schools and medical services to ensure all SEND needs are correctly identified and met, that risks are identified and mitigated and that the transport workforce has all been properly trained for the role.
- 4.9 The policies for HTST, including post 16 transport, are scheduled to be reviewed on a co-produced model with PaCC once new government guidance is finalised and published.
- 4.10 The service is also developing a Value for Money Tool, which will provide expected bands within which we expect providers to bid. This would support a focus on quality as well as price, by identifying bids that are exceptionally low or high and providing evidence for further inquiry. The service is also in contact with the relevant department of the Government, which is undertaking similar work at national level in this area.
- 4.11 The service works in partnership with the Council's Vehicle Licensing Team to carry out spot checks at school sites. The HTST team check for compliance with the HTST standards such as transport staff identification badges, high visibility jackets and knowledge of children being transported, while the Licensing Team

carry out vehicle inspection checks as this is part of their role in monitoring standards in the taxi and private hire trade.

5. Summary and Next Steps

- 5.1 Officers will reflect in detail on the recommendations of the Members' Policy Panel in consultation with PaCC and other stakeholders and will incorporate these into the existing service action plan.
- 5.2 The action plan will be monitored by the HTST Governance Board as part of monthly meetings.
- 5.3 It is proposed that the extended action plan with an evaluation of progress against targets will be presented to the CYPs Committee in six months i.e. April 2020.