

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Report

Committee:	Children and Young People Select Committee
Date:	19 January 2024
Title:	School Transport: Summer 2023 Lessons Learned and Policy Consultations
Report From:	Director of Children's Services

Contact name: Jon Bramley, Head of School Transport

Email: Jon.bramley@hants.gov.uk

Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Select Committee of:
2. The Lessons Learned exercise conducted by the School Transport Service and the resulting Service Improvement Plan;
3. The results of the recent public consultation on proposed changes to the School Transport Policy and the Post 16 Transport Policy.

Recommendation(s)

2. It is recommended that the Children and Young People Select Committee note the lessons learned by the School Transport Service and the contents of the Service Improvement Plan.
3. It is recommended that the Children and Young People Select Committee note the feedback received during the public consultation on proposed changes to the School Transport Policy and the Post 16 Transport Policy, and the actions and mitigations proposed to respond to this feedback.

Executive Summary

4. This report sets out some background about the challenges faced by the School Transport Service, both in the long term and over the period leading up to the new academic year. It then goes on to describe the lessons learned from that period and the resulting Service Improvement Plan.
5. The report gives a summary of the feedback received from the recent public consultation on proposed changes to the School Transport policy and the

Post 16 Transport Policy.

6. This report is a brief summary; the detail of each element is given in the attached Appendix A - "Select Committee - Lessons learned, improvement and consultation" presentation, Appendix B - "Proposed changes to the School Transport Policy" report for Executive Member Decision Day and Appendix C - "Determination of Post 16 Transport Policy 2024" report for Executive Member Decision Day

Contextual information

7. The period leading up to the new academic year was challenging for the School Transport Service. Several one-off factors increased the pressure on the Service at a time that is already the busiest of the year. It was agreed at the autumn Select Committee that the lessons learned would be brought to the January Committee meeting for Members to consider.
8. School transport operates to a defined set of statutory duties. Outside of this, transport provision is discretionary and is therefore subject to parental contribution towards the cost of transport. The DfE published revised guidance for local authority school transport in June 2023.
9. These factors led to the need to review the current School Transport policy, which identified some areas that should be amended to give parents increased choices and other areas that needed to change to align with the new DfE guidance. Proposed changes to the policy must be subject to a public consultation.
10. There is a statutory requirement for the Post 16 Transport policy to be reviewed and republished each May, necessitating a public consultation. It was decided to conduct this at the same time as the consultation on the main School Transport policy.

Finance

11. The School Transport Service faces escalating costs, especially due to pressures caused by an increasing number of SEN children requiring transport. The service has a £53.4m forecast spend for 23/24 (£9.5m pressure on £43.9m budget), £2.78m more than forecast at start of year. The forecast spend for 24/25 is £61.4m (£2.9m pressure on £58.5m budget).
12. The lessons learned, service improvement activity and policy consultation described in the appendices are not expected to have a significant effect on the budget or spend.

Performance

13. Appendix A sets out the detail of the challenges faced by the School Transport Service. Over the summer period several factors, both internal and

external, led to a significant and overwhelming increase in incoming calls. This led directly to parents being unable to get through to the Service and so to an increase in issues raised with Elected Members.

14. The Service conducted a series of lessons learned workshops in October 2023. These identified numerous individual service improvement activities, grouped into five key themes – data, process, tooling, resources and communications, and four workstreams.
15. Each workstream and activity has been assessed for priority and allocated to a lead member of staff. Work is progressing but will take more than one academic year to complete. Some of the identified activities are dependent on input or resources from other teams or organisations which may or may not be forthcoming, so contingency plans are being developed.

Consultation and Equalities

16. Over the period 30th October to 6th December 2023, public consultations took place on proposed changes to the School Transport policy and the Post 16 Transport policy.
17. The proposed changes, and the broad numbers in favour and against each for the School Transport policy are:
 - Implementation of Personal Transport Budgets – 62% for, 22% against.
 - Independent Travel Training – 50% for, 27% against.
 - Review of Passenger Assistant allocation – 66% for, 14% against.
 - Increase charges for discretionary transport by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) - 39% for, 43% against.
 - Clearer wording aligned to DfE guidance – this was not scored as positive versus negative. Comments were generally supportive as long as the changes did not materially change transport eligibility. There were several comments regarding overall lack of SEN school provision and comments that concerned previous changes to the School Transport policy.
18. The proposed changes, and the broad numbers in favour and against each for the Post 16 Transport policy are:
 - Increase charges for Post 16 transport by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) - 17% for, 73% against.
 - Clearer wording aligned to DfE guidance – this was not scored as positive versus negative.
 - Comments concerned affordability, lack of SEN schools and queries around why there was a charge when education is compulsory to 18 years.
19. The service improvement activity concerns processes and ways of working and has no equality impacts. The School Transport policy changes (Appendix B) and Post 16 Transport policy changes (Appendix C) include their own Equalities Impact Assessments and feedback on impacts highlighted by consultation responders.

Climate Change Impact Assessment

20. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience impacts of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.
21. Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation. The service improvement activity concerns service processes and ways of working and has no environmental impacts. The School Transport policy changes (Appendix B) and Post 16 Transport policy changes (Appendix C) include their own Climate Change Impact Assessments.

Conclusions

22. The School Transport Service went through a challenging period over summer and into the new academic year. This resulted in parents being unable to contact the service which caused frustration.
23. Many local authorities across the country experienced difficulties securing transport for eligible children for the start of the academic year as a result of the supply and demand issues.
24. The School Transport Service has learned lessons from this experience and seeks to continually learn and improve. The new structure and management team are now established, resulting in a firm base on which to build further improvement activity. The Service has a comprehensive and structured improvement plan and has commenced working on the highest priority activities.
25. Various proposed changes to policy to introduce more choice for parents and to align with changes to DfE guidance went to public consultation between late October and early December.
26. The feedback from consultation responders is positive about the proposals that will increase parental choice, neutral about the changes to align with DfE guidance and negative about the proposed increase in discretionary charges to match CPI.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	Yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	Yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	No
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	Yes

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

Equalities Impact Assessment:

Please see individual Equality Impact Assessments in Appendices B and C.