

Education Directorate
Home to School Transport Briefing December 2021
Schools Forum

Home to School Transport (HTST)

GCC Home to School Transport (HTST) is experiencing unprecedented pressures and challenges at the current time. This is predominantly in relation to the specialist transport requirements for CYP with Special Needs (SEN) and is in part a result of the continuing growth in EHCPs (30% rise over the last 3 years).

Growth is not the only factor however, as this has combined with other external factors to create a 'perfect storm' and has resulted in a number of contractors giving notice on contracts for some or all of the following economic and pandemic related reasons

- rising fuel costs,
- lack of drivers (drivers have retired or are being encouraged to re-train as HGV drivers, home delivery companies are poaching them all for Xmas deliveries and/or are paying more)
- lack of personal assistants (very few want the work or feel the pay is not sufficient),
- increasing costs of running, replacing and relicensing accessible vehicles etc
- increasing costs of C-19, self-isolating and cover staff more generally
- lack of competition – they can now try their luck with higher quotes and no-one else is there to compete.

As a consequence many SEN transport routes are being re-tendered by ITU through the framework and in light of the lack of competition this is resulting in significantly higher contract costs (in some cases two or three times higher) as we have a limited supply of accessible taxi/minibus vehicles in the county.

As an example we have had quotes circa £365 a day for a 6 mile journey - this equates to £1825 per week, or £71,000 per academic year.

Budget

The HTST budget for 2019/20 was £11.5m, it has since jumped 31% to a predicted £15.1m this year and this could rise further with the increasing cost of SEN contracts which constitute the majority of the budget. MTFs bids have been submitted to meet the projected increase in costs for the next 2 years.

Risks

In light of the limited notice given by some contractors and in some cases a lack of contractors with accessible vehicles bidding for new work, there are a small number of children and families who may not have access to transport for short periods of time, until alternative arrangements on a temporary or permanent basis can be put in place.

The SEN Transport Enablement Team is working closely with families to keep them informed and working to mitigate the effect of change for this vulnerable group of children, many of which who do not respond well to changes in routine and personnel etc.

SEN HTST costs are expected to increase in the short to medium term as the market adjusts to a range of factors in play. This is being monitored closely.

Action underway

- Transport routes are being re-tendered as quickly as possible to limit the amount of time, when provision may be affected/unavailable. Some tenders have been considered unreasonably high.
- The SENTE team are working closely with ITU to secure temporary albeit more expensive solutions when needed, and families are being kept informed of the situation when it affects them. In some cases those families are able/willing to make their own temporary transport arrangements with the support of a Personal Travel Allowance - however not all families can make use of this option.
- ITU in conjunction with Procurement are investigating options for improving the situation in the medium to longer term including the possibility of a pilot in-house mini-fleet of accessible vehicles; encouraging the market and supporting local contractors to improve recruitment – a further report on options is expected in December.
- Edge Public Solutions has been commissioned to carry out a full review of HTST service, policy, processes, resources and cross working arrangements – this work is ongoing and a report is expected mid January.
- The Manager of the SENTE Team has recently resigned and interim arrangements will be put in place from January until any recommendations arising from the review can be considered more fully.

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