

Submission by the Corporate Director of Children and Families

Special Needs Transport 3 Call-in report supporting information

Inadequate consultation with stakeholders prior to the decision:

Consultation to date

Prior to the decision of Cabinet on 11 April 2013, there had been consultation with the trade unions and staff, details of which are set out below. However, it is accepted that the report did not contain details of this consultation or any responses received. This detail is included in this appendix and Cabinet are requested to consider it when deciding whether to confirm its decision of 11 April 2013.

Unions: Discussions with Unions during the research phase were held at the Children and Families DJC where the possibility of further externalisation was referred to on 15th May & 10th July 2012.

The programme proposals were then confirmed and discussed with Unions again on 19th March 2013. At this meeting it was made clear that externalisation was the option being pursued. The union representative confirmed that the union would consider submitting a response. It is understood that a letter was sent direct to the Leader asking for reconsideration but no alternative proposals were submitted for consideration.

Staff: The programme has been developed with members of the special needs transport management team who work closely with their staff and have been integral board members. Their input has been vital in shaping the overall approach.

A meeting with the whole of the management team was held on 21st November 2012 and on 20th March 2013, when proposals were discussed.

The whole workforce were written to on 20th March inviting them to one of two all-staff meetings held on the 28th March at times of the day intended to best accommodate peoples availability. These sessions were attended by approximately 40% of the staff.

Questions and views arising from these meetings included the following:

- the possibility of an in-house option
- the possibility of offering a lower level of service at a cheaper cost
- concern about loss of the 'hidden values' of the in-house service
- questions around the use of local providers
- the West London Alliance proposal
- what steps the Council was taking to increase its grant from central government
- where the savings come from with the use of external suppliers
- whether the staff profile was considered in the EqIA
- whether there are further savings by managing the vehicle supplier more effectively
- what trade union consultation had taken place

- the risk of a fragmented TUPE process
- whether voluntary severance, redundancy or redeployment was a possibility
- whether the proposals incorporate escorts
- how contracts will be managed
- why some parents do not pay for transport

It was planned to give written responses to these questions after the Cabinet decision, although this was put on hold following the call-in of the decision.

In response to some of the points raised above, alternative options around changes to the in-house service have been considered previously but the running cost of the service and the long term vehicle leases mean that high levels of savings are not possible. The West London Alliance proposal to have a single transport hub was trialled in September 2012 and plans are on hold as the arrangements cannot demonstrate sufficient reliability and overall benefits to Harrow Council service users. Many of the questions raise issues that are relevant for consideration during the transition and implementation phases of any proposed externalisation.

Future Consultation

If agreement is given to the proposal to externalise the service in a phased way, the timetable incorporates a 2 month consultation phase to consider the detail of the proposal and its implementation. This, together with the earlier consultation, meets the requirements of the Council's agreed Protocol for Managing Organisational Change (PMOC). The PMOC has been developed with staff and unions and in adhering to the PMOC the programme is consistent and compliant with Council procedures.

This approach will also include the establishment of a partnership board that will include members of trade unions, staff and if possible service users or representatives.

Service users: The Cabinet report made it clear that service users would be consulted on the proposed new transport eligibility policy (section 2.13 & 2.14 of the Cabinet Report). We would also use this engagement opportunity to help ensure there is a smooth transition between providers and that new providers are appropriately ready and prepared to provide services (see section 11.19 of the Business Case, and section 2.13 & 2.14 of the Cabinet Report).

Recommendation

Given that trades unions and staff members have expressed significant interest in the key decision to externalise a greater percentage of the service, the recommendation is that Cabinet reconsider the key decision in September to allow fuller consultation with trades unions, staff and service users for the decision to be made with the benefit of the consultation responses.