AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE
24 March 2014

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Transport for Education

Briefing Note for Members

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services and Budgets

The Chair of Children and Education Select Committee has asked for a briefing for Audit and Governance Committee to provide some background information and context to the Transport for Education – Management Action Plan progress report, included on the agenda.

Introduction:

1. The Schools and Learning Service is responsible for determining and applying the Home to School Transport Policies, including determining whether a child is entitled to free home to school transport. Once determined, the responsibility for providing transport rests with the Transport Co-ordination Centre (TCC), which is part of the Travel and Transport Group within Environment and Infrastructure department.

Key TCC/service relationships:

2. The TCC provides a 'one stop shop' co-ordination service for the majority of SCC transport bookings, including
    *   Home to school transport for entitled mainstream children – requested by the Admissions & Transport team in Schools & Learning
    *   Home to school transport for entitled children with Special Educational Needs (SEN) – requested by the area SEN teams in Schools & Learning
    *   Non-routine journeys for vulnerable children and adults – largely requested by children's and adult social care (ASC)
    *   Home to day centre transport for adults – requested by ASC
    *   Transport to and from respite care – requested by parents based on the pre-agreed level of support approved by SEN teams
    *   Ad hoc bookings for emergency transport, officer travel etc.

Service volumes and overall costs:

3. The expenditure that goes through the TCC for transport provision is set out below split by service area:

Travel & Transport - Cost Breakdown and Projection

where costs managed via TCC

		year end 2011/12 £	year end 2012/13 £	oct proj 2013/14 £
Mainstream	Coaches	4,698,500	4,797,000	4,807,400
	Taxi/Minibus	3,302,500	3,403,000	3,658,400
	Petrol reclaim	78,700	91,800	103,300
	Bus/rail passes	1,711,600	1,408,300	1,776,600
		9,791,300	9,700,100	10,345,700
SEN	Taxi/Minibus	19,392,100	20,291,800	21,378,900
	Petrol reclaim	321,600	298,700	360,000
		19,713,700	20,590,500	21,738,900
Short Stay Schools	Taxi/Minibus	278,700	305,500	353,800
Adults	Taxi/Minibus	1,427,900	1,782,400	2,091,400
Children SC	Taxi/Minibus	459,500	926,300	921,339

4. There are approximately 1200 minibus and taxi routes (largely SEN) and 109 mainstream coach routes currently, transporting around 2500 SEN pupils and 6800 entitled mainstream pupils.

How the data flow between Schools and Learning and the TCC is managed:

5. Eligibility for free home to school transport for mainstream pupils is assessed within Schools & Learning by the Admissions & Transport team, managed by the Principal Manager Admissions and Transport (Strategy). For SEN pupils, eligibility is assessed by the relevant area SEN team, each team managed by an Area Special Needs Manager.

6.   There are two teams within the TCC responsible for commissioning home to school transport – (i) the mainstream team, managed by the Mainstream Team Leader and (ii) the SEN Delivery Team, managed by the Delivery Team Leader.

7.   Once eligibility is agreed, the relevant Schools & Learning officer completes an ESuite Transport Request Form, which is then delivered straight to either the TCC Mainstream Inbox or SEN Delivery Team Inbox.

8.   Requests for transport are then commissioned as appropriate, utilising the most cost effective means of transport that meets the children's needs. Requests are turned round within 10 working days from receipt, as per the Service Level Agreement between E&I and CSF.

Key SEN transport representative and various improvements being proposed:

9.   The Area Education Officer South East (Sue Roch) has recently been assigned overall responsibility for SEN transport. She has established a group which has assessed key transport priorities, that are either impacting on the SEN budget position and/or which will improve the efficiency of the transport process. Each priority has a named lead and progress was reported at the last group meeting in February. A further meeting is scheduled for May 2014. The key priorities are detailed below:

10.   Specialist escorts – at the start of the year the annual cost was around £640k and, though this has been reduced significantly (to around £300k) by negotiating reduced hours with the provider, this is still a high cost provision. The aim is to have in place an impartial and consistent assessment process that clearly identifies the level of medical or behaviour support an individual child requires. It is hoped that the use of fully qualified nurses can be largely avoided in future, with appropriate medical training given to regular escorts by school nurses. As a starting point, negotiations are in hand for the healthcare provider responsible for school nurses to reassess all existing pupils who have specialist escorts currently.

11.   Regular reviews of transport – as highlighted in the 2012/13 Internal Audit report, there is a need for SEN teams to review the need for transport on a regular/annual basis. To assist in this, the TCC is working with SEN teams to use end dates on the transport request forms to trigger the need for a review. Completion of a transport end date is now a mandatory field on the SEN Transport Request Form. The intention is that, towards the end of each term, the TCC will send a report to SEN area teams listing all those pupils with a transport end date of the end of that term. SEN will then verify to the TCC, for each pupil, whether transport should end or whether it should be extended. If no response is received, then it will be assumed that transport is ending and the TCC will terminate.

12. Training for drivers and escorts transporting SEND pupils – SEN and TCC officers are working together to review the code of conduct/training for drivers and escorts. SEN schools do provide some training, but this needs to be more formalised.

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13. In addition, there is a joint E&I and CSF process review currently underway to identify any process blockages and to ensure that parental information provided by both departments is consistent, avoids duplication and keeps parents properly informed.

14. A further major improvement is the introduction of a new transport software system being implemented by the TCC, with a go live date of mid April 2014. The previous system was no longer fit for purpose and, as highlighted in the Internal Audit report, did not provide an adequate level of management information for the service departments. CSF and Shared Services were fully involved in the specification for the new system and improved reporting is a priority objective.

Summary RAG status of actions in the management action plan:

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15. An updated management action plan is attached. In summary the RAG status for each element is:

SEN staff having clear written procedures to allow consistency	RED
Requests completed on forms with mandatory fields	GREEN
Management Information from new system is fit for purpose	AMBER
Service Level Agreement in place	GREEN
SEN Annual Transport Reviews	RED
Use of end date in system to trigger a review	AMBER
Budget Setting and Monitoring	AMBER
Risk Registers in place and regularly reviewed	GREEN