

<b>Subject:</b>	<b>Briefing on Home to School Transport Arrangements for the Autumn Term 2020</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>29 August 2020</b>
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## 1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The briefing provides an update on arrangements for Home to School Transport for the autumn term 2020.
- 1.2 Appendices to the briefing include the latest communication with parents and carers on arrangements for September and a 'Social Story' written to help children and young people cope with changes.
- 1.3 Also attached are longer documents providing further information on:
  - Guidance for Operators on Arrangements over the Autumn term
  - The first two training modules in the new suite of online training materials– 'Introduction to HTST' and 'Safeguarding on HTST'

## 2 ROUTE PLANNING

- 2.1 Planning took place in good time this year and details of known children and young people for transport were passed on to firms before the end of July.
- 2.2 Our providers will be transporting around 480 children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities to around 50 different schools and colleges.
- 2.3 At the point of writing the briefing, the HTST service is still receiving details of a small number of new children needing transport. This happens every year and in all Local Authorities and necessitates last minute changes to arrangements in some cases.
- 2.4 Our transport providers have been flexible and supportive over a period of much change and uncertainty, working in partnership with the service to ensure that arrangements are the best they can be over the pandemic period and in relation to the return to school.
- 2.5 The Parent and Carers' Council, often under extreme pressures themselves as parents and carers over the period of school closures, has provided highly valued challenge and support in relation to autumn arrangements and very helpful input into planning and communications.
- 2.6 In these uncertain and challenging times, we have said to parents and carers that there may be imperfections and issues to be resolved at the beginning of the term. However, we are committed to providing a good and safe service and will work swiftly with all stakeholders to resolve any issues that might arise.
- 2.7 Social distancing has been continued on vehicles in line with the latest government advice, issued on 11 August. While it is not mandatory to operate reduced numbers on HTST, Government advice is to try to do that as far as possible.
- 2.8 Our routes have been planned to leave a spare seat between each passenger in vehicles. Where this has been difficult for practical reasons, one extra passenger only has been allowed.

- 2.9 Social distancing has necessitated the commissioning of more vehicles and crews, and while we have managed to secure sufficient capacity, resources have been stretched with additional vehicles commissioned and providers have had to recruit extra staff.
- 2.10 The Government has provided extra funding for COVID-relief generally and a grant for dedicated school transport, including specifically commissioned buses.
- 2.11 Parents/ carers have all been asked to contact us if they have any worries about their arrangements. In the few instances where they have done so, we have been able to make changes and provide reassurance.
- 2.12 Firms were asked to ensure all families knew of arrangements and had met new teams where applicable by 16 August. While in the majority of cases, firms met this deadline, we have had to chase up a number beyond this date. Although in some cases, we have been told of genuine difficulties in making contact with parents and carers, we do not feel this system has worked as well as it should and needs further improvement. We have been discussing with a PaCC representative how to make changes to ensure greater compliance with deadlines in the future.

### **3 GUIDANCE TO OPERATORS AND FAMILIES**

- 3.1 New updated guidance was issued to operators on 18.8.20 in response to the government's latest guidance for school transport issued on 11 August. This guidance is circulated as an attachment to this briefing and covers all aspects of prevention of virus transmission and response to virus symptoms on HTST.
- 3.2 We have also required our operators to send us their risk assessments before the start of term and these are in the process of being returned currently.
- 3.3 We issued our latest communication to parents and carers on 20.8.20 (see Appendix 1) with a 'Social Story' (see Appendix 2) to help some children and young people prepare for the changed transport arrangements for September.
- 3.4 All our communications with parents and carers have been discussed and approved by PaCC.

### **3.5 VEHICLE PASSENGER ASSISTANTS**

- 3.6 This workforce is often difficult to recruit and retain because of limited hours needed, split shifts and time of day when transport required.
- 3.7 A high percentage of VPAs (and drivers on HTST) are an older workforce and their safety is a priority, alongside that of children and young people.
- 3.8 Acknowledging recruitment and retention difficulties, our supplier relief over the period of school closures has paid VPAs at 100% of their expected pay.
- 3.9 The LA has also recruited 6 'bank' VPAs who can cover for any gaps caused by sickness or any issues that might arise with time taken for acquiring enhanced DBS for new VPAs.

### **4 MONITORING**

- 4.1 Our checks with providers are complete and no transport staff member will begin their work in September without a current enhanced DBS
- 4.2 Following issues last year, where parents and carers reported feeling burdened by requests for new Pupil Information Sheets annually, this year parents and carers have only been asked to update the existing sheets if there have new information to provide about children's needs.

- 4.3 All operators have been told that they will only get an updated Pupil Information Sheet if the parents or carers have provided updated information. Where routes have changed, transport operators have been provided with Pupil Information Sheets for children and young people new to their service.
- 4.4 The Home to School Transport Service has conducted risk assessments on all children using our transport.
- 4.5 The service is monitoring compliance with COVID-19 safety standards by:
  - 4.5.1. requiring an updated risk assessment from each firm;
  - 4.5.2. staff being required to complete the training modules sent out to them by the beginning of term;
  - 4.5.3. team presence at key school sites in the first week of term to monitor traffic flow;
  - 4.5.4. regular spot checks on COVID preventative and cleaning regime compliance at key school sites from the beginning of the autumn term.

## **5 TRAINING**

- 5.1 We have issued our firms the first two training modules for all staff to complete by the beginning of term (see attachments with the briefing) – they are:
  - ‘Introduction to HTST’
  - ‘Safeguarding on HTST’
- 5.2. We are checking that our firms are complying with the requirement that all staff have completed these two modules before starting work in September. Initial feedback from firms on the content is very positive although there have been some teething problems with accessing the Learning Gateway. We have issued the modules as PDFs also to make sure everyone has access irrespective of access to the Learning Gateway.
- 5.3 We are then requiring all staff to have completed a further three modules by this half term and a further four by the end of the autumn term, covering all aspects of SEND, Equalities and Exploitation.
- 5.4 The training programme has been developed by relevant specialists from across the Local Authority and produced in consultation with representatives from PaCC and our transport providers.
- 5.5. VPAs, drivers and parents and carers have contributed to the module on ‘Introduction to HTST’.
- 5.6 We are also just about to issue training on epilepsy for staff transporting children with epilepsy plans.
- 5.7 Epilepsy plans are now being written by the specialist nurses at Seaside View with a dedicated section providing advice specifically for transport staff, and with parents’ and carers’ consent, each updated plan is being forwarded to our operators.

## **6 RECRUITMENT**

- 6.1 Low capacity in the HTST service is the most significant risk to continued service improvements currently. Low capacity in the team at peak times, was referenced in the report from the Independent Review Team, published in March 2020.
- 6.2 The current service establishment is small at 1.75 FTE client transport officers and a seconded team manager plus an interim Head of Service (part-time).
- 6.3 Low capacity at the peak time from mid-summer to September has been exacerbated by the need to respond to special arrangements for the pandemic.

- 6.4 Currently recruitment is underway for a permanent team manager and an administrative assistant. Our attempt to recruit a contract manager 0.5 FTE and an interim Head of Service did not produce a short-list and the posts will be advertised again. The current interim Head of Service is still in post.
- 6.5 We will be advertising for a SEND officer and 1.8 further transport officers once these posts have been graded.

## **7 GOVERNANCE BOARD**

- 7.1 The Home to School Transport Governance Board meets monthly and its membership includes representatives from the Parent and Carers' Council and from schools.
- 7.2 The Governance Board has provided challenge and support in relation to new policies and practices relating to the co-produced action plan for the service and preparations for September 2020.

## **8 FURTHER QUESTIONS ON SEPTEMBER ARRANGEMENTS FROM CLLRS WARES AND MEARS**

- 8.1 *Have H&S risk assessments relating to Covid been completed for all the drivers and escorts being engaged in transporting children?*  
Individual risk assessments for each driver and VPA on transport would be the responsibility of transport operators as they are the employers of these staff.

However, the safety and wellbeing of transport staff is extremely important to the service also and we have regularly updated our advice to providers, including advice on the safety and wellbeing of staff, signposting the relevant government and Public Health advice on all issues. See Pages 2-6 in the attached guidance letter sent to all providers on 18.8.20.

While the wearing of face coverings and PPE is not mandatory on HTST, our guidance supports the risk assessments of our providers, based on their individual situations. In relation to PPE, the Council has accepted applications from transport providers in some cases for free PPE from Council stocks at times of shortage. However, to preserve stocks for where most needed, the council's policy has always been that PPE can only be accessed from the Council by suppliers if they cannot reasonably source it elsewhere.

Where issues relating the safety and wellbeing of staff have been raised with us by providers, we have consulted with Public Health colleagues and responded.

We have asked all our providers to update their firms' overall risk assessments in line with the latest guidance from the government for dedicated school transport (11 August) and to provide the HTST service with a copy. We have also been offering them guidance and support in this area, as well as a proforma to use if necessary and have required the updated versions to be returned to us.

- 8.2 *Do all the operators/drivers/escorts have Covid insurance in place?*  
This is not a contractual requirement and the council has not asked firms to acquire this insurance. All our firms comply with council requirements on

insurance cover. We are not aware of any insurance firms willing to insure against COVID-19 transmission specifically.

8.3 *Have arrangements now been put in place with the schools to deal with the drop-off and pick-up of the children at school and what are they?*

We transport to 50 schools. Arrangements for drop-off and pick-up are the responsibility of the schools and transport providers working together. The council's responsibility is to monitor effectiveness and to resolve any issues if necessary.

We surveyed all 50 schools in July on a number of issues, including handover arrangements. We had a 50% response rate. Of those responding, 100% reported that they were satisfied with the service, including handover arrangements, and half of those responding rated the service as good or better. There have been access issues at Hill Park Lower School, due to restricted space on the site and the narrowness of the road, and so the HTST team met with operators and Hill Park senior staff on 28<sup>th</sup> August and put in place a plan to resolve issues through staggered starts and a self-imposed one-way system for transport vehicles in Foredown Road.

We intend to monitor the situations directly at Hill Park and Downsview at the beginning of term to check runs are flowing smoothly.

Traffic issues in the City could be a concern. We have planned routes on the basis of normal conditions, but new restrictions and road works may delay routes and we have warned parents and carers of this. We will monitor arrival and departure times in the new term to check for issues.

8.4 *Have compliance checks been carried out on all the vehicles being used?*

Vehicle standards are the contractual responsibility of the operator. The HTST service carries out spot checks at school sites with the Council's Licencing Team. While it is not the responsibility of the HTST to undertake vehicle safety checks, we monitor contractual compliance in relation to the specifications in the HTST contract, such as punctuality, drivers carrying identity badges and CCTV in vehicles. From the autumn we will also be doing spot checks on compliance with cleaning regimes, for example carrying of sanitiser and cloths for cleaning between journey.

8.5 *Are there any vehicles proposed to be used non-compliant with the Blue Book?*

All providers are required to comply with Brighton and Hove HTST standards, which include the Blue Book and additional specifications in the Home to School Transport contract. As stated above, the Home to School Transport Service works with the Licencing Team to support the Licencing Team's role in monitoring standards set out in the Blue Book. Regular spot checks at school sites are carried out by HTST officers working with officers from the Licencing Team.

The HTST service also monitors standards through termly contract reviews against Key Performance Indicators in the contract. In addition, any incidents or complaints about the service from any quarter are thoroughly investigated and action taken as appropriate. Investigations into complaints with a safeguarding element are conducted in close liaison with the Local Authority Designated Officer.

Our new training modules cover standards expected from transport staff and promote a thorough understanding of safeguarding responsibilities.

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **Most recent comms to parents and carers sent on 20.8.20**

Dear Parents and Carers,

#### **Home to School Transport – special arrangements for September 2020**

With the beginning of the autumn term approaching, I am writing to update you on the special arrangements we've put in place to ensure the safety and wellbeing of our children and young people on Home to School Transport (HTST).

We realise this continues to be an anxious time for families.

However, we want to assure you that the safety and wellbeing of children and young people on transport is extremely important to us and we have taken care with special arrangements for the autumn term.

Please bring any problems or issues to the attention of the Home to School Transport Service.

Also, please get in touch if you would like help with this letter and we will go through what it says with you on the phone.

You can ring us on 01273 293501 or email at [Hometoschooltransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:Hometoschooltransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk)

#### **September Arrangements**

The latest guidance covering Home to School Transport was issued by the government on 11 August. Here is a link to it:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020/transport-to-school-and-other-places-of-education-autumn-term-2020>

We have considered all national guidance carefully in constructing the following advice to you about arrangements for the autumn term.

### **If your child or someone in your household has COVID-19 symptoms**

The main symptoms of COVID-19 are:

- a high temperature
- a new, continuous cough
- a loss or change to your sense of smell or taste

If your child or young person, or a member of your household has these symptoms, **you must not send your child on Home to School Transport or to school.**

Our transport staff must not be asked to take your child or young person if they have symptoms. This is because it risks spreading the virus to other children and staff. In these circumstances, your child or young person must stay at home and be tested. Please follow the guidance in the link below:

[Stay at home: guidance for households with possible or confirmed coronavirus \(COVID-19\) infection.](#)

If your child or young person develops COVID-19 symptoms while at school, **we cannot allow the transport team to take them home.** To avoid potential transmission of the virus, we will ask you to collect your child and take him or her home. If that causes difficulties for you, you can ring us to discuss – but we have to protect the safety of all children and our transport staff.

### **Social Distancing on Transport**

The government has said that the rules for public transport on social distancing do not apply to 'dedicated' or Home to School Transport.

The risk is deemed to be lower on Home to School Transport, as pupils do not mix with the general public on those journeys and the same groups travel together every day.

However, the government encourages arrangements that leave more space between passengers wherever possible.

Brighton & Hove is reducing the numbers of children and young people on vehicles this autumn term to allow for greater distance between them.

This has meant we have had to commission more vehicles and staff crews than we would normally over the pandemic period. This means there is less spare capacity in the city in the event of staff illness or absence.

However, the council has recruited a small team of Vehicle Passenger Assistants (VPAs), to provide extra cover if needed.

The principles we've used are:

- Distancing within vehicles where possible / reduced numbers on vehicles
- Maintaining consistency for children and young people / familiar firms / crews
- Ensuring everyone gets safely to school in an efficient and timely manner

In most cases, there will be a spare seat between each child or young person. Where this has been difficult to achieve, we have added one extra child in to enable everyone to get to school in a timely and efficient manner.

We are asking firms not to seat children opposite each other if at all possible.

Unless there are exceptional circumstances agreed with families, the HTST team and the transport provider, we are not permitting children to sit in the front of vehicles.

We are also asking our firms to make sure vehicles are well-ventilated, with open windows where possible, and that surfaces are cleaned thoroughly between passengers.

Transport staff will not be permitted to enter your homes. Please make sure you bring your child to and from the transport vehicle. School staff will meet transport staff at the school entrance.

All routes for September have been planned and all new transport teams should have introduced themselves to you and your child by now. Please let us know if this has not happened and we will chase this up.

## **Face coverings**

The government are recommending that children and young people over 11 years old wear face coverings on Home to School Transport, as on public transport.

However, our children and young people on HTST are excluded from this recommendation under the following circumstances:

- if they have a physical or mental illness or impairment, or a disability that means they cannot put on, wear or remove a face covering;
  - if putting on, wearing or removing a face covering would cause them severe distress.
- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-safer-travel-guidance-for-passengers#exemptions-face-coverings>

If your child or young person cannot manage to fix and remove the face covering or mask safely on their own, it is not safe for them to wear them.

If your child or young person is over 11 years old and can manage to fix and remove a face covering safely and independently, we would recommend that they do wear one. However, this is at your discretion.

## **Other safety measures**

Please make sure your child or young person has washed their hands thoroughly before joining transport in the morning.

Please make sure you take your child to the vehicle in the mornings and collect from the vehicle in the afternoon.

It can help if your child travels with tissues.

If you would prefer to transport your child yourself over the continuing pandemic period, please contact us in relation to a mileage allowance or personal travel budget.

We are keen to support parents and carers who are able to do this. This does not in any way affect your entitlement to free transport and you can end any such arrangement at any time.

### **PPE for Transport Staff**

Government guidance does not require staff on Home to School Transport to wear PPE or face coverings.

However, it is recognised that masks or face coverings and sometimes other forms of PPE may be a sensible precaution where social distancing is not possible. This will depend on the risk assessments carried out by our transport providers of their own situations.

Your child or young person should be prepared for staff wearing PPE when they return to school. I have re-attached a 'social story' we put together that may be a help to you in preparing your child for what to expect in September.

### **Emotional and Behavioural Needs**

We understand that many of our children and young people are highly anxious, and that the pandemic can make this worse.

We know that anxiety and distress can lead to challenging behaviours for some young people. Our VPAs, if there is one on the route, will help them and reassure them to the best of their ability.

Our new training programme will support transport staff in meeting children's needs.

However, drivers must be allowed to pay full attention to the road and cannot be expected to manage children and young people's behaviour.

For the safety of all children and young people and transport staff, we may have to make special arrangements if staff are struggling with unsafe behaviours over the pandemic period.

In these circumstances we may ask you to travel with your child, although you do not have to do so.

### **Cleaning of vehicles**

We have set out expectations for all transport providers about thorough cleaning of vehicle surfaces between journeys.

We will be carrying out spot checks at school sites to check that cleaning and safety precautions are being complied with.

### **Training for Transport Staff**

Please be assured that all staff on transport have the required DBS checks.

Our transport providers have been given all the information in this letter.

We are also introducing online training for all staff and require all transport staff to have completed introductory and safeguarding modules before the start of term.

Over the course of the autumn term, all staff will have to complete online modules on Equalities and a broad range of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

Our training has been produced by specialist staff at the council with input from transport operators and PaCC representatives.

### **Traffic**

We are aware that with planned roadworks and other changes to the traffic systems across the city, there could be some temporary hold-ups. We are hoping that journeys won't be adversely affected, and we will monitor the situation in the autumn and check on arrival times at school or college.

### **And finally...**

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or queries about the above or any other aspect of your child or young person's transport:

- phone 01273 293501
- or email [hometoschooltransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk](mailto:hometoschooltransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk).

We are here to help if we can and you will receive a warm welcome from us.

Your child or young person's safety and wellbeing is very important to us and we want to be sure you are comfortable and confident in the arrangements made for the autumn term.

The pandemic is a challenge for all of us and we cannot guarantee that everything will be perfect straight away as we all come to terms with the 'new normal'.

I hope you can bear with us if there are any unforeseen challenges. However, we have planned to the best of our ability and – working together with PaCC and our families in partnership – we will do our very best to ensure a smooth transition back to school for everyone.

Best wishes,

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **'Social Story for Children and Young People'**

## **My Story: Back to School**

My name is ....

I go to .... School.

I am going back to school on ....

I go to school by (taxi, minibus, school bus)

Some things will be different.

This is because of the virus.

I might see my old driver and VPA again.

But I may have a new driver and VPA for a while.  
If I do, my new driver and VPA will still be kind to me.  
They will say hello and goodbye.  
They will want to get to know me and what I like.

I may have to sit somewhere different.

This is to help keep everyone safe.

My driver and VPA may be wearing a mask and gloves  
like in these pictures





This is to help keep everyone safe.

If I am worried, I can tell (mum/dad/ carer).

School is fun.

I can see my teachers and friends again.

