

Appendix 2: Consultation

The SNT3 programme board used the EQIA research and their experience of the service users as the basis for designing an effective consultation process.

The three main areas of consultation were with:

- The workforce;
- Service users;
- Trades unions.

In addition to these three groups there was also consultation with local schools as a group and with strategic partners through the establishment of a partnership board.

All three consultations will be summarised and sent to the stakeholders that took part so that each stakeholder can access the thoughts of others and so that the Council can meet the needs of the EQIA action plan in giving sufficient information early in the process and making sure that respondents are aware of the impact their involvement and engagement has had.

The method and outcome of each separate consultation is listed in the sections below.

Public Consultation: children's service users

There were three forms of consultation with the parents, carers and service users of the Children's and young adults transport service. These were a postal survey, three public meetings and a web-based survey.

Postal Survey

The most successful method in terms of the number of people involved was the postal survey. The postal survey was sent to the homes of service users through the drivers and escorts who provide the transport. A total of 524 letters and consultation questionnaires were given directly to the homes of service users and in total, 170 (33%) have been returned by handing them back to the transport staff.

The results of the postal survey questionnaire are shown in summary below:

Which two or three of the following, if any, are the most important qualities for you? Familiar staff (82%), friendly staff (79%) & reliability (69%)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that Harrow Council should offer contracts to other providers to make savings? disagree (20%) or strongly disagree (42%)

From the following list, which two or three would make the transition from one company another easier for you or your child? Familiar staff (85%), Familiar Vehicle (41%), Friendly staff (62%), Ability to discuss

needs before the start (55%), provide enough time to communicate (23%)

How important, if at all, is it for Harrow Council to continue to promote the most environmentally friendly forms of transport? Very important (48%), fairly important (34%)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that parents should claim a mileage payment for transporting their own children? Strongly agree (21%), Neither agree nor disagree (24%)

How important is it to you personally that Harrow Council continues to give parents access to travel claims? Very important (38%), Don't know (21%)

Do you agree or disagree that if parents choose school places further away, then they should accept full responsibility for their child/ren's transport? Strongly disagree (42%), disagree (31%)

How important is it to you personally that Harrow Council continues to promote Independent Travel for students who are able to do so? Very important (41%), Important (36%)

Do you agree or disagree that Harrow Council should continue to work with schools to provide transport to education? Strongly agree (84%)

The majority group of respondents (49%) were under 16 years of age, 27% were between 25-44 years of age. 31% have a disability that affects mobility, 45% have a learning disability.

The results show that the preference of the respondents is to have friendly, familiar and reliable service. There is significant disagreement for using other agencies to provide transport, the most important factor in transition is familiar staff, followed by friendly staff and the ability to discuss the child's needs before transfer. Less important than these was a familiar vehicle.

Public Meetings

The three public meetings were arranged in the morning, afternoon and evening to give a spread of days and times available. One was held at Shaftesbury High School to provide a more suitable venue for some parents. The meetings were very useful and engaging and were attended by a total of 21 parents, carers and relatives of services users. The sessions are summarised below:

Parents and carers value & **trust the service** highly for its familiarity of staff, punctual delivery, training levels, feeling of safety, flexibility in times of changed circumstances, ease of contact

Would prefer cuts to be **made elsewhere** and would be ready to pay to keep it as it is

Parents and carers were interested in the policy changes and pleased that over all eligibility was due to be **largely unchanged**

Travel training is **OK** where appropriate and safe etc

Would prefer Harrow pupils transported by **Harrow staff & Harrow businesses**.

Parents are **anxious** about losing the things about the service that they value, particularly the familiarity of staff

Any significant change of this service needs to be carefully handled to ensure a **smooth transition**, this would include having information about the new service early such as photographs of the bus & staff.

Would like to have an on-going opportunity to feedback on the service to retain some sense of control. Liked the idea of a **parent/provider partnership board**.

Having spoken about their concerns and heard-back how these will be managed, parents would prefer that the service stayed as it is, but were far **less anxious** about the future having heard about impact & transition planning

Having experienced **routine transition at times** and the change from previous bus fleet to the current purple, remembered that impact reduced fairly quickly back into a new routine.

Those delivering the sessions were thanked for **creating the opportunity to listen**, for responding openly and honestly and for having already given the customers such high consideration in the face of government cuts

Parents were invited to join the **SNT3 Partnership Board** where members of the public meet with Council Members, Trade Unions, Local Disability Group representatives and Officers to discuss the programme and give input to its overall shape and direction.

On-Line Survey

The web-based survey was expected to have a low take-up and just 11 questionnaires were completed.

The results of the on-line survey questionnaires in summary are presented below:

Which two or three of the following, if any, are the most important qualities for you? Familiar staff (100%), friendly staff (45%) and reliability (82%)
To what extent do you agree or disagree that Harrow Council should offer contracts to other providers to make savings? disagree (36%) or strongly disagree (36%)

From the following list, which two or three would make the transition from one company another easier for you or your child? Familiar staff (91%), Familiar Vehicle (18%), Friendly staff (27%), Ability to discuss needs before the start (45%), provide enough time to communicate (27%)

How important, if at all, is it for Harrow Council to continue to promote the most environmentally friendly forms of transport? Very important (36%), fairly important (45%)

To what extent do you agree or disagree that parents should claim a mileage payment for transporting their own children? agree (36%), Neither agree nor disagree (18%), don't know (18%)

How important is it to you personally that Harrow Council continues to give parents access to travel claims? Very important (18%), fairly important (36%), not at all important (18%)

Do you agree or disagree that if parents choose school places further away, then they should accept full responsibility for their child/ren's transport? Strongly agree (45%), disagree (18%), strongly disagree (45%)

How important is it to you personally that Harrow Council continues to promote Independent Travel for students who are able to do so? Very important (36%), Important (36%)

Do you agree or disagree that Harrow Council should continue to work with schools to provide transport to education? Strongly agree (45%), agree (36%).

The respondents were (27%) under 16 years of age, 27% were between 25-44 years of age, 36% between 45-64. 27% have a disability that affects mobility, 27% have a learning disability.

The results show slight variation in responses to the postal survey, notably there is the same level of opposition to the use of external providers, familiar vehicles are less important. In transition familiar staff are important in along with the ability to discuss needs before start-up. The strong difference of this return to the postal return was the support for parents that choose schools further away should be responsible for providing transport.

Summary

There is significant opposition to the use of new providers in the first instance, this was apparent at the public meetings and in both the postal and web returns. However, this is not the universal view and some service users are not unduly worried by this potential change.

Discussions around potential transition have been very helpful, in some instances in discussion at public meetings the public have changed their opinion of the potential disruption and settled that change does occur naturally and over time and that so long as there is sufficient notice and better still some level of familiarity, that transition can be managed and may not be as unsettling as first thought.

The consultation has been very helpful and the responses will be a great aid in progressing proposals in a sympathetic and customer centred manner.

Public Consultation: Adult Service Users

At this time the effect on the Adults side of the service is thought to be minimal if at all and therefore consultation will only happen if and when it is felt changes are necessary.

Staff Consultation

All special needs staff were invited on 24th June to join officers on either the 3rd or 4th of July to discuss the proposals. The two meetings were held at 11:00 at the depot to make the time and venue as appropriate to staff as possible. A total of 27 staff attended the meetings, a low number given the number of staff potentially affected by the proposals.

In summary the staff made the following comments and asked the following questions:

Did the proposals effect **children's and adult's** services?

What would happen to their **pensions**?

Would their **pay drop** if they TUPE'd across?

Were there any **voluntary sector** organisations likely to be providers?

Would a **5% paycut** for all staff meet the savings target?

Why can't the councils £10m **under-spend** be used to fund that service?

Would like the service to stay in house to preserve their training and **safeguarding** principles that the current staff have

Thought the management team should reduce to make some of the savings, but also increase to manage the external providers.

Were concerned that the **location** of employment would change.

Thought all private operators were unlikely to deliver the service to such a high standard.

Wanted to know if there was a **time-limit** on the contracts?

Wanted to make sure all the vital information about the **individual needs** of the children were passed over.

Officers **thanked** those present for attending, attendees thanked officers for being honest and listening to views

The overall message was that staff would “**prefer the service to stay in house**” for reasons involving “**the impact of change on the children**”, the “**risk of the quality of the service going down**”, the potential for “**cost-cutting to effect the service**”, change is normally accepted after time and “**becomes the new norm**”.

Trades Union Consultation

With a programme of this size and significance, there is a considerable level of interest from the Trades Unions (TU's) that work with special needs transport staff. For this programme the engagement with TU's has been positive and we have been through a process of assisting the TU's in developing an alternative proposal.

Principally, the two most represented Trades Unions within special needs transport are Unison and GMB.

Following the Call-In of the SNT3 report in April this year, a meeting was held with both TU's on 23 May. In this meeting, the TU's mentioned that their members would like to consider putting together an alternative proposal to SNT3 that safeguarded in-house services and gave the same level of quality and delivery.

At this time TU's expressed that they would only need two weeks to put together their proposal, the board thought there was at least a month available in the timetable and agreed on a 4-week deadline.

Following this, TU's were given details of budgets and actual levels of spending, upon which their proposals could be built.

Early proposals were discussed at the programme's partnership board on 19th June, where TU's were given an extension of the deadline to 17th July.

The Harrow Branch of the Unison TU have provided a full and complete alternative proposal to the SNT3 programme.

The Unison proposal recognises the need to outsource part of the service and their proposal initially proposed limiting the outsourcing to all the out of borough routes. This will maintain a mixed delivery approach which is favoured by about half of the London boroughs that the Branch has contacted.

Following further discussions Unison have understood that the in borough mainstream schools would also have to be considered in phase one of the programme.

The revised savings proposed break down as follows:

Cost Element	Saving
Route cost reductions (outsourcing)	411,254
Management staff reductions	70,000
Total	481,254
MTFS Savings required	540,000
Under delivery total	58,746

Financial appraisal of revised proposal

The route cost reductions are based on SNT 3 projections and rely on the same assumptions that by outsourcing all routes except the four Harrow Special Schools will achieve 30% savings to the service.

Management staff reductions are again based on the same projections in the SNT 3 business case but it has to be noted that assumption was based on all the routes being outsourced. As some routes will now initially remain in-house the team requirements will have to be carefully managed to ensure it is fit for purpose.

The Unison proposal would like to see a voluntary severance (VS) scheme put in place to allow staff to choose between TUPE transfer and leaving. There is some merit in this approach as the cost and time involved in transferring staff to what would be several external companies, would be far more lengthy and costly than allowing staff to leave if they wish. Also if staff did transfer to the new contractors it would be likely to increase the cost of the routes, possibly negating the required 30% savings by outsourcing.

As with SNT 3 original proposals there will be one off costs associated with returning vehicles under lease and the cost of allowing staff to leave under VS. It is however anticipated that by returning fewer vehicles (and by transferring some vehicles to Adults routes, giving them approx £40k savings) that there will be one-off savings to the project costs.

Harrow Council is in favour of accepting this proposal as it mirrors closely the outline plans for the first phase of SNT 3 but as the revised proposal may not deliver the £540k required, the Council would have to look at outsourcing either all or part of the routes to a special school, likely Shaftesbury High School routes.

The Unison proposal supports the tendering of a new framework which would provide greater resilience in the supply chain.

Outsourcing the external routes to the providers in the current framework, will give the council absolute data on the following:

The **demand** of the companies within the framework

The best method for customer **transition**

The absolute **savings delivered** and those that could be delivered from further outsourcing

The **complexity** and **benefit** of transferring staff if any possible VSS was not approved.

Partnership Board

An SNT3 partnership board was established to bring together the views of the strategic stakeholders that are interested in the service and the impacts that change may bring.

The board consists of two parents of children who attend Harrow special schools (one of whom represents the Harrow Parents of Disabled Children group), representatives of the Harrow Associated for the Disabled, the two Trade's Unions who are most interested in the proposals (Unison and GMB), Council Members who are Portfolio Holders for Adult's and Children's services and Officers from Adults Services, Children's Services and Human Resources and Development.

Each member of the group represents their area of interest or profession, their group members and in some cases the specific interests of the service users.

These views are brought together to safeguard the interests of services, the staff involved and the Council's requirement to deliver savings in-line with the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

It has been the Partnership Board's view that the Unison proposal should be explored in more depth to understand if it does deliver the level savings required which has now been undertaken.

Following the Cabinet Meeting in September, the purpose of the board will be re-focussed towards the delivery of the savings and oversight of the change processes before new services go-live.