



Mainstream Home to School Transport - Update

Committee Operations

Date of meeting 28 April 2023

Date of report 13 April 2023

Report by Chief Executive

1. Object of report

To update the Committee in relation to Mainstream Home to School Transport.

2. Background

Under agency agreements with 11 councils in the West of Scotland, SPT manages, monitors and maintains provision of Mainstream Home to School Transport (HST). This is achieved through the procurement of contracted services from commercial bus and coach operators, taxi and minibus providers. This combination of operators is required as the complexity of school travel takes account of distance travelled, location of pupils to specific schools, and number of children to be collected on specific routes. In addition, each council considers non-eligible entitlement on varying criteria.

To that end, SPT typically manages approximately 1,200 contracts at any one time, ensuring c. 36,000 primary and secondary children get to school and home again, completing around 72,000 journeys per day. In 2022/2023 the total budget for HST was £35million.

The performance of operators in providing services in fulfilment of these school contracts is actively monitored by our team of Compliance Inspectors, whose role is to ensure that the vehicles and service provided meet the safety requirements, contract specification and quality criteria stipulated by each council (again, this differs across councils).

Looking ahead to the 2023/2024 school year, SPT planned to advertise c.450 contract renewals (to provide HST for around 11,600 pupils) on behalf of our partner Local Authorities. Details on the contract volumes by council are detailed in Appendix 1 for reference. Pupil eligibility for Home to School Transport Eligibility is based on a pupil's home address being further from school than the designated Walking Distance for the respective Local Authority, as detailed in Appendix 2 for reference. Additionally, the key project milestones in respect of tendering, evaluation, approvals, award and mobilisation are set out in Appendix 3 for reference.

3. Outline of proposals

The key stages in the HST contract renewals process are summarised as:

- Tender Specification
- Tender Advertisement

- Tender Evaluation
- Notification of Most Economically Advantageous Tender
- Contract Approval(s)
- Contract Award(s)
- Contract Mobilisation
- Contract Monitoring

In terms of progress to date, SPT's Schools team have completed over 400 tender specifications which were issued to the market week commencing 16 January 2023 via SPT's Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS). The remaining 50 contract specifications are now finalised for advertisement and will be issued to the market week commencing 17 April 2023.

Following Tender Evaluation, SPT notified Local Authorities of the Most Economically Advantageous Tender(s) by 3 April 2023, with operators being notified of preferred bidder status in advance.

SPT has now received approvals from a majority of Local Authorities to proceed to contract award, noting certain Councils require specific committee approval (i.e. Inverclyde, West Dunbartonshire and North Lanarkshire) to implement the contract awards.

Given pressures on HST transport budgets, and further initiatives including the Under 22's Free Bus Travel Scheme, SPT is aware that a number of local authorities may be considering their policy in terms of designated Walking Distance. The statutory minimum designated walking distance is 3 miles for secondary schools and 2 miles for primary schools, with HST transport being provided outwith these distances in certain council areas. Any such changes are likely to require extensive consultation by local authorities. Prospective savings may also be limited, given most eligible pupils reside outwith the statutory minimum designated walking distance. SPT officers therefore continue to engage with respective local authorities in this regard and any implications for contract renewal durations and will assist local authorities in assessing the benefits and risks of any policy change. For example, SPT recently met with NLC colleagues to discuss such proposed changes and potential impacts.

Notwithstanding the above, the key ongoing risks to HST delivery include the following factors:

- Inflationary pressures, including in relation to fuel price volatility and wages;
- Continuing national shortage of bus & coach drivers;
- Reduced government support for bus & coach; and
- Concerns over the ongoing viability of bus, coach and taxi operators in the HST market.

SPT officers provide regular updates to the Education Transport Liaison Group attended by the 11 partner Local Authorities on matters such as the above and actions to mitigate such risks, where possible. Given the HST transport difficulties encountered in Lanarkshire during 2022/2023, additional engagement meetings between SPT officers and colleagues from North and South Lanarkshire were established and remain ongoing, at an operational level.

Further updates will be provided to the Committee in due course in terms of the 2023/2024 HST contract renewals and ongoing communication with our partner Local Authorities.

4. Conclusions

The Mainstream Home to School transport provision is essential in supporting and facilitating the education of children across Strathclyde. SPT has successfully managed, monitored and

maintained provision of Mainstream Home to School Transport on behalf of 11 of our partner councils for many years.

As the 2023/2024 HST contract renewal process continues in line with the agreed Project Plan and Key Milestones, the ongoing challenges faced remain significant in respect of driver availability, fuel price volatility and wider inflationary pressures – market volatility remains a key risk to successful delivery. In the main, swift contract approvals to date from Local Authorities has therefore been most welcomed, in securing market resources.

SPT officers continue to work closely with our Local Authority partners and operators, in order to mitigate such risks, where possible. However, anticipated costs for HST transport are expected to be significantly higher than in previous years.

Officers will further update the Committee on progress in due course.

5. Committee action

The Committee is recommended to note this report.

6. Consequences

Policy consequences	<i>Delivery of school transport is in line with the RTS.</i>
Legal consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Financial consequences	<i>Costs associated with HST are allocated to each Local Authority based on the agreed contract provision.</i>
Personnel consequences	<i>None directly.</i>
Equalities consequences	<i>Ongoing monitoring of equalities impacts of school transport.</i>
Risk consequences	<i>The fragility of the Home to School Transport market remains an ongoing risk to delivering services effectively and efficiently.</i>
Climate Change, Adaptation & Carbon consequences	<i>School transport has a positive benefit through reducing the need for journeys by less sustainable modes.</i>

Name Neil Wylie
Title **Director of Finance & Corporate Support**

Name Valerie Davidson
Title **Chief Executive**

For further information, please contact Gordon Dickson, Head of Bus Strategy & Delivery on 0141 333 3407.

APPENDIX 1

HST Contract Renewals by Local Authority

Council	No of Contracts	Number of Pupils
East Ayrshire	44	1585
East Dunbartonshire	13	234
East Renfrewshire	11	45
Glasgow	31	950
Inverclyde	27	990
North Ayrshire	27	743
North Lanarkshire	123	3763
Renfrewshire	20	430
South Ayrshire	16	311
South Lanarkshire	122	2015
West Dunbartonshire	15	529
Overall	449	11595

APPENDIX 2

HST Walking Distance Requirement by LA

Council	Walking Distance Requirement (High School)	Walking Distance Requirement (Primary School)
East Ayrshire	3 miles	1.5 miles
South Ayrshire	3 miles	2 miles
North Ayrshire	3 miles	2 miles
North Lanarkshire	2 miles	1 mile
South Lanarkshire	2 miles	1 mile
West Dunbartonshire	2 miles	1 mile
East Dunbartonshire	3 miles	1 mile
Inverclyde	2 miles	1 mile
Glasgow	2.2 miles	1.2 miles
East Renfrewshire	3 miles	2 miles
Renfrewshire	2 miles	1 mile

APPENDIX 3

Key Milestones

- Tender Specification – Target completion Date(s); Phase 1; 11 January 2023.
- Tender Advertisement – Target completion Date(s); Phase 1; 16 January 2023.
- Tender Evaluation – Target completion Date(s); Phase 1; 6 April 2023.
- Notification of Most Economically Advantageous Tender – Target completion Date(s); Phase 1; 10 April 2023.
- Contract Approval(s) – Target completion Date(s); 10 April to 12 June 2023.
- Contract Award(s) – Target completion Date(s); 10 April to 12 June 2023 (subject to approvals).
- Contract Mobilisation – Target completion Date(s); August 2023 / As per school return dates.
- Contract Monitoring – Ongoing 2023/2024.