

Appendix E: Communications with parents carers, Crews, Amaze and the Parent and Carers Council on Home to School Transport Service changes from September 2023

Letter 1: 2 March 2022

Dear Parent / Carer

This letter is the first in a series aimed at keeping you updated on the Home to School Transport (HTST) service.

What's happening and why?

As a local authority, Brighton & Hove City Council has a legal responsibility to renew its Home to School Transport contract every four years. The current contract started in 2019, so must be renewed by **August 2023**, with businesses bidding for the routes they want to operate.

We know there were a lot of difficulties at the start of the contract in 2019 which is why the council set up a Procurement Board last April to agree how to take forward the new contract in plenty of time before it starts in August 2023. This is also why we are updating you at this early stage to ensure families are kept informed

The board brings together a wide range of specialists who will ensure the system we put in place is the best it can be. It includes the council's Assistant Director of Education and Skills, the Head of Home to School Transport, a representative of the Parent Carers' Council (PaCC), a special school Headteacher and representation from the council's Legal, Procurement, and Licensing services.

From the work the board has carried out over the last 10 months, councillors will be presented with different models and options on how the contracts will be awarded in the future which will ensure a far more stable service going forward.

Councillors will discuss the options at meetings next month and we will inform you of the outcome. If you'd like to read the latest Home to School Transport Report which contains an update on the current service as well as explaining the proposed changes to the way that operators are matched to routes, you can read it here and also watch the webcast [Brighton & Hove City Council - Agenda for Children, Young People & Skills Committee on Monday, 7th March, 2022, 4.00pm \(brighton-hove.gov.uk\)](#)

Will there be changes?

We absolutely recognise that for many of your children and young people changes to their routine can be incredibly difficult for them and for you.

Legally the council must also put the routes out to tender at the start of the new contract. If a different operator to the one who provides your service currently is the successful bidder, it will mean your child would have a new driver and Vehicle Passenger Assistant (VPA) taking them to and from school.

We realise this may cause anxiety. Whilst we must comply with the law, we will work together with you, the PaCC, and the operators to ensure changes to routines are introduced as smoothly as possible ahead of the new term in **September 2023**.

Once the routes have been allocated they will become the baseline for the service and much like the current service, there should be some broad continuity year on year over the next four years, although the movement of students in/out of the service does mean that changes do happen.

Could we keep our existing driver and VPA?

It's also possible that the existing operators will win their bid for the routes they run now – in which case there may be little to no change.

The bids for routes will not be evaluated solely on cost – this is very much about the quality of the service to children and young people.

Will new drivers and VPAs have proper checks carried out?

Please note that an enhanced DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) check is carried out on each driver and VPA to ensure they're suitable people to be working with children.

The service offers extensive training which, as well as safeguarding, includes modules on equalities, SEND, exploitation, autism, epilepsy, behaviours that challenge and language and communication.

All drivers and VPA's must have completed these training modules and hold an enhanced DBS before they transport your child. This helps us to ensure children and young people receive the same level of service regardless of their driver or VPA.

Route Planning for the next school year (September 2022)

Over the next few months, as usual, we will begin to make plans for this coming September. As always with start of new school year, a bit of re-routing is inevitable as children join and leave our service. We plan journeys for over 600 children and young people to 68 schools/colleges, but the aim is always to minimise changes wherever possible.

Your September 2022 arrangements will be confirmed before the end of the Summer Term. We know that last minute changes can generate stress all round and create a shaky start or even trigger emotion-based transport refusal. If there are any changes to existing arrangements, we will ask the Taxi Operators to arrange 'Meet & Greet' introductions and confirm timings before the end of August to ensure a smooth September.

Providing a HTST system is extremely complicated, but we've learnt important lessons from what happened in 2019.

Please be reassured the comfort, safety and wellbeing of children and young people are at the forefront of how the new contract will be awarded, operated and managed.

If you would like to talk further about any aspect of this letter, please contact me at HometoSchoolTransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk or on 01273 293501.

Letter 2: 14 April 2022

Dear Parent / Carer

This letter is to update you on some important home to school transport news.

The team is growing

We will soon be welcoming two new members to the Home to School Transport team. Abi Crowley, who has been working as a contract manager in the Home Office, managing a portfolio of contracts within the Immigration Enforcement Commercial Directorate will join us in May as our Contract and Service Development Manager. In August will also be joined by Laureen Casement, currently a SEN teacher at a local school, who will be our new SEND Officer. We are looking forward to welcoming Laureen and Abi to our team.

Annual Consultation on our Post 16 Policy Statement

We are seeking your views on our updated Post 16 Transport Policy Statement. The Department for Education requires Local Authorities to consult each year, regardless of any changes, to ensure the policy provides a full picture of the available transport and support. Legislation on free school transport only applies to children until the end of Year 11. Any arrangements for travel support for 16-18 are at the discretion of each Local Authority. Some local authorities make a parental charge for travel support post 16, BHCC operates a discretionary policy to support families on a low income and for some young people with a learning or a physical disability.

What we did following last year's feedback

Last year you provided helpful feedback on how the policy could better support and promote independent travel. This year we have received funding to run a pilot from September 2022 for circa 10 trainees. This will be voluntary, and training will be adaptable and flexible to the needs of each pupil and their family circumstances. A local Independent Travel Training provider will be taking this forward with us.

No major policy changes to Policy for 2022

We are not proposing any substantial changes to the policy around the help that is available to young people.

You will see the following minor changes in this year's statement:

- The special deals for NUS card holders are no longer available, but special deals remain available for young people doing an apprenticeship
- The Sussex Student Card (rail season ticket) is no longer available, but the 16-17 Saver Card remains so

Further clarifying information about the following has also been included in the 2022-23 Policy:

- The type of help given
- Local SEND Offer
- Travel support from schools and colleges
- The 16-19 Bursary Fund
- Signposting for support for travel for pupils over 19 years old
- Care to Learn for young parents

You can participate in the consultation by clicking the link below. The consultation ends on 8 May 2022 and the new policy will be published by 31 May 2022. [Consultation on the Post 16 Policy Statement](#).

If you would like a word version of the consultation, please contact the team at hometoschooltransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk or on Tel:(01273) 293501.

Sustainability Strategy 2021-2025

The Government requires Local Authorities to make transport arrangements for eligible children, including those with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), and also to promote sustainable and environmentally-friendly travel and transport.

We are therefore seeking your views on our Sustainability Strategy 2021-2025 to ensure we're meeting these requirements. The strategy outlines how the Home to School Transport service endorses sustainable travel and transport in line with Brighton & Hove City Council's mission to promote and encourage safer, healthier and more environmentally friendly modes of travel for children and young people to and from school and college.

Passenger safety and the need for all children and young people to be supported to safely access education is paramount.

You can participate in the consultation by clicking the link below. The consultation ends on 8 May 2022 and the new policy will be published by 31 May 2022 [Consultation on the Sustainability Strategy 2021-2025](#).

If you would like a word version of the consultation, please contact the team at hometoschooltransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk or on Tel:(01273) 293501.

Travel arrangements for 2022

Over the next few months, as usual, we will begin to make plans for this coming September. As always with start of new school year, a bit of re-routing is inevitable as children join and leave our service. We currently plan journeys for over 600 children and young people to over 70 schools/colleges, but the aim is always to minimise changes wherever possible.

Travel arrangements for 2023

As described in our last letter, legally the council must also put the routes out to tender at the start of a new contract – and a new contract will start in 2023. If a different operator to the one who provides your service currently is the successful bidder, it will mean your child would have a Transport Crew taking them to and from school.

We realise this may cause anxiety. Whilst we must comply with the law, we will work together with you, the Parent and Carers Council, and the operators to ensure changes to routines are introduced as smoothly as possible ahead of the new term in September 2023.

Once the routes have been allocated they will become the baseline for the service and much like the current service, there should be some broad continuity year on year over the next four years, although the movement of students in/out of the service does mean that changes do happen.

We are currently drafting a new Service Specification for the new contract. It will firmly put children and young people at the centre of the service, with a stronger emphasis on safety, communication and safeguarding. The Specification will be overseen by a Home to School Transport Procurement Board, which includes the council's Assistant Director of Education and Skills, the Head of Home to School Transport, a representative of the Parent Carers' Council, a special school Headteacher and representation from the council's Legal, Procurement, and Licensing services.

Spot Checks

We periodically make unannounced visits to schools during drop off and pick up time. We call these 'spot checks' We do these checks to monitor and improve the quality and safety of the service that we provide to you and your children and young people.

It's a great way for our team to meet with Transport Crew and with your children and young people, and to see and hear from them first-hand how the travel arrangements are going.

During these visits we check the Transport Crew's ID, whether they are wearing their high visibility jackets, we ask for confirmation that their CCTV is functioning, if car seats, booster seats or harnesses are in good order, if the vehicle is clean and well ventilated, (and during the pandemic we have asked to see the cleaning schedule), if the information about what to do in the case of an emergency is visible and we also check the timings of

arrival and departure. It is a great opportunity for us to be able to see the interactions between the Crew and the children and young people.

We have 12 spot checks arranged for the summer term and if your children and young people are on the vehicle during the check, we will be in contact to let you know how these go.

Passenger Charter

We are working with the Parent and Carers Council to co-produce a child friendly Passenger Charter. This will set out what children and young people can expect from their Transport Crew. The Charter may be in audio format as well as written, and we will share this once finalised.

If you would like to talk further about any aspect of this letter, please contact us at HometoSchoolTransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk or on 01273 293501.

Letter 3: 9 June 2022

Dear Parent / Carer

This letter is to update you on some important home to school transport news.

Increase in mileage allowance to 52p

We now pay 52p per mile, for 4x journeys a day, for 190 school days in the academic year. 46 parents carers receive a mileage allowance to cover the costs of transporting their child/young person to and from their educational setting. Some parents/carers find milage payments a more flexible and convenient alternative to hired transport.

Payments are made at the end of each term and are calculated on attendance data which you are asked to email us on the last day of term. This will ensure prompt payment to you by the following dates:

TERMLY PAYMENTS	
School / college dates	Payment Date by:
Autumn Term September-December	31st December
Spring Term January - April	31st April
Summer Term April - July	31st July

Two new initiatives

We're seeking your views on two new initiatives we're looking to launch within our service. They are Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets. Both initiatives support travel arrangements to school which promote independence and flexibility.

1. Independent Travel Training (ITT)

Independent Travel Training (ITT) supports young people in preparing for adulthood as part of independent living and skills for life.

Travel training provides tailored and practical help for children and young people with SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities), to travel independently and without fear to school by public transport or on foot.

Aims of ITT

Research by the Department for Transport indicates travel training is most effective if it's delivered prior to a transition in the learner's life, for example, from primary to secondary school. The HTST Service aims to maximise independence for all its young people, and to enable that independence as early as possible.

Independent travel is a valuable life skill as well as an essential employability skill, and it provides greater opportunities for young people, not least by increasing confidence in their abilities and reducing their sense of reliance on family members.

There are more than 1,000 children and young people in Brighton & Hove who receive transport assistance from the council to get to their educational setting, of which 603 have SEND. The council is committed to supporting as many pupils as possible to be equipped with the skills and confidence to travel independently.

Our proposal

From September 2022 a local provider will be offering voluntary, structured and bespoke travel training to up to 10 local children and young people to support them to travel independently to their educational setting. This is a completely voluntary initiative and undertaken with the consent of parents and carers.

Each child will have their own personalised travel plan, which will cover the following three areas:

1. Learning the route – looking for safe points and landmarks
2. Crossing roads – using the “green cross code”
3. Safety on public transport – how to hail a bus, where to sit and how to get off safely, recognise stranger danger, peer danger and digital safety

The duration of the training course will depend completely on the child or young person's needs. It may take some children longer to travel independently, and some may start the course but not be able to continue.

We understand this, and therefore during the course children and young people will still be entitled to free travel from HTST, though they may not always get their usual crew.

Who would be eligible?

To be eligible for the voluntary travel training offer, the child or young person must:

1. Be aged between 11 and under the age of 19 on 31 August
2. Have SEND and be eligible for home to school transport service
3. Live in Brighton & Hove
4. Have a journey to school or other educational facility which it is possible to complete by public transport within 75 minutes
5. Be suitable candidates who are looking to learn their public transport journey safely
6. Have parent/carers who wish their child to learn the journey and are supportive of this

The following criteria may also be considered:

1. Existing level of independent travel skills
2. The frequency of the journeys required

Please be aware that the Independent Travel support staff do not undertake any support worker or care duties. This programme would not be suitable to any young person requiring 1 to 1 care support.

If you have any comments about this proposal for Independent Travel Training please feedback here – <https://consultations.brighton-hove.gov.uk/children-and-learning/htst>

If you would like to enquire about Independent Travel Training for your child or young person, please send an email to HometoSchoolTransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk or phone us on 01273 293 501.

2. Personal Travel Budgets (PTB)

A PTB is a payment to help you make your child's home to school travel arrangements in a way that suits your personal circumstances.

The payment allows parents or carers to make flexible arrangements and monitor the quality of your child's transport directly. It also allows you to work with other parents/carers to achieve the best possible travel arrangements for your children.

Benefits of a PTB

- It provides freedom and flexibility to choose the most appropriate travel arrangements for your child
- It provides choice and control over how funding is used to get your child to and from school on time in a way that suits you, your child and your family.
- It allows you to explore opportunities to share with other parents or carers.

Disadvantages of a PTB

- You are responsible for making your travel arrangements, including ensuring anyone accompanying your child has an enhanced DBS check
- If you are let down by the arrangements you put in place, it's your responsibility to make alternative arrangements
- It's not always easy to find your own personal assistant or childminder
- Shared arrangements can often work well but can also add strain to friendships if the arrangements fall through for any reason.

How much will my Personal Travel Budget be?

Each PTB will be tailored to the needs of each family. Below are the different scenarios that could occur.

1. Covering the cost of driving - the PTB is calculated based on the distance between home and school for the days that your child attends school. It is based on there being 190 school days in an academic year, 4x journeys a day, at a fixed rate of 52p per mile.

The distance is measured using the shortest route and is from home to school to home for each journey. It bears no relationship to the cost of a hired vehicle or the specific journey you may use when taking your child to school.

1. Purchasing a travel pass – you will be paid the amount of an annual train or bus ticket to accompany your child.
2. Paying for an assistant/family member, friend or someone you trust to take your child to school – we will pay an hourly rate at the voluntary living wage (currently £9.90 per hour).
3. Paying a child minder to look after other children to support you to take your child to school, or to take your child to school – we will pay an hourly rate, capped at £15 per hour.

Should your child be absent from school, a reduction will be made to reflect the absenteeism. If you chose to enter into a PTB, it should be noted that it is your legal responsibility to ensure your child's regular attendance at school.

Who can get a Personal Travel Budget?

If your child is eligible for transport to school, as set out in the council's HTST policy, you may be entitled to a PTB, but it must be cost effective for the council. Therefore, before granting a PTB, we will investigate whether there is any transport currently in place at a lower cost.

Additionally, you must also satisfy the council you have a suitable plan in place to get your child to/from school before a PTB can be allocated.

This includes looking at your child's school attendance record; getting your child to school on time, safely and ready to learn; and making sure the travel arrangements are reliable.

How do I get a Personal Travel Budget?

Once we are satisfied all the above is in place, we will ask you to sign an agreement and then make arrangements to transfer the PTB to your bank account. We will not pay money to anyone else.

You will then be free to arrange and manage your child's travel arrangements in a way that best suits you, your child and your family.

If your circumstances change, for example your family moves house or your child's school placement changes, the PTB may need to be re-calculated.

Any transport arrangements, until your child has been re-assessed, will be your responsibility. Where it is later established that there had been no notification of the change, payments made in error will be recovered by the Council.

Can I stop the Personal Travel Budget if it doesn't work out?

Yes, but we would encourage you to discuss the problems with us before deciding to leave the scheme.

If you still decide to leave the scheme we will need one month's notice to arrange alternative forms of travel assistance for you.

Will it have an impact on other benefits?

No. PTBs have no impact on any other benefits but it is your responsibility to check that this is the case in your personal circumstances. Payments are not taxed as they are made in relation to the child not the parents or guardians.

Will I regularly need to show the Council how I am spending the Personal Transport Budget?

Whilst the Council is responsible for ensuring that public funds are spent on the intended services, we want to keep the flexibility and control with you, and we will keep monitoring to a minimum. To receive the PTB, you need to keep records, e.g. receipts and invoices, and surrender them for monitoring purposes when requested.

Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets

The Council is fully committed to increasing independence among young people and to enable them to lead fuller lives. To this end, the council will periodically review PTBs and if appropriate, assess your child's readiness for Independent Travel Training.

If this situation arises, and you are in agreement, your PTB will continued to be paid until your child has been successfully travel trained and assessed as being able to travel safely and independently. At this point, your child will be given a bus pass and the PTB will end.

Your key responsibilities

You must ensure that your child gets to and from school each day in a way that ensures:

- They are kept safe on the journey
- They get to school on time
- Their journey is without such stress and strain that their ability to learn is affected
- They meet the average level of attendance for the school.

It is for you to decide what travel arrangements are right for your child. However, your PTB may be withdrawn if the Council feels that the arrangements you have made do not meet the above requirements. We will always discuss this with you first.

You are responsible for ensuring that anyone employed by you maintains an enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service clearance, the necessary insurance cover in respect of the provision of the service(s) agreed and also for ensuring the suitability and safety of the services they provide e.g. a valid MOT (if applicable), road tax, a valid policy of motor insurance, and a valid driving licence for that type of vehicle.

If you have any comments about this proposal for Personal Travel Budgets, please feedback here – <https://consultations.brighton-hove.gov.uk/children-and-learning/htst>

If you would like to enquire about a Personal Travel Budget for your child or young person, please send an email to HometoSchoolTransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk or phone us on 01273 293 501.

Travel arrangements for 2022

Over the next month, as usual, we will begin to make plans for this coming September. As always with start of new school year, a bit of re-routing is inevitable as children join and leave our service. We currently plan journeys for over 600 children and young people to over 70 schools/colleges, but the aim is always to minimise changes wherever possible.

Travel arrangements for 2023

As described in our last letter, legally the council must put the routes out to tender at the start of a new contract – and a new contract will start in 2023. If a different operator to the one who provides your service currently is the successful bidder, it will mean your child would have a different Transport Crew taking them to and from school.

We realise this may cause anxiety. Whilst we must comply with the law, we will work together with you, the Parent and Carers Council, and the operators to ensure changes to routines are introduced as smoothly as possible ahead of the new term in September 2023.

Once the routes have been allocated, they will become the baseline for the service and much like the current service, there should be some broad continuity year on year over the next four years, although the movement of students in/out of the service does mean that changes do happen.

We are currently drafting a new Service Specification for the new contract. It will firmly put children and young people at the centre of the service, with a stronger emphasis on safety, communication, and safeguarding. The Specification will be overseen by a Home to School Transport Procurement Board, which includes the council's Assistant Director of Education and Skills, the Head of Home to School Transport, a representative of the Parent Carers' Council, a special school Headteacher and representation from the council's Legal, Procurement, and Licensing services.

If you would like to discuss any aspect of this letter, please contact the team at HometoSchoolTransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk or phone us on 01273 293 501.

Letter 4: July 2022

Briefing for the Parent and Carers Council (PaCC) on Home to School Transport (HTST) route planning, September 2023

This briefing is to update you on home to school transport route planning for September 2023 when the service is re-procured.

What's happening and why?

As a local authority, the council has a legal responsibility to renew its HTST contract every four years. The current contract started in 2019, so must be renewed by August 2023, with businesses bidding for the routes they want to operate.

The service is currently supporting 560 children with special educational needs and disabilities to travel to and from their educational setting on 207 journeys. We also support and additional 600 pupils by providing a free bus pass and 48 families by providing a mileage allowance.

We know there were a lot of difficulties at the start of the contract in 2019 which is why the council set up a Procurement Board last April to agree how to take forward the new contract in plenty of time before it starts next August.

The board brings together a wide range of specialists who will ensure the system we put in place is the best it can be. It includes the council's Assistant Director of Education and Skills, the Head of Home to School Transport, a PaCC representative, a special school Headteacher and representation from the council's Legal, Procurement and Licensing services.

Will there be changes?

We absolutely recognise that for many children and young people changes to their routine can be incredibly difficult for them and their parents/carers.

Legally the council must put the routes out to tender at the start of the new contract. If a different operator to the one who provides your service currently is the successful bidder, it will mean the child would have a new driver and Vehicle Passenger Assistant (VPA) taking them to and from school.

We realise this may cause anxiety. We've communicated directly with existing parents/carers about these changes through a series of briefings and have committed to working with them, the operators, PaCC and Amaze to ensure changes to routines are introduced as smoothly as possible ahead of September 2023.

As things develop, we'll continue with briefings and will be offering a drop-in session early in 2023 to talk with parents and carers about any specific concerns.

It's important to stress any changes to a procurement of this size will result in some disruption, but we're working closely to try and mitigate this as much as possible.

The principles of route planning

The HTST service has a statutory duty to provide free travel arrangements for eligible children and young people. It's our responsibility, and a priority, to ensure these arrangements are suitable, safe and without unreasonable levels of stress for the children and young people SEND.

Once the routes have been allocated, they will become the baseline for the service and much like the current service, there should be some broad continuity year on year over the next four years, although the movement of students in/out of the service does mean that changes do happen.

The route planning process

Local Authorities must issue Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP), naming a school/college for the child or young person to attend by the statutory deadlines of 15 February for children under 16 years old, and 31 March for children over 16 years old. Local needs assessments are conducted in good time.

Home to school route planning starts as soon as all phase transfers and new starter information is shared with the service. Locally we set a deadline of 30 April for under 16s applications, and 31 May for over 16s.

However, meeting this deadline is a challenge as there are a number of factors that drive later applications, for example, if parents/carers are appealing a placement, awaiting an out of area placement or, in the case of post 16, waiting on exam results.

In 2021, 93 parents/carers applied between May and August, with a further 25 applying for transport after school starts in September. This makes it extremely difficult to route plan effectively and efficiently.

While we can advise that transport will not be guaranteed if parents/carers miss the prescribed deadlines, the travel arrangements for other children and young people will be disrupted by the delayed applications coming in throughout the summer.

We want to avoid setting up travel and introductions with Transport Crew and then having to change arrangements after a few months to incorporate late applicants.

Once the lists of children and young people, and where they are going, are received, the HTST team contact every parent/carer to support them to apply for their child's transport to try and mitigate delays to effective and efficient route planning.

It is crucial that applications come in as quickly possible so we can set up the travel arrangements before schools break up for summer.

As part of ensuring the travel arrangements are suitable, safe and reasonably stress free, we risk assess each child and undertake shared vehicle risk assessments – we aim to do this in consultation with schools, which is why it's important applications come in before schools break up.

To try and streamline the application process further, in 2023 information from the Pupil Travel Information Forms will be added to the Online Application Form. This means parents/carers will only need to complete one form.

This does mean parent/carers providing more information and then may not be found eligible for free travel. However, in 2021 around 10% of applications were declined.

This will also support the service to meet PaCC's request that information passed to Operators fully specifies *'vehicle size, configuration requirements and passengers' needs, including VPA & any special training/skills requirements to ensure 'conscious and conscientious bidding' and to minimise hand backs'*.

When will the 2023 routes be awarded and confirmed?

It is important to stress that overbidding and 'handing back' routes is inevitable and unavoidable regardless of when the routes are put out to tender. This is because all operators will want to maximise profitability. The Procurement Board is currently exploring how we can deter operators from this established practice.

The Procurement Board is also exploring 'direct award criteria' with legal and procurement colleagues. If, and where we are legally able to direct award contracts on medical grounds, we will do so, and these will be confirmed well in advance of the end of the summer term.

Similarly, all known solo and travel alone contracts will also be awarded in advance. This will only equate to a small number (circa 11%) of the total contract.

The Procurement Board has recently considered the two options below in terms of the timeframe to put routes out to bid on. The board has discussed at length the pros and cons and have favoured the latter approach.

Therefore, it is intended all route competitions, including for post 16 (where the setting has been named), will be concluded by the end of July 2023, with Downs View and Hill Park, the two largest settings out to tender at the start of June.

Option A

Routes are 'drip fed and drip awarded' between April and July 2023, (rather than at the 'end' of the process).

Pros	Cons
More time to arrange introductions with parents/carers	HTST will have little control over how many routes are awarded to each operator and will be less able to assess how much capacity the operator has to provide the routes.
Less time for parents/carers to wait to know what the travel arrangements may be	Increased risk of hand backs in August/September if operators have over committed themselves or 'cherry pick' the more lucrative/'easier' routes

Option B

The majority of routes are awarded throughout June and July in batches of vehicle size and by setting, with known solo, travel alone and direct awards awarded much earlier.

Pros	Cons
Less likelihood of changes to the travel arrangements or crew as there is more time to receive all applications, route plan and award. Routes may be less likely to be handed back at this stage.	Operators may choose to bid for work in neighbouring LA's who would be putting their routes out at a similar time
HTST is better able to assess operator capacity to provide the number and nature of routes they have bid on	Less time to arrange introductions, due to crew and parent carers holidays in August
Routes are more equitably distributed across all operators – reducing over reliance on any one operator	Operators may struggle to retain VPAs

When will introductions to new crew's take place?

The expectation is that operators arrange introductions with parents/carers before the end of August. The HTST will support with setting these up where the parent/carers preference is for these to be online.

Whilst operators are asked to name the transport crew when bidding, they don't always know which crew will be delivering the service, as evidenced in September 2019 and every year since. Crews often go on leave during the summer (as they are not able to during term time), operators may also have lost staff between award and contracts starting (hampered further by local and national staff shortages).

If parents/carers are on holiday in the last two weeks of August 2023 they may unfortunately miss out on the opportunity to meet their child's new crew. At the very least

they will receive an email with names and photos of their child's crew, and a short video introduction may be able to be arranged, crew willing, at their request.

Providing a HTST system is extremely complicated, but we've learnt important lessons from what happened in 2019.

I hope this briefing provides you with assurance that the comfort, safety and wellbeing of children and young people are at the forefront of how the new contract will be awarded, operated and managed.

If you would like to talk further about any aspect of this briefing, please contact me at mia.bryden@brighton-hove.gov.uk or on 01273 293501.

Letter 5: July 2022

Dear Transport Crew

We'd like to take this opportunity to thank you for your co-operation and hard work in providing transport to more than 500 children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) to more than 60 schools/colleges.

We're very aware of the importance of your role and the real complexity of the work you undertake, and we sincerely thank you for all that you do.

As you know, the needs of the pupils travelling in your care includes physical, emotional, communication and learning disabilities and, in some cases, behaviour that challenges. Some of the children you transport have medical conditions and are prone to seizures during their time in the vehicle.

By providing safe and friendly transport you make a real difference. The Parent and Carers Council (PACC) often refers to home to school transport as crucial 'bookends' to the school day. The quality of the transportation is an essential factor in ensuring children:

- arrive at school in a calm state, ready to learn and on time
- have a positive experience of the journey
- have a safe journey

We've met some of you at our routine spot checks over the year and have been impressed by the respect, empathy and understanding you show the children and young people.

PACC also sends its appreciation on behalf of children, young people and their families.

Route Planning for the next school year (September 2022)

At this time of year the Home to School Transport Team will begin planning for this September. As always with the start of new school year, a bit of re-routing is inevitable as children join and leave our service, but the aim is to minimise changes wherever possible to provide continuity to the families and you as their crew.

September 2022 arrangements will be confirmed with parents and carers before the end of the Summer Term.

We know last minute changes can generate stress, create a shaky start or even trigger transport refusal by some children. If you do transport new children and young people, your operator will ask you to arrange a 'Meet & Greet' with families before the end of August to ensure a smooth September.

If you're on holiday during this time, you may be asked to send your photo and a short description of yourself for parents and carers to share with their children. You may even like to record a short introductory video.

Re-procurement of the Service in 2023 - What's happening and why?

As a local authority, the council has a legal responsibility to renew its Home to School Transport contract every four years. The current contract started in 2019, so must be renewed by **August 2023**, with businesses bidding for the routes they want to operate.

We know there were difficulties in 2019 which is why we set up a Procurement Board in April to agree how to take forward the new contract in plenty of time before August 2023. This is also why we're keeping all our key stakeholders updated. The board includes a range of specialists who will ensure the system we put in place is the best it can be.

Will there be changes?

Legally the council must put the routes out to tender at the start of the new contract. This means you may not be taking the same children and young people to school / college that you've been regularly transporting.

Once routes have been allocated, there should be broad continuity year on year over the next four years, although changes can still happen.

It's also possible of course that the existing operators will win their bid for the routes they run now – in which case there may be little to no change.

The comfort, safety and wellbeing of children and young people are at the forefront of how the new contract will be awarded, operated and managed. If you would like to talk further about any aspect of this letter, please contact HometoSchoolTransport@brighton-hove.gov.uk or call 01273 293501.

Yours sincerely,

Mia Bryden

Head of Service - Home to School Transport

Brighton & Hove City Council

