

Reply to PaCC's Home to School Transport Emergency Position Statement

The Council is acutely aware that change can be difficult for some children and young people who get help with transport and families trust that their children are provided with a caring service that recognises their child's needs and vulnerabilities. This response seeks to recognise the concerns that have been raised, explain the circumstances that has resulted in uncertainty and what is being done to resolve matters and apologise for the setting up the service this year not being delivered as well as we would want.

For many months the council has been working to ensure suitable transport arrangements are in place for children and young people at the start of the academic year. The introduction of a Dynamic Purchasing System for the academic year 2019/20 onwards was successfully set up and by the start of the summer holidays all routes had been successfully awarded.

During the summer holidays a number of changes have affected some of the original routes. Whilst some changes can be anticipated to occur, such as when pupils move home or their needs and equipment change, other changes had not appeared likely. Ten routes have now been returned to the council by operators who have determined that they are not able to honour the journeys allocated to them by the DPS process. During this time the council accepts that it could have kept parents more informed about what was happening and this has generated uncertainty especially where some routes have taken longer than the council would have liked to re-assign.

At the time of writing this response on Thursday 5 September there are 7 routes which have not been confirmed with operators although 3 of these are expected to be confirmed later today. In total 39 pupils do not have confirmed arrangements and these are being prioritised between the council and

operators. We have been prioritising contacting the families who are still to be informed of arrangements. The Home to School transport team are calling families whose children and young people return to school in order of the date they return to tell them about arrangements.

Richard Barker will be available to talk to parent carers who have not heard about their child or young person's home to school transport arrangements on Friday 6 September 12-4pm and Monday 9 September 2-5pm. Please call 01273 290732.

It was an intention of the tender agreement for operators to meet with families prior to the start of term but unfortunately because of the operational issues this has been prevented from happening as hoped. The Council would like to apologise for this situation.

The council is in the process of obtaining assurance that those journeys recently allocated to operators will be provided in accordance with the service specifications set by the council. The verification exercise that took place earlier in the summer did not identify any problems with the operators who had been allocated routes. In some cases additional information was required.

These difficulties have meant that the council has not been able to review all parental concerns brought to its attention in a timely fashion. Whilst it is known that change can be difficult for some children and young people receiving assistance with transport, when changes occur close to the start of the term there is less time available to try and resolve them. The DPS allows the council to keep arrangements under review and re-assign journeys when circumstances require it to happen. As school journeys start so there will be a period of checking on school sites during operation, as part of the assurance process. Where there are contractual failings action will be taken.

As an additional measure of assurance, the council has commissioned extra transport capacity in the first few days of term to assist in resolving any difficulties that are encountered on the initial journeys. All journeys scheduled to take place today, Thursday took place.

The council is in the process of providing updates to the special school headteachers that reflect the changes that have taken place over the summer holidays so that they have the most up to date information. Some site specific matters relating to Hill Park school which is undergoing some structural work are being discussed in partnership with the school's Executive Headteacher and transport operators. Pupils do not return to the school until next week.

At this time all efforts are focussed on ensuring transport is in place for all children and young people, that families are aware of those arrangements and operators have the most up to date information on the pupils. Whilst the council would have hoped to have had a smoother implementation for the new academic year the very late notification of some operators being unable to fulfil their allotted routes has brought significant challenges. The Council strives to keep parents well informed but on this occasion we accept that more should have been done to keep families up to date with arrangements for the start of term.

Following a discussion at the Policy Resources & Growth committee in July it was agreed that a report will be submitted to the Children Young People & Skills committee in January 2020 which reviews the implementation of the transport arrangements. This will be an opportunity to consider the introduction of the DPS and any lessons learnt from the preparation for the start of the new academic year. To improve joint working between the Council and parent carers there is a commitment for PaCC to be part of the process. The council, in liaison with PaCC and Amaze, will arrange an open forum

during the autumn term to discuss and explore what has taken place in recent weeks.

Please direct any further enquiries to Richard Barker, Head of School Organisation via email richard.barker@brighton-hove.gov.uk or phone 01273 290732.

Regards,

Richard

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