

**This position statement is written to demonstrate the priorities East Sussex Parent Carer Forum has raised with East Sussex County Council when discussing retendering of some home to school transport contracts during 2021 for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. It is being shared now in response to live feedback received from the community regarding these changes.**

East Sussex Parent Carer Forum (ESPCF) acknowledges that there is a rationale and legal requirement for the retender process for the home to school transport service. We are aware that transport providers compete to secure contracts through a competitive tender process based on cost, but that all providers are required to meet a minimum criteria and are subject to pre-approved quality checks. We are also aware that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) has a project officer dedicated to manage this change process, which is reassuring.

However, home to school transport (HTST) provision must be safe and fit for purpose for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and the change process needs to be well planned, managed and communicated to families. A new provider brings change and uncertainty which may be difficult for many SEND children and young people and in turn means this change process will very likely be unsettling for families – it is essential this is understood and responded to.

ESPCF maintains that the below principles are critical in providing an effective HTST service.

### Principles

- **ESCC must communicate clearly and in a timely way with families** to confirm if their transport provider is changing and to explain their specific transport arrangements.
- **Risk assessments need to be completed** as part of the planning process, e.g. to ensure vehicles/routes are suitable to each child or young person's needs. ESCC, schools, families and transport providers should all be involved in this and they need to be based on written information as well as an in-person meeting with the child or young person.
- **Facts about children and young people's needs should be included in pupil information sheets** and these must be used effectively to help manage transitions and specifically any safety concerns.
- **Drivers and vehicle passenger assistants (VPAs) need to be inducted into child or young person's needs** and trained in:
  - First aid, including basic life support
  - The handling of emergency situations, including when to contact emergency services
  - An awareness of different types of disabilities, including hidden disabilities
  - An awareness of what constitutes discrimination
  - Training in recognising and supporting children with different disabilities, including hidden disabilities, and behaviour that may be associated with such disabilities
  - Communicating appropriately with children and young people with different types of disabilities

- **Transport operators must offer parent carers the opportunity for the driver and VPA to meet with the parent carers and their child or young person before the service starts.** The operator should consider the impact of establishment holidays and allow sufficient time to contact parent carers. ESCC needs to ensure that these visits definitely happen.
- **Parent carers need to be reassured around the availability of alternative arrangements in unforeseen circumstances** (e.g. vehicle breakdown/driver unavailable) particularly for routes that will be served by operators not otherwise operating in the local area. What are the contingency plans?
- **Queries and transport applications need to be processed in a timely manner.**
- **Regular spot checks should be undertaken** on providers to ensure quality criteria are being fulfilled.
- **Parent carers should feedback concerns and questions to the ESCC HTST team**, as without this information, staff managing the change may not know about issues arising.

ESPCF continues to talk to ESCC about issues wider than the current retender process, outlined below.

### Issues outside retender process

- **Learning from any safeguarding concerns** that have occurred in recent years within the service and any adjustments to processes that need to be made.
  - **Introducing a secondary identification vetting card**, in addition to the taxi licence ID, which demonstrates that the operator has met the quality requirements to provide HTST.
  - **Introducing a leaflet for families explaining the service and the proposed new ID card.** This could explain the minimum requirements which an operator needs to be meeting, thereby helping to increase transparency around the service and decision-making processes.
  - **Transporting children and young people to after-school clubs.** While we understand HTST is not statutorily required to offer this, and there is no discretionary policy in place, without this transport many SEND children and young people cannot access extended day provision.
  - The **post-16 HTST policy needs further discussion**, with ISEND rather than the HTST team.
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ESPCF asks that parent carers continue to feedback all issues, positive and negative, to the HTST team: [specialist-transport.cts@eastsussex.gov.uk](mailto:specialist-transport.cts@eastsussex.gov.uk) and please also share with [info@espcf.org.uk](mailto:info@espcf.org.uk) so we are aware of concerns and can raise these on behalf of the wider SEND community.

The Amaze SENDIASS team can support any families through appeals and specific HTST legal advice. Contact details: call **01273 772289** or email [sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk](mailto:sendiass@amazesussex.org.uk)