

Members' Policy Panel
21.7.20

Response to previous queries

Panel would like to review the cost of routes

The HTST team with finance colleagues has been working on a route comparison tool which would give us some 'fair price' benchmarking with the sophistication needed to cover variables, such as whether there is a VPA on the route, how many children are being transported, how complex their needs, how far etc. The breakdown of route costs per mile then provides 'outliers' against our benchmarking. We already have this information but are going through a checking process to ensure all variables and complexities have been accounted for in each route. For example, a route cost per mile might seem very high, but further analysis might show the journey the child's needs are very complex, requiring longer to support on and off the vehicle/ load equipment etc.

Panel would like more information about how comparator council budgets' break down

We do not have this information currently. This could be obtained but capacity an issue this summer.

Panel would like a breakdown of overspend in last financial year to understand how this can be prevented in future

- Prior to new software system, Mobisoft, introduced last autumn, the data on pupils and routes was less reliable, making comparisons between July and September difficult. This is a substantial caveat to consider when looking at the table below.
- Best estimate of full year overspend in 2019/20, without the new procurement having taken place, was £498K
- This increased by £470K to £968K on account of a. consultant fees and b. increase in costs relating to changes in transport arrangements (see table below)
- The increase in costs relating to changes in transport arrangements largely resulted from the need to make emergency arrangements, that were not always the most efficient, when routes were handed back in late summer of 2019. This is being addressed for September 2020, although effects will be masked initially by additional transport needed to maintain social distancing.
- Contextually, it is important to note that EHC plan numbers are increasing by an average of 17% a year. The government has acknowledged the resulting budget pressures on SEND budgets and increased the DSG accordingly. HTST budgets have not been increased and yet pressures there are inextricably interlinked to SEND.
- The LGA independent review report (March 2020) recommended that the Council consider pressures on the base budget for HTST and on resources in the HTST team, especially at times of peak demand.
- At Policy and Resources Committee on 27.5.20, it was agreed to increase the base budget of the HTST service from April 2021 to acknowledge pressures nationally and

locally, to bring the budget more into line with statistical neighbour averages and to allow for an increased in staffing in the HTST team.

Description	2019/20 Outturn variance £'000	
Underlying overspends and new pupils	468	Some of the additional cost of new pupils will be as a result of the changes in September
Consultants fees	168	
Increase in costs as a result of changes to transport arrangements in September/October	404	Part year effect from September (7 months)
Subsequent savings made by the Home to School transport team by re-routing etc.	(72)	
Total Overspend in 2019/20	968	

- Panel would like to recommend corporate risk more swiftly recognised in future when raised by councillors

We accept the need to keep councillors updated on progress when recommendations around corporate risks are made.

- Panel would like final confirmation of insurance situation once all operators have returned information

All transport operators have confirmed full insurance for all duties undertaken. The panel have had a spreadsheet provided to them with the details.

- Panel would like clarity on use of DPS this September

We continue to use the DPS with some administrative changes (ie we email operators on the framework to request bids for new routes, rather than using the online auction tool but we can do that within the terms of procurement rules). We have not gone for a wholesale re-tendering of routes, aiming to maintain stability as far as possible. However, we have new children arriving and a similar number leaving transport, which means a number of routes need to be re-configured and new routes are put out to tender. This is always the case at this time of year for this and all Local Authorities commissioning transport. When we consider bids, we do not just consider price, but also quality and contextual factors. At present, all routes for known children have been planned for September, subject to changes in government guidance on social distancing. HTST is excluded from government guidance on 2m or 1m+ social distancing as it is deemed lower risk than public transport, given that children largely travel in the same groups with the same staff. However, we have reduced the numbers

on vehicles temporarily for September. We will charge costs of extra vehicles to COVID-19.

The government is signalling new HTST specific guidance in preparation. Where there are changes, new drivers and VPAs will introduce themselves to families in the first two weeks of August.

Panel would like to request administrations view on H2ST policy

Cllr Clare to cover separately.

- Panel would like to see further detail on the changes made with the LGA to the Independent review report.

The LGA have provided the version of the report to the panel which explains any amendments that were made between their first working draft shared with a core group for factual accuracy checks and their final published version.

