

Communication to Parents/ Carers on HTST arrangements

7.5.2020

Dear Parents and Carers,

I hope this email finds you all well and that you and your families are staying safe during these very difficult and testing times.

I am writing today to give you an update and an overview on how the Home to School Transport (HTST) Service is dealing with the challenges we face during the COVID-19 pandemic. Also how, in the context of the crisis and the current uncertainties, we plan to organise transport when schools re-open fully.

I would like to reassure you that the safety and well-being of our children and young people on transport is always our first priority. We are committed to providing the best and most efficient service for families both now and when schools re-open fully. However, as I'm sure you can understand, there are serious challenges for HTST, just as there are for schools, in providing services during the pandemic period.

Current Arrangements

A small number of our children and young people are currently being transported to school. The following measures are being taken to ensure their safety and the continued running of our service.

We are:

- Closely following the advice and guidance being issued by Public Health England and the Government
- Sharing plans and solutions to challenges we face due to COVID-19 with our neighbouring Local Authorities.
- Checking that all our firms are following government guidance on cleaning of vehicle surfaces between passengers' journeys
- Ensuring physical distance is maintained as far as possible on transport, although you will appreciate this is sometimes not easy in the confined space of vehicles
- Continuously reviewing our practice and risk assessments in relation to journeys in the light of changing guidance
- Supporting our transport providers who feel it necessary to use Personal Protective Equipment (PPE), where physical distancing cannot be easily maintained. This includes the use as appropriate of ordinary/ plain surgical masks, disposable gloves, plastic aprons and cleaning materials While it is the responsibility of transport firms to ensure a supply of PPE for their staff, at the council we will help where we can, subject to prioritisation and availability.
- Working closely with PACC, operators and schools to reach solutions in partnership

Arrangements for September 2020

Looking forward to September, we are doing everything we can to make sure the new school year starts smoothly and efficiently in terms of transport. As is always the case at the start of a new school year, we will have many new children joining transport and some leaving.

We are supporting our transport firms financially over this period of reduced home to school journeys so they can cope with the loss of income and hopefully retain their staff. We want to help them to be ready for when the full service is needed again.

However, despite our best efforts, there may be some disruption for a temporary period due to this global crisis. We may need the support, understanding and forbearance of parents and carers to help us in making any special arrangements needed.

When schools re-open, we will have many more children needing transport. Government guidance recognises that social/ physical distancing on transport will not always be achievable, but we will do our best locally to make this possible. For a temporary period at least, we will be reducing the numbers of children on shared transport so that physical distance can be maintained wherever reasonable and practical. We will also try to source additional vehicles as physical distancing will increase the number of journeys needed. But there may be a shortage in extra vehicles and staff needed. In that case, we will work together with schools, PACC and our transport firms to make the best arrangements possible until the situation improves.

If parents and carers are able, and would prefer, to make their own arrangements to transport children temporarily over the pandemic period, we would welcome this as it could be very supportive over a challenging time. We give our absolute assurance to any parent who is willing to transport their child over this period that this would in no way affect your child or young person's eligibility or entitlement to home to school transport longer term, and that we would check with you regularly to ensure that you are still able to do this. We would also arrange mileage payments in this situation.

We are aware that this is a very unsettling and difficult time for our families. We will do everything in our power to avoid adding to the stress. Families who have transport in place will not have to re-apply for the new academic year (unless your child is moving to a new school or college when you will receive an application form from us). Additionally, we will not be asking existing parents or carers to complete new pupil information sheets. We will only ask you to update us with any new information that you would like us to record, if needed.

Lastly I would like to say that we are responding to the problems with Home to School Transport identified in the Independent Review of the service which was undertaken recently. We have started a major programme of improvements, co-produced with PACC. We will update on this shortly.

If you have any queries or concerns with regards to Home-to-School-Transport, or you would like signposting to services or agencies who may be able to assist you and your children during these challenging times, please do not hesitate to contact the Home to School Transport service straight away.

Best wishes,