

Education and Children's Social Care Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Portfolio Update
21 July 2021

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to update the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the following areas of Children's Wellbeing portfolio including:

- Early Years
- Hunters Hill update
- An update on the SEND Local Area Revisit and progress that has been made since this concluded.
- SEND and EHCPs including the health aspect

Early Years Wellbeing

Work is currently underway to update on the work being undertaken to support the development of the integrated early years checks (healthy child and EYFS progress checks) for children at age two, working with Birmingham Forward Steps as part of the Early Years Health and Wellbeing contract.

A task and finish group has been established to co-design a solution to ensure greater integration between the Health professionals undertaking the mandated reviews and the early years providers where children are attending.

The work to be progressed includes:

- Work in aligning system working within the following professions – Health Visitor, Early Years Worker, Family Support Worker and Childcare provider.
- Two-year-old health checks and the Early Year family service progress review and identify the overlap.
- Quality Assurance to be included as part of the framework.

Hunters Hill Update

- Hunters Hill College will close to pupils at the end of the current 2020/2021 academic year
- SENAR has been working with Hunters Hill leadership and staff to facilitate interim placements in appropriate settings for all pupils remaining on roll. Most of those interim placements for pupils in years 8 to 10 have, or will, become permanent by July 2021, while placements from September 2021 for the year 11 cohort continue to be identified via the Post 16 transitions process

Placement Update

- Numbers on roll have reduced from 84 in January 2021 to 38 as a result of 46 permanent placements having since been agreed and finalised.
- In addition, a further 8 permanent placements have been agreed with families and schools and EHCPs are in the process of being amended to reflect these.
- As a result, the number of pupils remaining on the Hunters Hill roll will shortly reduce to 30. two of these are Outside Local Authority.

- Of the remaining Birmingham pupils, 22 are currently in year 11, and those pupils will stay on roll at the school until the end of the academic year pending transition to their Post 16 placements from September.
- Six pupils remain in Years 9 (2) and 10 (4) for whom ongoing casework is being carried out to resolve permanent placements
- Attendance in respect of interim placements is being monitored daily
- For those pupils who are not attending an interim placement/receiving home tuition, a remote learning offer is in place via provision of appropriately tailored individual work packs.

The SEND Local Area Revisit and Progress since 2018

A SEND local area revisit took place from 24th to 27th of May, to review the progress we have made against our Written Statement of Action (WSOA) since its publication in January 2019.

The purpose of the revisit was to determine whether the local area has made sufficient progress in addressing the 13 areas of significant weakness detailed in the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) and to demonstrate that the Local Area, during the COVID19 response, has:

- understood the experience and needs of children and young people with SEND, and their families, during the pandemic;
- involved children and young people with SEND and their families in co- producing decisions about how best to support them;
- worked collaboratively to prioritise, adapt and provide the services and support that children and young people with SEND and their families need.

Self-Assessment

In advance of the revisit, a self-assessment was produced, which concluded that though progress had been made in some areas, it was not possible to demonstrate impact in all thirteen areas. The impact of COVID on Birmingham was significant. The COVID pandemic has galvanised partnership working across the Partnership and SEND has benefitted from this strengthened partnership. However, progress was interrupted during this period.

The Self-Assessment recognised that a great deal of activity had taken place, as outlined below:

Responding to the WSOA:

- The SEND Strategy was published in 2019.
- Sufficiency reviews carried across education, health and social care
- Focused support on inter-agency working and quality of EHCPs.
- The Transitions Strategy was agreed to ensure well-managed transitions from Children's to Adult's services.
- The Joint Commissioning Framework was created, which was a steppingstone for Section 75 Agreement work.
- Established a Youth Forum.
- Conducted parent carer surveys and engaged with parent carers through various means (e.g. Health SEND PCF, Be Empowered Workshops, Link Advisers, SENDIASS, training, etc.).
- Redesigned and improved the Local Offer website.

- Delegated £7m from High Needs Block to Direct Local Provision school led project to improve the outcomes for SEND across partnerships of secondary and primary mainstream schools.
- introduced Pupil Referral Unit and Local Authority Link meetings to develop bi-directional dialogue between City of Birmingham School (main tier 2 graduated response capacity) in order to inform future SEMH strategy and improve current graduated response.
- Established integrated transitions team with over £1m investment that holds employments as a core priority.

During COVID19 pandemic:

- A COVID response Early help offer was established across 10 localities, in partnership with the Birmingham Voluntary community Sector, with over 14,000 children and families receiving vital subsistence and help.
- A £1m resilience fund was established to support families in hardship.
- A £70,000 community grant scheme established supporting 162 community organisations with their local responses to need.

Challenges:

However, the self-assessment also recognised that:

- The experience of our children and young people with SEND and their families is not yet good enough for all children.
- Structural and process changes are underway in SENAR to address the entrenched weak performance, including building a Locality Model but these are not yet fully embedded and will take time to improve the experiences of all children, families and schools moving through the system.
- Processes for quality assuring EHCPs are evolving, but improvements are recent, and impact is yet to be fully realised.
- The way that we are managing and using data is not sufficiently robust and needs to be strengthened.
- Sharing and using data across partners needs further development.
- We have invested in our therapies provision but waiting times to access therapies (speech and language, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and neurodevelopmental services) are still too long.
- Parent Carer Forum tells us that because they have experienced poor performance over many years, and trust in embedding improvements is low.
- The SEND Strategy is not sufficiently well-understood and embedded across the city.
- Senior Leadership within this area has been subject to churn since the last inspection. This has meant that vital time has been lost, especially immediately after the Written Statement of Action was signed off.

Outcome of SEND Revisit

The letter outlining the findings of the inspection team will be published in the week of 12 July. The inspection team noted that the self-assessment was accurate. A full update on the outcome of the inspection revisit will be circulated in advance of the meeting on 21 July 2021.

Next Steps

In advance of the publication of the letter, steps have already been taken to improve services:

- A SEND Improvement Programme Manager has been recruited
- The SENAR Restructure has been paused and steps are being taken to improve the service performance in the short term
- The SEND Improvement Board is working on a relaunch of the SEND Improvement Programme that places children and families at the heart and is built around the principles of co-production

Education and Health Care Plans Update

SENAR currently maintains approximately **10,600** EHCPs – There has been a steady rise in the number of EHCPs maintained by Birmingham. This increase in numbers is not unique to Birmingham and is reflected in the national picture.

EHCPs Maintained	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	Growth
Birmingham	7,294	7,427	7,612	9,023	9,437	9,169	20%
Leeds	2,160	2,287	2,873	3,353	3,836	4,339	50%
Liverpool	1,520	1,703	2,006	2,282	2,608	2,884	47%
Manchester	2,319	2,599	3,214	3,676	4,163	4,667	50%
Newcastle upon Tyne	916	1,059	1,292	1,370	1,490	1,701	56%
Sheffield	2072	2203	2475	2861	3201	3252	36%

This increase in numbers of EHCPs is due in large part to the extension of the age range they support from 2-19 to 0-25 introduced by the Children and Families Act 2014 and SEND Code of Practice 2015. Previously SENAR would expect around 600 statements per year to lapse at age 19 but the majority of these CYP are now continuing in education.

Statutory Assessments

The number of requests has dropped in the last financial year, which is likely due to the COVID pandemic and schools being closed or dealing with different pressures, however, the proportion of requests for assessments agreed has increased from 69% to 83%.

Year	Finals Issued	Agreed to Assess	Requests Received	Parental Referral	School Referral
2018/19	890	1049	1517	38%	48%
2019/20	912	1081	1583	49%	40%
2020/21	906	1161	1391	51%	40%

The percentage of requests received has always historically been highest from schools, however, the proportion of requests being received currently is highest from parents. There has also been a recent communication from the DfE stating that nationally there has been an increase in requests for CYP presenting with Social, Emotional and Mental Health Needs which would tie in with an increase in parental requests as a result of the impact of national lockdowns.

There are currently 656 statutory assessments in the process of being undertaken, with 43 being outside of the 20-week timescales. This is in comparison with 162 assessments being over 20 weeks in May 2021. 31 of those 43 families have received a draft plan and the assessment will be finalised after the required 15-day period.

There has been significant work undertaken to bring this number down and to improve performance. As outlined above, however, due to the volume of requests being agreed, there has been significant pressure on partners, to provide information within six weeks, leading to delays.

2021/21	New Plans Issued	% issued in less than 20 Weeks excluding exemptions
September	46	61.5%
October	32	28.6%
November	59	3.8%
December	44	33.3%
January	41	18.8%
February	69	35.1%
March	128	37.7%
April	137	73.4%
May	172	50.0%
June	142	62.1%

There have been some ongoing delays in receiving advice and information back from Health colleagues to inform statutory assessments. Work is required to address this issue and ensure that advices received from all partners are of the necessary quality.

We continue to endeavour to find a placement for all children/young person as quickly as possible. Strategic work regarding the sufficiency of high need placements for children with complex SEN is ongoing in order to reduce the amount of EHC plans that are finalised by type each month and to ensure that children receive appropriate provision.

Annual Reviews

There is currently a backlog of reviews that have yet to be fully completed, families are either awaiting a review decision or awaiting a final plan following that decision. Additional agency staff have been recruited to work both on the backlog and on the new annual review reports being received from schools.

Specialist Provision in Birmingham

There is significant pressure for changes of placement from mainstream schools to Resource Bases or Special Schools, notwithstanding an increasing number of commissioned places in special schools each year (see below):

14/15 3781
15/16 3905
16/17 4111

17/18 4250
18/19 4413
19/20 4538
20/21 4509 (Lower number reflects reduction due to closure of Hunters Hill College)

There are 129 children and young people who are currently awaiting a special school placement while on roll at another setting. Further work is being undertaken to ensure the currency and accuracy of this figure.

There are a further 115 CYP who are currently out of school and the vast majority are awaiting a placement at a special school (29 of these have a confirmed placement for September 2021). There are interim education offers in place for those currently out of school as well as a Home Bridging Worker to support the family and CYP until they have transitioned into a new setting.

Transitions

Secondary Transfer 2021 – 634 pupils

- 342 children have confirmed placements with an amended final plan issued
- A further 233 children have identified placements and are currently having their final plans issued by the reviews team.
- There are 30 children where placements have been identified and these are being confirmed with the schools.
- 29 pupils remain that are yet to receive confirmed placements for September 2021
- Consultation responses are awaited for the remainder and officers are pursuing each individual case with the relevant setting

Reception Transfer 2021

The children who had an EHCP at 15 February 2021 requiring a reception place for September 2021 all have confirmed placements for September 2021.

Post 16 Transfer 2021

1636 out of 1734 young people received decisions by 31st March 2021.

Resolution and Complaints

Themes from complaints continue to centre on:

1. Lack of school placement for a CYP and failure to provide educational provision as set out in Section F of EHCPs.
2. Failure to respond to an Annual Review within the statutory timeframe
3. Lack of communication (no phone numbers)

We are seeing an increase in the request for Stage 2 escalation (as a precursor to a potential LGSCO complaint which can lead to a financial remedy being recommended for any injustice or delay). Given that there has been a publicised decision in relation to Home to School Transport in BCC recently this trend is likely to continue.

There is a challenge around identifying the link professional/advisor for the children who are in specialist settings, in other Local Authorities or in ISPs, as this model does not readily follow through from mainstream provision. This can cause delays in providing a response.

Tribunals

The number of tribunals that are currently 'live' and not yet resolved is 108; 15 were registered in 2020 and 93 in 2021. 86 involve a Section I appeal (placement).

The number of SENDIST Appeals registered per calendar year is as follows:

2018 – 265

2019 – 279

2020 – 268

2021 – 117 to date

Due to the tribunal timeline, cases that have been registered since mid-April now have hearing dates from September onwards, which means that in cases where there is a Section I appeal, parents may choose not send their child to the school named in the plan and continue to appeal for their preferred placement. If the LA opposes such an appeal, the provision named in Section I remains available until the Tribunal makes a decision.

The tribunal numbers and delays are causing some parents to approach their MPs and Councillors in respect of requests for an earlier hearing or other intervention. Parents bring the appeal as they disagree with a decision the LA has made and, once it is lodged, a legal process starts that must be followed. The Tribunal Officers continue to work with families to bring about an early resolution where possible.

SENAR Restructure

As a result of the outcome of the Local Area SEND Revisit, a decision has been taken to pause the planned restructure of the SENAR service whilst steps are taken to ensure that the planned structure is the right way to address the significant areas of concern identified. Officers are currently working on a revised timescale and plan for this restructure that will be shared with staff and stakeholders shortly.

The main aim of any changes to the service will be to ensure that caseloads are manageable, and staff are able to deal with EHCP requests and Annual Reviews in a timely fashion and that parents and schools will be provided with a high quality and responsive service.

Home to School Transport

Our Home to School Transport service has been on a significant improvement journey over the past 9 months.

There is a need to acknowledge and thank our Parent Carer Forum and all our parents and carers and families that have been in touch and participated in engagement sessions to set out issues and what they would like, helping the service to shape improvements. We have made significant investment over the past 9 months to improve our home to school transport service we still have a way to go but we are on a journey.

Some key areas of activity include:

- Safeguarding all our safeguarding cases are monitored through weekly situation reports for resolution in a timely manner. Furthermore, a Safeguarding Project has been established within the HTS to establish robust business processes and a policy relating to child safeguarding within Birmingham City Council's Home to School Transport Service. There is also a further HTS Safeguarding Stocktake meeting that runs every 6 weeks to bring together key contacts across the wider organisation, to review and assure progress against this activity.
- Routes performance, routes are monitored daily through a triangulation of parent/carer, school and operator feedback. This has led to between 99 and 100% of routes being successfully delivered since 8th March 2021. Routes are also monitored for timeliness – routes operating more than ten minutes after the target arrival time are recorded as 'late'. In excess of 99% of routes were operated to time during the months of April, May, and June.
- Safety, our Compliance team was established in Autumn 2020 has now been enhanced with Contract Managers who have started in post to further improve safety and performance of routes.
- Training, to date 247 of our Guides (just under half of the total) are now trained in all modules of the Passenger Assistant Training Scheme (PATS) trained. The team is aiming to train all available guides in the foundation stage in advance of September. We are aiming for all our BCC Guides to have been trained in the foundation stage ready for September.
- Market engagement has been key, and our Home to School Transport and Commissioning teams undertook ongoing engagement with the market prior to tendering NEAT routes for September start, to be clear on expectations of our operators. The retendering of routes concluded with the successful award of contract in June as planned. A further webinar was offered to operators in late June to discuss additional contingency routes the council will be tendering for, and this was well attended.
- New routes tendered for September were evaluated with the support of a representative of our special schools.
- A Mobilisation team has been established to oversee the successful mobilisation of all routes for September, managing the critical path to successful delivery of these routes with in-depth indicators around operators' communication with schools and families, operational readiness in relation to vehicles and staff and safeguarding/regulatory requirements.
- The Clean Air Zone will be positive in terms of health benefits for the children of the city. Home to School Transport are working with the CAZ team, schools and families to capture any impact on journey times during the rollout and over September when traffic volumes traditionally increase. Since the commencement of the CAZ there has been no identified impact on journey times but this will be continually monitored as we anticipate increased traffic volumes at the start of September as per normal 'back to school' traffic fluctuations, and the anticipated relaxing of Covid-restrictions may see increased commuters returning to their normal places of work. The council has taken a decision to route journeys internally, so we have more control over ensuring that journey times meet the statutory guidance and pupils' needs. Previously all routing has been carried out by transport operators.
- The pilot of the 365 scheme is continuing with all operators mandated to sign up to use the system and specifically the BCC instance. Launch is planned to be phased once full

testing is completed and signed off successfully. This is likely to be around Autumn 2021 onwards.

- FAQ's for families have been compiled from feedback from families, our PCF and SENDIASS colleagues. This is due to be launched on our Local Offer page, following review by Legal and is a great example of the co-production which we look forward to continuing
- A monthly Task and Finish Group chaired by the Leader of the Council has also been established, which brings together key stakeholders including parent and school representatives and SENDIASS to discuss progress in an open forum. Performance data is reviewed, and attendees hold Officers to account for progress against key actions and are offered the chance to shape work as it is developed, e.g., this group contributed to the newly developed FAQ document that was due to be published at the end of May, and a final review by Legal is due to conclude soon. A document encapsulating Vision and Strategic Priorities for the Service have also been discussed and agreed by this group. The public meeting of this forum has been scheduled on 21st July.

Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Performance data has been improved and KPIs are measured, monitored and managed weekly by the Head of Service. KPIs are also reported weekly to the Assistant Director, Inclusion, SEND and Wellbeing through a SitRep Report. In addition, performance in delivering core KPIs is reported to the monthly Leaders Home to School Task and Finish Group where robust conversations about progress against KPIs are held.

Service Improvement Plan Priorities

A Service Improvement Plan was put in place to continue the service's improvement journey once the Immediate Fixes Plan had been delivered. Performance in delivering the plan is monitored at monthly Management Team meetings, in supervision and performance reviews that are regularly held with staff, and at Home to School Project Board meetings, where the improvement impacts upon project deliverables. An update is provided below on progress in delivering improvements in:

- Communication
- Safety
- Safeguarding Risk
- Reliability – impact on parents, families and schools
- Policy, Assessments and Appeals
- Parent Carer Forum, Parent Engagement and Co-Production
- Integrated Passenger Transport Unit
- Project Oversight and Planning

Communication

Communication has been raised continually as a major issue, parents repeatedly raised the frustration they experienced on an ongoing basis in contacting the service including phones and emails not being answered. This is obviously especially stressful for parents who need to be assured of their child's safety at all times.

The Service has identified improving communication as a key priority and Managers are working with all members of staff to embed an open and responsive culture.

Responsiveness is monitored on a regular basis, with weekly meetings held where performance data is monitored for telephone calls and any issues are discussed and resolved. In line with Birmingham City Council Service standards, the service aims to answer 90% of calls within a reasonable time. In April, the average response across the month was 87% with some weeks falling short of the desired service level. Since then, performance has continued to improve reaching 90% early May and achieving weekly levels above 96% throughout June. Further ways to improve responsiveness continue to be explored.

The Service has committed to rolling out an IT solution - 365 Response - which has the capability to provide real time information to parents (and schools) on the location of their child's transport. This would be a national first in rolling out a Home to School transport system which links multiple service providers in a real time information scenario.

It is important to ensure that this launch is successful. The project is currently in an extended pilot phase and a review of the pilot is due to take place shortly so that Officers can learn from this before rolling out more widely. The Council is very keen to have 365 operational to form an integral part of its longer-term improvements for home to school transport.

A key success driver for real time information is the full engagement of every operator so that all operator staff are fully compliant. The Council has therefore amended its terms and conditions to require all operators to be compliant with the system and have the appropriate ICT kit to facilitate this. These changes to terms and conditions are due to take effect from the start of the 2021/22 academic year.

It is likely that the pilot will be extended to recognise that changes to the terms and conditions of contract with contractors need to take effect to enable the most robust test of the system. It is essential that the system is thoroughly tested prior to rollout and project managers are reviewing timescales, with the likelihood that rollout will be phased over the autumn of 2021. Communication with parents about this will be prioritised from the start of term so they are clear what to expect.

The Service has reviewed the structure of its operational team on an interim basis to allow the team to flex staff resources to respond to increased call and email volumes, and readiness for the start of Autumn term. Additional staffing resource has also been invested in this area on a temporary basis.

The Service has transferred to the Cirrus system, allowing calls waiting to be monitored to allow staff resources to be flexed accordingly, and providing management information to support the performance in this area. For example, call volumes increase on Mondays and following a school holiday, so the service now takes a proactive surge approach to ensure there is additional staff capacity on these days.

The Service is also reviewing the root cause of increased call volumes to allow a more proactive approach. For example, when correspondence is sent to a group of parents, a well written letter should provide enough information to answer most queries without the need for a follow-on phone call or email. Parents will soon also be able to access a Frequently Asked Questions document available through the Local Offer which should also help reduce phone traffic. In addition, consideration is being given to how to provide structured feedback channels with parents/carers and pupils which can be managed effectively as part of standard operational service.

Safety and suitability of Vehicles

A compliance team was established in the Autumn of 2020, which has a well-established programme of checks and audits on operators providing home to school transport on behalf of the City Council. In addition, the Council has commissioned an external contractor to provide additional mechanical checks on the Council's behalf. Three contract managers have also recently been recruited to work alongside colleagues in Commissioning to provide robust contract management.

Suitability of guides and drivers: The rollout of the Passenger Assistant Training Scheme (PATS) ensures Guides are trained to a national standard in their field. This includes some training on managing health issues on transport. Training, to date 247 of our Guides (just under half of the total) are now trained in all modules of the Passenger Assistant Training Scheme (PATS) trained. The team is aiming to train all available guides in the foundation stage in advance of September. We are aiming for all our BCC Guides to have been trained in the foundation stage ready for September.

Other training including emergency aid and epilepsy training is also being explored to be rolled out across a similar timescale. Guides are provided in some cases now by service providers as well as by the Council. In these cases, the advantage is that the service is less likely to be interrupted by Guide shortages. The same training is provided to guides whether they are employed by BCC or a transport provider.

The Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS) has a clear expectation on the providers that all members of their staff working on transport (including drivers) are trained and monitored to a high standard. The expectation of the drivers is in line with what is being required by the service and the policy. Additional guide capacity has also been put in place to increase capacity for covering sickness absence.

Safeguarding

As well as the training improvements already referenced in this report, management information in relation to Driver and DBS checks is included in weekly situation reports on the service's overall operation. There is a revised process in place involving a HR led DBS weekly panel to review any more complex cases, and this has required a deed of variation with the Council's Legal team providing the relevant support. This management information provides reassurance on DBS checks being in place for all staff transporting pupils on home to school transport.

Transport reliability and the impact on families

Whilst 365 Response is not fully rolled out, routes are currently reviewed daily to identify any issues and get to the root of those issues to prevent repetition. Where a route is operating at ten minutes either side of its scheduled school drop off time, it is recorded as 'on time'. Feedback from transport operators is triangulated with schools and parent information to identify and challenge any discrepancies. As a result, improvements have meant since 8th March that between 97 and 100% of routes are operating, and 'on time' as classified under the definition above.

The re-opening of schools following the second lockdown was a key test for the Home to School Transport Service which needed to mobilise an additional ten routes for this to happen successfully. The service also tendered for up to 30 contingency vehicles that could be used if there were problems with any of the routes. 12 of these were utilised. Except for issues with NEAT routes on Monday 8th March all routes ran effectively with these routes being covered with the contingency vehicles.

Parent Carer Forum, Parental Engagement and Co-Production

We have worked closely with the Parent Carer Forum to engage them in specific areas and their input has been much appreciated by Home to School Transport. A co-produced 'Frequently Asked Questions' document is due to be published for parents and the Head of Service will continue to attend regular meetings with the Parent Carer Forum and other professionals. The Parent Carer Forum also attend the regular monthly Task and Finish Group chaired by the Leader of the Council where progress is examined.

A Parent Engagement Event chaired by the Leader of the Council is scheduled for 21st July, when parents will be given the opportunity to comment on service improvements and to hear about plans for next year and how this will impact on them.

The Education and Skills Transformation Director is working closely with the Parent Carer Forum to support them with recruitment to two key roles that will provide more capacity and enable the PCF to promote the Forum more widely and attract greater membership. Interviews have been conducted for a Co-Production Officer and we hope to appoint shortly. An Administrative Officer post should be out to advert soon.

Integrated Passenger Transport Unit

The independent inquiry of SEND Home to School Transport recommended that the Council should consider implementing an Integrated Transport Unit (ITU). An Integrated Transport Unit is a service where different transport functions are brought together from across an organisation, or brought together from multiple organisations, and integrated to improve outcomes, efficiency and effectiveness.

ITUs can bring significant benefits, most importantly improved outcomes and more efficient, accessible and easy to navigate services for the people they serve and their families.

A project has been initiated to develop an outline business case for an Integrated Transport Unit, which will provide the basis on which a decision can be taken whether this is the

preferred way forward and how this could operate. This project brings together Officers from across the council and is being overseen by Rob James, Director, Neighbourhoods.

Co-design is being built into this from the beginning and the Leader's Home to School Task and Finish Group has already taken part in a discussion about the scope of the project, the benefits that it should deliver and the risks that need to be managed.

Key Challenges

Our Home to School transport service has been a challenging area of work for which there have been a combination of immediate improvements as well as improvements which are being delivered over a longer period.

Staff capacity has been a challenge and additional capacity has therefore been agreed on a temporary basis to continue to roll out service improvements between now and Autumn 2021 to ensure standards remain consistent and continue to improve. Additional permanent capacity will be required to sustain those improvements, and this will be reflected in a permanent structure to be proposed beyond this period.

The impact of the Clean Air Zone will undoubtedly bring significant benefits to the health of the city's residents. Whilst the CAZ is being rolled out, there is a risk of traffic displacement impacting on journey times, and this also impacting at the start of September. As a result, operators reviewed route times through trialling a dry run at the start of the scheme or through a desk-top exercise, starting routes early and communicating daily with the Council on any issues. In addition, parents received communications advising of the actions the Council is taking to monitor the impact. Plans are in place to ensure that parents, providers and schools are all prepared for potential impact and the Service has put in place all possible mitigations. Since the commencement of the CAZ there has been no identified impact on journey times but this will be continually monitored as we anticipate increased traffic volumes at the start of September as per normal 'back to school' traffic fluctuations, and the anticipated relaxing of Covid-restrictions may see increased commuters returning to their normal places of work.

The COVID Pandemic has obviously brought a new level of challenge in providing a safe service for children. Increased spend has been incurred due to the need to make transport 'Covid safe' and provide extra capacity where required due to staff absence. Officers have prioritised the safety of children during this period and taken all possible measures to ensure that travel is as COVID safe as possible. Routes have been increased from c600 to c900 to ensure bubbles and social distancing can be maintained, as well as employing contingency operators.

COVID funding, the Council has been in receipt of additional funding from the Department for Education (DfE) confirmed on a half term basis since September 2020. It is now confirmed that the funding will end at the end of this academic year and is unlikely that this will be reintroduced in the new academic year. This will be managed as part of the mobilisation phase for September so that parents are aware how routes will be planned for

the new academic year without bubbles but with enhanced cleaning and hygiene measures in place.

Retendering of routes, around 40% of existing routes that are provided by National Express Accessible Transport was successfully concluded in June. This was a large-scale project, overseen by the Assistant Director of Commissioning with regular reporting arrangements in place to ensure the project remained track. Any changes of operator will need careful planning and communicating to pupils and families. A mobilisation team has been set up to carry out this work.

Guide capacity continues to be a challenge due to staff needing to self-isolate and agency staff have been put in place to support. A deed of variation has been enacted to increase supply via the Transport providers and continued support from agencies is available as required.

Issues with the Transition process this year have meant that a small number of pupils have still not had places confirmed for September 2021 or, in some cases, places have been confirmed but confirmation letters were delayed. This has a knock-on impact on Home to School Transport as staff cannot begin to put in place plans for travel arrangements until placements are confirmed and parents have been notified and requested travel. The risk of this impacting on a successful start to the Autumn Term is being managed as closely as possible and Home to School Transport Service is working closely with SENAR to address any issues and find solutions.

Home to School Transport – next 6 months

Monitoring of the Service/Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) – KPIs will continue to be monitored and delivered to identify the overall performance of the service.

Schools have been briefed on the plan for recommissioning of routes for September and will be invited to be involved in evaluation of bids from potential suppliers (with particular focus on quality). Schools will also play a key role in managing any risk areas surrounding pupil groupings of these new routes and will be involved in route planning.

365 Response pilot will extend to allow terms and conditions changes to take effect, with a view to rolling out the system following robust testing, on a phased approach towards the end of 2021.

The contract management and compliance function will continue to work closely with operators to monitor quality and performance of routes.

The service will continue to work closely with the Parent Carer Forum through regular meetings to update and where possible work jointly on specific areas of work, as jointly agreed.