

Briefing for Brighton & Hove PaCC Network on HTST issues – 11/10/19

Purpose of the briefing

- To all parents/ carers whose children and young people receive home to school transport in Brighton & Hove
- To keep you informed on our response to problems relating to the recent new arrangements with our transport providers
- This information can be shared widely

Message from Pinaki Ghoshal, Executive Director of Families, Children & Learning

I want to acknowledge that the plans for home to school transport provision this year for many families and their children have gone very badly. This shouldn't have happened and I'm sorry for the stress and disruption this has caused for some families in the city. We have been working hard to rectify this.

After a poor start to the academic year our priority has been to resolve the issues, keeping in contact with the families affected. I'm afraid we've not always been able to give an immediate answer on what the individual solution might be as we have been reliant on our contracted operators, some of whom have changed their view on what they can deliver for us. Part of what we've been intending to do amongst these changes is to build our in-house team more, so that we are less reliant on external contractors.

We believe we have resolved the key issues for the majority of families affected and are now working on finalising the longer term transport arrangements. Checks are happening with the operators and the information we have been given about children's needs is being shared with them. We are very grateful for those families and friends who have been able to support the transportation of children whilst we've sought these longer term plans. We do understand the impact this may have had on getting to work on time and the effect on the transportation of other children in the family.

We acknowledge that for some children there are still issues around journey time, which can impact on their wellbeing and readiness for school. These issues include delays getting on and off vehicles at the hubs, partly due to the ongoing building work. We are working with the hub heads to resolve these issues as quickly as possible. Parent carers have also fed back concerns that increased vehicle size can slow down the process of VPAs helping children on and off the vehicle. We are committed to ensuring that these issues are addressed, to ensure journey times are kept within acceptable limits. We will update you on how these issues are being resolved.

We have listened to parent carer feedback around the suitability of vehicle size and appropriate groupings of children to ensure a stress free journey, enabling them to arrive at school ready to learn. We have made changes to transport arrangements where parent carers or school heads have alerted us to these problems.

PaCC have told us that families have fed back that they feel there are inconsistencies of what gets agreed around transport to in-house and to commissioned respite, short-breaks provision and after school clubs. This includes after school play provision recommended by BHCC social care team such as Pebbles. We apologise for this and we are seeking to improve consistency and transparency in decision making.

We are commissioning an independent review to learn from what has happened and as part of that we'd like to talk to parents and carers. All of this information will inform how we work with you in the future. More information will be shared about the review via the PaCC networks.

The PaCC have provided us with a great deal of helpful reflections and feedback on this situation, including a range of suggested additions for our ongoing action plan to manage and improve home to school transport.

We have a number of planned ways in which we engage with the parent and carer community about SEND matters in the city and I want to assure you that this will continue. We recognise that things went wrong with transport and we will learn from this. We will continue to seek and act upon your views, recognising your position as experts on the needs and wants of your children and young people.

Some key questions we've been asked

What's the current situation?

- The situation has improved significantly in the last three weeks. There are now no children with transport issues related to the challenges faced when operators pulled out of delivering routes at short notice. The twenty children remaining who were being transported under those temporary arrangements now have permanent arrangements from Monday. We are however aware that circumstances change often and we will need to remain responsive and change arrangements as needed. This includes when new transport arrangements are agreed for children.

What's happening with the independent review?

- A choice of review leads is being sought and a decision will be made within the next two weeks on who that will be. The PaCC Chair(s) will be involved in that decision. The work should still commence in late October, with focus groups and other meetings being planned for November.

Are we paying more money to Edge than we are saving? Are cuts being made to the budgets?

- We are aware of conflicting reports in the media about financial issues relating to home to school transport, including the financial arrangements we have in place with Edge, our consultants. We would like to reiterate that we are not cutting any home to school transport budgets either this year or next year, we are however looking to reduce the ongoing overspend on the budget. This reduction is more than we are paying Edge. In addition, it should be noted that Edge are supporting the council in setting up an in-house team who will in the future directly manage all of our transport support to vulnerable children, not just home to school transport. We would also like to remind families that we are not changing eligibility criteria.

What are you doing to get parents and carers more involved in all this?

- We have set up a transport governance group to oversee and resolve the current situation and also to coordinate future service planning and improvements including learning from the review. The PaCC Chairs have been invited to join this group.

What checks are being done with the operators?

- Operators are being assessed against what we set out as a requirement in our service specification. Clearly we've had some late adjustments to the routes planned and who the drivers will be, etc. We are also sharing all the information we receive about the children's needs with the operators. If a family has not yet sent back their Pupil Information Sheet we ask if that can be done ASAP please.

When will the building works be finished at Downs View Woodingdean?

- Work is underway at the Woodingdean site to make access to the school easier by introducing a one way system. The hope is that this will be done by the end of the October half term in 2019.

Are the start and end times changing at Hill Park?

- The school is going to conduct a consultation with parents / carers about the opening and closing times for the primary school site at Hill Park. If there are any agreed changes planning will need to be done with transport operators to ensure there are no disruptions to arrangements.

Further information

If you have any questions or need more information please email:
hometoschooltransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk