

Home to School Transport

Progress update to the Audit and Governance Committee
18 January 2023

Purpose of update:

- To revisit the key findings from the Internal Audit of H2STA in May 22
- To update Committee on improvement work and progress across the system of H2STA since the Audit
- To provide a verbal update to Committee on the live progress against the specific 14 actions/findings



Home to School Transport: current context

In May '22 an audit of Home to School Transport agreed 14 findings and recommendations with the team to improve the control environment and the processes within it. The key findings reported are summarised below:

- Where high volumes of applications were received, these were not always reviewed (with an outcome letter sent to parent or guardian) within the statutory time period;
- The dual impacts of Brexit and Covid-19 had created a risk in the supply chain for transport provision with the potential to increase costs;
- Transport providers submitted bids on route contracts through the 'ADAM' portal. However, the process in 'ADAM' did not always facilitate value for money because where a transport provider was the sole bidder they could increase their bid amount, ultimately driving up overall costs;
- If no bids were submitted on a route, contracts were directly awarded. There was no formal record of this or a formal procedure to ensure consistency and transparency;
- The appeals process mirrored the two-stage process outlined in the Statutory Guidance. However, in some instances the same officer could be responsible for successive stages so there was not always appropriate separation of duties;
- The Transport Policy did not define and clarify the eligibility and provision for those in post-16 years education; and
- Newly introduced systems had not been fully documented.

These findings were reported at a similar time to the 2022 policy change, the development of a new transformation and improvement programme, as well as a number of BAU and service changes. Significant work is underway to transform the service and the experience of parents, carers, children and young people in-year and in preparation for the 23/24 school year and beyond.

Action taken to date on Audit findings

New programme and governance arrangements underway:

- **New SRO appointed** for end to end improvement and independent of service BAU
- **H2ST Oversight Board meeting** monthly, scrutinising service and finance updates, transformation progress, risks and KPIs including applications, appeals and complaints.

A new team structure implemented from 1 December, designed to:

- **Centre ownership and improve workflow** between assessment of children and young people (CYP's) eligibility for transport and delivering an appropriate and timely transport solution
- **Enable more flexible and resilient resourcing** across peak periods by training staff to flex across functions, to ensure statutory time periods are met, even at peak periods
- **Appropriately segregate duties and decision-making**, including across appeals
- **Ringfenced resource for internal and external stakeholder liaison** and ensuring effective communication, particularly with parents

Documentation of processes and procedures to ensure consistent practice and policy application, e.g.:

- **Process maps** have been completed across the service and will be finalised by end January. These will be reviewed for further opportunities to streamline families', transport provider and SCC effort in 'to-be' maps as part of the Single View of a Child programme
- **Documentation of procedure, decision-making and escalation levels** around the majority of In Year and Summer Review of travel arrangements and route contract awards
- **Costing matrices** to ensure consistent calculation of costs for any routes, including CYP with SEN

Improvements to systems, data and reporting including:

- **Applications process** for parents and carers, clarifying eligibility and ensuring necessary information is requested and submitted once
- **Record-keeping**, including around decision-making for parents, ensuring they are routinely informed of the reason for a decision
- **Procurement**, full audit of the dynamic purchasing system (ADAM) and changes made to ensure audit recommendations were addressed

Clearer and increased information and communication with parents:

- **End to end improvement of the customer journey**, including all communications, advice, guidance and documentation
- **Clarification of the policy**, including defining the eligibility criteria and provision for those in post-16 education
- **A parent guide**, including an online home to school transport eligibility checker they can use prior to submitting an application for under 16 year olds



Next steps on action on Audit findings, recommendations and improvement overall

- **Complete improvement plan and transformation programme including** full implementation of Internal Audit recommendations
- **Continue to report progress** to monthly Oversight Board
- Plans underway to **utilise Internal Audit expertise as a critical friend** on specific elements of our improvement plan at agreed points
- Follow-up full internal **audit report assessment tbc**