



## **PaCC Home to School Transport Progress Report for Children, Young People, Education & Skills Committee Meeting 29th September 2022**

**Date: 23<sup>rd</sup> August 2022**

*Please note the date of this Report, which is prior to the commencement of the September service. We will add a verbal update at the meeting, to highlight any specific aspects of the September service, should it be needed.*

### **Team Update**

We are pleased to see the team evolving, especially the addition of the Contract and Service Development manager, at this critical time of transition into the 2023 Procurement system. We thank the current Administrator for their dedication and wish them well in their new role. We look forward to working with new members of the team as they come on board and note that incoming staff have recent and extensive SEND skill sets, further adding to the team's existing collective strength. 'Lived Experience' will always be of value for this person-centred service.

### **Policies and Processes**

While we await the statutory guidance update, we have supported the HTST team to introduce the Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy. We recognise that our Service may, to the untrained eye, look 'vehicle heavy' however this service needs to run within key overarching children and young people wellbeing guidelines, including the 45/75 min max time on board principles (primary age/secondary age children).

A blend of vehicle types and sizes will continue to be needed, moving forward, in order to continue to meet the needs of the young people as they move toward adulthood, and in line with their own changing needs and our expanding numbers. There will continue to be young people who need to travel by themselves for reasons of safety and to ensure their school or

college attendance and PaCC is pleased to see greater clarity around the decision making for these specific cases.

There may be conflict of interest between Policies, for example if the introduction of Personal Travel Budgets leads to more vehicles being on the road overall, this might not sit so well within the Sustainable Travel Strategy, however this could be offset overall against the introduction of the Independent Travel Training Policy - with the ambition of supporting some students to become independent travellers using public transport safely and confidently.

When assessing the Service overall, it is important to keep in mind the very individual needs of the children and young people and recognise that safety and wellbeing led decisions may not always offer the most sustainable option. At the same time, as PaCC, we represent children and young people whose health issues may be made worse by environmental pollution, so we recognise the importance of the new Policy and the broad direction of travel toward improved Sustainability.

### Post 16 Transport

PaCC supports the current Post 16 Transport arrangements, following the public consultation, with the new addition of Independent Travel Training which is much anticipated by some of our community who recognise that their young people are 'ready' for this.

### Post 19 Transport

There is confusion within the Parent Carer community about the mechanisms around Post 19 Transport provision. The Transport Guidance discriminates between students who are on courses which started before their 19th birthday (they fall within the 16-18 Sixth Form age and thus under the HTST Policy) and Adult Learners starting new courses after their 19th birthday - 'Post 19'. The decision making around eligibility and subsequent communications for this latter cohort (and in some instances, a daily charge for transport) is held *outside of the Home to School Transport Service* and from a students/families perspective is sitting awkwardly between the SEN Team and the Specialist Community Disability Service (SCDS), but it is Home to School Transport who organise and deliver the Transport.

The Jan 2019 Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities for 'Post 16 Transport and Travel Support to Education and Training' states that a 19-25 Transport Policy for Adult Learners with EHCPs should be published by Local Authorities as part of the overall Post-16 Policy and where Transport is

assessed as *needed* in order for the Adult Learner (with an EHCP) to be able to get to their further education setting, should be provided *free of charge*.

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/772913/Post16\\_transport\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/772913/Post16_transport_guidance.pdf)

There is currently no Post-19 Policy or information regarding eligibility, charging criteria or mechanism for Appeal, publicly available to families on the Council's website. Without a clear and transparent Policy, we are unclear whether the Post19 decisions being made are compliant within the specific guidance of 508F of the Transport Guidance.

PaCC have requested an urgent meeting with SEN & SCDS Representatives and asked them to meet with us (PaCC & HTST Co-Production) to examine the current Post-19 mechanisms in light of receiving queries and concerns from some families in the city. We would like to work together to create a transparent Policy and ideally a single point of contact for families to make the process clearer, easier and fairer. We expect to have a working group underway to address these concerns by the time the CYPE&S Committee convenes, and are looking for an effective resolution with a clear leadership, ownership and implementation of a published Post 19 Transport Policy.

## **Service Satisfaction**

### Schools/Colleges Feedback

30 settings responded out of a total 75 settings that are currently serviced by HTST.

We would like to see a greater return rate on this important survey, but recognise the unprecedented pressure on schools leaders, so our request for feedback would not have been top priority. This is an important exercise and one that not all HTST services would take the time to conduct. As such, some out of city settings may not be used to being canvassed. The objectives of building closer relationships across all settings is to ensure that arrangements are safe for all, the 'meet and greet/send off' experience for passengers is consistently positive, and the working relationship between crews and staff is of a good and courteous standard. This is especially important for the provisions that are beyond our city borders.

### Parents & Carers Feedback

We are pleased overall with the maintained high standards, and will support the HTST Team to look at the process with the aim of raising the 77% 'very/fairly easy to apply for transport' result.

We would welcome an easy way to prompt families to update information periodically to reflect children & young people's development and support needs. This could also potentially be a capture mechanism for expression of interest in ITT so that the service can forward plan.

We are satisfied that the Appeals process is now clearer, more accessible and more equitable.

### Students Feedback

We welcome the addition of a survey that children and young people can complete. Their views, together with Parents & Carers should always be front and centre.

### **Monitoring Contractual Compliance**

We welcomed the opportunity to attend the Contract Reviews and introduce PaCC to Operators who may not be familiar with our role in the city and our co-production work. The communication to parents and carers following a spot check is indeed a good example of service standards and transparency in action.

### **Independent Travel Training (ITT)**

We look forward to the launch of the pilot ITT programme, and have confidence in Grace Eyre, having seen their sterling work with young adults in our city, including familiar faces that we know personally. We hope it will be successful and the beginning of a bigger rolling ITT scheme. We are aware that there will be families who feel frustrated to be missing out on this pilot, or indeed the missed opportunity if their young people have just moved out of the service. And we acknowledge that there is a potentially broader Equalities issue for young people with SEND who aren't eligible for HTST/the ITT Pilot, but who are disadvantaged in terms of their independence and transition to adulthood, by not being able to access any ITT elsewhere. We would encourage the Committee to consider flagging and redirecting this to colleagues in ET&S, and the EDI Officers, as a missing part of the broader

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Active Travel initiatives and pipeline Accessible City Strategy, with respect to young people with SEND specifically.

### **Personal Travel Budgets (PTBs)**

We are excited to see this addition to the HTST Service and that the mileage payments are pegged to the council's private mileage rate, especially with respect to rising fuel prices. Conversations to date have been open minded and pragmatic, and we hope the final Policy will offer families the freedom to create bespoke solutions that can work for their whole family needs. We will monitor the uptake/conversion rates and feedback from families, at our regular co-production and governance meetings.

### **Travel Planning for September 2022**

The period from May to September is the most challenging time of the HTST year, when routing takes place, while waiting for inevitable 'late entries' due to finalised EHCPs, tribunals, and appeals, which can all have a knock on effect on the scheduling of what amounts to around 206 daily routes.

We are concerned about the potential impact on students and their families when an operator returns routes at this late stage. Students and their families can feel highly stressed if they don't know the detail of their travel arrangements, when trying to prepare themselves as well as manage sibling and work commitments. There is an agreed time for uplift applications (October), so that these financial discussions can be held in a way that is considered, and minimises disruption, so it is frustrating when uplift requests come in just at the time when changes would have the most detrimental impact on passengers as well as potentially having an impact on the Crews who are expecting to work on a particular route. This potentially exacerbates our VPA retainment which could destabilise the service standards.

At the same time, PaCC fully acknowledges that these are unprecedented times with rising pressures on households and businesses from the costs of fuel and utilities, which is also driving these requests for uplifts. This is a national issue.

## Budgetary Pressures

PaCC does not hold budgetary responsibility as part of the co-production agreement. However, we are invited to comment from a community perspective, and were in strong support of the May fuel payment to all existing operators.

We monitor the national picture through our Parent Carer Forum associates regionally and nationally and note the detrimental impact of HTST service failure on children and young people and their families which has been evidenced in several local authorities. This is typically due to cost cutting initiatives drowning out the recognition of the very bespoke needs of the children and young people cared for by the HTST service.

It is imperative that the Financial Directorate in Brighton and Hove understand the vulnerabilities and the rights of the children and young people that this service transports and recognises that their entitlement to education (and arriving stress free) is protected by Law. The forecasts for 2023 and beyond, must recognise the triad of pressures arising from the increase in passenger numbers (related to an increase in the number of Education, Health and Care Plans in the city), the cost-of-living pressures facing our service delivery partners (the operators and their drivers and VPA Crews), and in particular the cohort of passengers with very bespoke needs who need 'travel alone' status &/or who go to educational settings outside of Brighton & Hove which necessitates more expensive/solo runs. The Budget must be able to embrace the diversity of requirements of this statutory service.

We have historically raised the notion of a contingency budget with Officers via Governance Meetings, as a potential means of ringfencing additional funds, to ensure that the service standards can be maintained through these volatile times but are reassured that this is a statutory service and as such will be funded, even if that means going over budget. However, PaCC would prefer to see the HTST being set at a realistic level that recognises the volatility and bespoke requirements of this Service, so that the Officers can work within a fit-for-purpose budget, rather than continually justifying 'overspend' against a lesser budget that cannot stretch. PaCC do not want to see any compromise on the service standards which the Service has worked so hard to raise, since 2019, and these must be maintained at their current good levels.

## **Re-procurement of the Service from August 2023**

We thank the HTST Team and Comms Support for introducing the upcoming changes to service in an up front and transparent way. This communication will increase and become more salient once we are past the current September start, and inevitably there will be a heightened level of anxiety when the full retendering process starts. Many families will feel very worried at the prospect that their Crew and arrangements could be changed. We recognise that this will be an unavoidably challenging time for some, and we will offer our full support to families and to the HTST Team as we navigate through this initial changeover. We hope that once all routes are allocated for September 2023, a 'new normal' will then run for the 4 years, hopefully with only minimal and necessary changes (much as it is now).

## **Community Engagement**

We suggested that HTST could begin a direct line of communication with Crews, and were pleased to see the end of term communication go out to thank them for their work over the year, and importantly, to keep them informed of the evolution of the Service, as they are the 'face' of our service to families and we know from experience that it is best when all parties are up to speed, with the same information. This will be important, moving forward.

As our ITT programme picks up, as well as our PTBs, there may be more young people with SEND travelling independently or with Travel Buddies on our city's public transport. It may be useful to consider some broad 'kindness & tolerance' messages as part of the City's ongoing Active Travel and public transport communications.

As this paper demonstrates, PaCC continues to work closely with BHCC officers and delivery partners on the co-production of the HTST service which is to be celebrated and recognised as a good practice example which other services could learn from. Also, parent carer representatives regularly attend and participate in HTST Panel meetings, ensuring there is a parent carer perspective in decision-making processes.

## **Financial Implications**

No further comment

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## Equalities Implications

We suggest the broader access to ITT schemes for all students with SEND, is raised by this Committee with ET&S Colleagues and EDI Officers.

## Sustainability Implications

As mentioned under the Policies and Procedures section, we support the application of Sustainability Principles but these must be secondary to the statutory entitlements of children and young people with SEND to receive safe and stress free HTST.

## Social Value and Procurement Implications

We fully support the monitoring of Living Wage payments and as an organisation representing the voices of Parent Carers, Social Value is an essential quality that we agree should be a factor when evaluating bids.

Report Completed by Pippa Hodge PaCC Rep for HTST

18th August 2022

PaCC welcome any communication on any of the issues contained in this document. You can contact us by emailing Diana Boyd, PaCC Chair [diana@paccbrighton.org.uk](mailto:diana@paccbrighton.org.uk) or calling **01273 234862**

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The Parent Carers' Council (PaCC) is a parent-led forum which represents parent carers with children and young people with any kind of physical disability, learning disability, complex or long-term medical/health condition, mental health issue or special educational need. The group was formed to enable parent carers to work closely together to help improve services and support. It aims to help parents get more directly involved in the strategic delivery of services for disabled children in Brighton & Hove and now has over 525 signed up members.