

Shared Services Joint Committee Wednesday 13th July 2022

Report Title	Highways and Transport - Home to School Passenger Transport Disaggregation – Change to Timeline
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Executive Member	Councillor Graham Lawman Executive Member Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and Assets, NNC Councillor Phil Larratt, Portfolio Holder for Climate, Transport, Highways and Waste Services, WNC

Key Decision	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Are there public sector equality duty implications?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972	

Contributors/Checkers/Approvers

Approver	Officer Name	Date Officer Approved Report
North MO	Adele Wylie	9 th June 2022
North S151	Janice Gotts	9 th June 2022
Other Director/SME	Lisa Hyde	9 th June 2022
West MO	Catherine Whitehead	9 th June 2022
West S151	Martin Henry	9 th June 2022
Other Director/SME	Stuart Timmis	9 th June 2022

List of Appendices

None

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To seek approval of reprofiling the hosted Place and Economy service, Highways and Transport – Home to School Passenger Transport disaggregation timeline from September 2022 to the Autumn half-term 2022 (end - October 2022). This is to enable additional time to disaggregate the service in a safe and legal manner following the peak timeframe for service

delivery and therefore reducing the potential disruption to the statutory service delivered by the Council.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1** The Highways and Transport – Home to School Passenger Transport Service is a hosted service provided by West Northamptonshire Council. The timeframe for disaggregation for all functions within Highways & Transport service area was set out within the Transformation Task and Finish Group. NNC Executive and WNC Cabinet agreed in June 2021 to extend the existing highways contract until the end of September 2022 in order to conclude the procurement of the new highways contracts (See Section 7 - Background Papers).
- 2.2** It is for the Committee to note that the Home to School Passenger Transport Service is subject to its peak time for service delivery during the current planned Highways and Transport disaggregation timeline and to effectively manage the risk to delivering this statutory service this report sets out the recommendation to reprofile the disaggregation of this function. Furthermore, the timeline for the disaggregation of this aspect of the service does not need to align with the new highways contract, since it will not be delivered through the new arrangements.
- 2.3** Disaggregation activity relating to the remaining Highways and Transport functions are underway and aligned to the agreed timeline.

3. Recommendations

- 3.1** That the Shared Services Joint Committee:
- a) Approve reprofiling the timeline to disaggregate Highways and Transport – Home to School Passenger Transport, and the blueprint is amended, to reflect the new disaggregation timeline of Autumn Term 2022 (end - October 2022).
- 3.2** Reasons for the Recommendation
- a) The proposed option to reprofile the disaggregation of Highways and Transport – Home to School Passenger Transport ensures continuous effective service delivery within this statutory function and reduces the risk of reputational damage.
- 3.3** Alternative Options Considered

Continue with full disaggregation by September 2022. For the reasons outlined below this option is not recommended.

Extending the hosting arrangements until December (Christmas holidays) to provide a full academic term for the team to overcome the busiest period before disaggregating. This option was not in line with the aspirations of NNC's Executive Members to form a disaggregated NNC team as soon as possible, and was therefore discounted.

4. Report Background

- 4.1** The timeline for disaggregation of Home to School Passenger Transport service is currently set for September 2022, as part of wider plans for the Highways and Transport service disaggregation. The timeline for disaggregation of the wider Highways and Transport service is not affected by this request to reprofile disaggregation of Home to School Transport.
- 4.2** The team (32 posts of which 7 are vacant) currently hosted by West Northamptonshire Council (WNC) provides a service to North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) through a hosted arrangement in line with the Local Government Reform (LGR) blueprint previously agreed through the LGR transformation programme. NNC Executive and WNC Cabinet agreed in June 2021 to extend the existing highways contract until end of September 2022 in order to conclude the procurement of the new highways contracts. It was also agreed that the hosting arrangement would continue until the new contracts were in place. The volume of service demand varies between the two council areas but this will be reflected in the detailed disaggregation proposals in due course.
- 4.3** The services provided by the team include:
- Home to school transport for pupils of statutory school age (4 – 16 inclusive) under s509 of the Education Act 1996.
 - Pupils with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCP) of statutory school age
 - Students aged 16-18 in further education and continuing students aged 19 and over
 - Children’s Social Care Transport, including respite care transport and family visits
 - Adult Social Care Transport
- 4.5** Dependent Services:
- Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT)
 - Adult Social Care Service
 - Schools and Colleges
 - Respite Centres
 - Adult day centres
 - Children’s Contact Centres
- 4.6** It was previously agreed by the Shared Services Joint Committee in March 2022 to commence disaggregation of all Highways Services, including Home to School Passenger Transport. During the course of the project, the risks to disaggregating the service during the Autumn term were identified. The most effective mitigation to manage this risk is to delay disaggregation until after the end of this term. Following feedback from Executive Members, it is proposed that the Home to School Passenger Transport service will be disaggregated at the latest during the half-term of the Autumn Term 2022 (end - October 2022). The opportunity to enable disaggregation towards the beginning of the Autumn Term will be explored and consideration will be given to disaggregating the Home to School Passenger Transport team sooner if operationally viable.

- 4.7 Services are procured via the current contract framework DPS (Dynamic Purchasing System) 'Adam' from bus, coach and private hire operators along with providers of specialist fleet for clients with mobility needs.

5. Issues and Choices

- 5.1 The following options are to be considered:

Option 1 – Continue with full disaggregation by September 2022

Option 2 – Approval of a delayed disaggregation by end of October 2022

Option 3 – Delay disaggregation to the end of the Autumn Term (December 2022)

- 5.2 **Option 2** is the recommended option for the following reasons:

- 5.3 The peak time for the Home to School Passenger service is from end July/August through to the end of October.

- 5.4 The service receives a high volume of late transport requests at the beginning of September through to November. For SEN applications the service received 358 applications between September 2021 and March 2022, of which 218 were received between Sept and Dec, equating to 61%. Mainstream received 1841 applications between September 2021 and Mar 2022 of which 979 are received during September to December, equating to 53%.

- 5.5 September is typically the busiest month for the service due to the high number of late applications together with increased correspondence (including MP letters) and high customer call volumes, which extends up to the October half term.

- 5.6 This is the period most correspondence from parents/ carers is received – disaggregation of data and staff will hinder response times and lead to increased numbers of complaints.

- 5.7 The team rely on each other to provide the service; providing different skills and experience. Although a collaborative working agreement can be put in place, it is anticipated that disaggregation will lead to reduced capacity and resilience whilst the gaps in the new structures are recruited to, and the new team members become familiar with the service

- 5.8 A restructure of the Highways and Transport service is to commence prior to disaggregation which will incur vacancies. Recruitment to vacant posts will take a number of months. Staff will require training and experience before they can be expected to be competent enough to fulfil the basic functions of the role. It will be preferential to allow more time for this recruitment process before disaggregation and to allow the new teams to establish themselves during a less busy time of year.

- 5.9 It is expected that a collaboration agreement will be created between WNC and NNC to enable support between the teams to ensure that the expertise from both teams is shared in a collaborative manner whilst the new teams establish themselves.

- 5.10** Home to School Passenger service is a statutory function and constantly scrutinised by external organisations, schools, Department for Education and parents. Therefore, any risk to service delivery as a result of disaggregation should be effectively managed and reduced. Physical disaggregation of the team prior to the October half term would not manage the risk effectively.
- 5.11** The disadvantages of this option are:
- 5.12** There is a potential additional burden on WNC to continue to host the service through line management requirements and financial costs.
- 5.13** There may be a perceived lack of control of the service by NNC during this extended period.

6. Implications (including financial implications)

6.1 Resources and Financial

- 6.2** Additional resources will be required from the enabler services to support the disaggregation process. These are being investigated by the Transformation Team and raise a risk until we have a full understanding of the system requirements, data governance and wider dependency implications.

6.3 Legal and Governance

- 6.3.1** The Shared Services Joint Committee is responsible for “ensuring there are robust plans for any disaggregation of services and that there is a smooth transition to new service delivery arrangements”. They are also responsible for ensuring that statutory arrangements are in place for each Council.
- 6.3.2** The service is currently operating in accordance with the Inter Authority Agreement that exists between North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council. If the recommendation proposed within the report is agreed, then the Councils will approve any further amendments under the Inter Authority Agreement to ensure that adequate contract and financial management and governance is in place between the authorities.
- 6.3.3** As outlined within the report, additional work is required in relation to contractual matters and work will be undertaken to ensure that the disaggregation of the services will not compromise legal compliance. If Members were minded not to delay disaggregation to December 2022, then there is a risk that legal requirements would not be met. This risk is reduced, but not avoided, by disaggregating in October 2022.

6.4 Relevant Policies and Plans

- 6.4.1** Reprofiled disaggregation of Highways and Transport – Home to School Passenger service complies with the requirements of the approved Blueprint, whereby it outlines the hosted services in each authority that require disaggregating.

6.5 Risk

6.5.1 If the service is disaggregated in accordance with the original timescales of September 2022, the following risks and issues will arise:

Risk Assessment	Mitigating Action
Continuing with disaggregation could mean the service cannot be delivered in accordance with statutory requirements.	Recommendation to delay disaggregation to end - Oct-22. This risk would be further reduced by extending the disaggregation to December 2022.
The office location for the North will not be ready for September. This will impact the home to school frontline team as they rely on hard-wired phones connected to the WNC system. The quoted lead-in time for the new network line will not meet the October disaggregation date. During October to December, there may be some service disruption as a result of not having suitable office facilities to enable the team to operate fully.	It is expected that the property team will be able to establish the network connections in the NNC office for December. Locate the NNC team in an alternative location that still has access to the WNC system; this may incur additional costs to NNC.
The proposed team structure for North Northamptonshire after disaggregation is likely to consist of vacancies in the team manager and team leader roles. This presents a notable risk to service delivery. It is not expected that recruitment will be complete by October 2022.	Delay of disaggregation provides more time to recruit to these pivotal roles within the structure. Agree a collaborative working agreement between NNC and WNC to enable joint support for the teams during the period of transition and until both teams are sufficiently resourced.

If the service is re-profiled and disaggregation occurs in December 2022, this will significantly reduce the risk of the service not meeting its statutory duty during its busiest time. It will also allow for recruitment and training for new posts and sufficient transfer of knowledge, data and systems to enable the service to function satisfactorily.

6.6 Consultation

6.6.1 This report does not meet the parameters required for public consultation.

6.7 Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel

6.7.1 No considerations arising from this report

6.8 Consideration by Scrutiny

6.8.1 No considerations arising from this report

6.9 Equality Implications

6.9.1 The service does provide transport to people with protected characteristics. The proposed extended timescales to October will reduce the disruption to service users but given the risks highlighted above, this may still occur until the teams are established and sufficiently resourced.

6.10 Climate Impact

6.10.1 No negative impacts arising from this report.

6.11 Community Impact

6.11.1 None arising from this report

6.12 Crime and Disorder Impact

6.12.1 None arising from this report

7. Background Papers

7.1 NNC Executive decision – Highways Procurement

7.2 WNC Cabinet decision – Highways Procurement