

## Home to School Travel Service Update

### Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides a high-level summary of work undertaken to improve the quality of service to children, young people, their families. This helps ensure high quality daily transport arrangements are in place for 810 eligible children and young people (CYP) in taxis and minibuses, as well as 500 others eligible CYP receiving travel assistance to a range of schools / educational establishments both within and outside of Derby, including:
- Improving access to, and the quality of home to school transport services required to transport 810 CYP from their home to 74 education settings in taxis and minibuses daily.
  - Creating efficiencies in processes, improving quality and service delivery for families and schools whilst realising financial savings set out within the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan for 2023/24.
  - Streamlining the application and decision-making processes.
  - Promoting greater independence through a new enhanced Independent Travel Training Programme.
  - Preparation for adulthood opportunities for sixth form and adult learners
  - The successful implementation of the Council's new Post 16 policy change for sixth form learners.
  - Identification of future opportunities being considered by the Council to realise further contract efficiencies.

### Recommendation(s)

- 2.1 To note the benefits for children, young people, and their families as a result of the improvement activities.
- 2.2 To note the continuing improvements in efficiencies, processes and improving quality of Home to School Travel and Transport Services for children and young people.

## Supporting information

- 3.1 The Council's Home to School Transport Service (H2STS) works in compliance with requirements set out within the Department for Education's (DfE) Home to School Statutory Guidance - June 2023 (see Appendices 1 and 2) to provide appropriate home to school travel arrangements for eligible CYP, including those with special educational needs. Currently, the Council provides home to school travel assistance support for families of 1,310 CYP aged between 05 and 25.
- 3.2 In order to support continued improvements, including improving the quality of service delivery, in January 2023 the HTSTS undertook a significant contract and route planning review, looking closely at each one of 334 separate taxi and minibus contracts transporting CYP to and from their education setting.
- 3.3 As a result of the contract review, a single contract was commissioned by the Council to provide high quality home to school transport for 425 of the 810 eligible CYP to travel to and from their home to the City's five Special Schools from September 2023, significantly reducing the overall number of single contracts, whilst at the same time continuing to provide value for money, high quality home to school transport for all eligible CYP.
- 3.4 Another service improvement identified through a review of the access to application processes, was the introduction of an online application facility for applications for the 2023-24 academic year.
- 3.5 Feedback on the new online application facility provided by parents and schools has been very positive, in relation to how this has vastly improved the application process, with the opportunity to be able to provide more information about circumstances and any additional needs children may have, as well as the outcome of applications being communicated much more quickly.
- 3.6 Process efficiencies have also been realised in that for the 2023/24 academic year application round which is open from 01 April to 31 May each year, 357 online applications were received, and decisions communicated to parents compared to 91 for the 2022/23 academic year. This has meant that not only more parents know much sooner about their child's travel assistance arrangements for the following school year, but the Council is also able to secure better value for money by commissioning transport contracts earlier.
- 3.7 Following a wide-ranging 11-week consultation, on 15 February 2023 Council Cabinet approved a change in the way the Council provides discretionary travel assistance for eligible sixth for learners (aged 16-19) by offering a personal travel budget or mileage allowance in place of Council arranged taxis and minibuses (unless there are exceptional circumstances relating to the young person or family's needs that required transport arrangements to be made).
- 3.8 Whilst appreciating the sensitivities relating to this change, it is important to note that the Council continues to support 225 eligible sixth form learners to attend their school or college placement by providing them with a personal travel budget, mileage allowance or a seat in a taxi or minibus.

- 3.9 In addition to the change in the way the Council provides discretionary travel assistance to eligible sixth form learners, Council Cabinet also approved the implementation of a brand-new enhanced Independent Travel Training (ITT) Programme to promote greater independence and preparation for adulthood opportunities.
- 3.10 Since its implementation, the ITT Programme has supported 21 young people to successfully complete the Programme and become independent travellers compared to 12 throughout the 2022-23 academic year.
- 3.11 In terms of further developments, work is continuing to identify further HTST contract efficiencies for 2024-25 including further reductions in the overall number of single contracts, whilst maintaining existing transport capacity and delivery high quality services for eligible CYP.

### **Public/stakeholder engagement**

- 4.1 The HTSTS meets monthly with the Home to School Provider Representation and Consultation Group and publishes termly newsletters and updates for parents and schools.

### **Financial and value for money issues**

- 5.1 The Council is currently forecasting a balanced budget position across Home to school Transport in 2023/24 and is on track to achieve the required MTFP savings.

### **Legal implications**

- 6.1 The Council has a statutory duty to provide free home to school travel assistance for eligible CYP of compulsory school age.
- 6.2 For sixth form learners, the decision to make and fund travel arrangements is at the discretion of the Council.

### **Climate implications**

- 7.1 None attached to this report.

### **Socio-Economic implications**

- 8.1 The Council continues to support families and schools with high quality home to school travel assistance and arrangements enabling access to education and work.

## Other significant implications

9.1 None relating to this report

This report has been approved by the following people:

| Role  | Name   | Date of sign-off |
|---|--|------------------|
| Legal   | Olu Idowu, head of Legal and Insurance Services  | 23 November 2023 |
| Finance   | Janice Hadfield, Head; of Finance  | 23 November 2023 |
| Service Director(s)   | Gurmail Nizzer, Director of Commissioning and Delivery   | 22 November 2023 |
| Report sponsor  | Gurmail Nizzer, Director of Commissioning and Delivery   | 22 November 2023 |
| Other(s)  | Diane Whitehead, Head of School Organisation & Provision   | 21 November 2023 |
| Background papers:  | None   |                  |
| List of appendices  |  |                  |
| 1 Home to School Travel Guidance – Statutory School Aged Children | <a href="https://publishing.service.gov.uk">Travel to school for children of compulsory school age (publishing.service.gov.uk)</a>         |                  |
| 2. Post -16 Transport and Travel Guidance                         | <a href="https://publishing.service.gov.uk">Post-16 transport and travel support to education and training (publishing.service.gov.uk)</a> |                  |