

## Transport Transformation – Progress Report

- To: Children and Young People Committee
- Meeting Date: 28<sup>th</sup> November 2023
- From: Executive Director Children, Education and Families
- Electoral division(s): All
- Key decision: No
- Forward Plan ref: n/a
- Outcome: The Committee will have oversight of the progress made in the implementation of the Transport Transformation Strategy one year on.
- The Committee will understand the areas of further focus that Officers intend to focus on in the coming year.
- Recommendation: The Committee is recommended to:
- a) endorse progress made towards the outcomes identified in the Transport Transformation Strategy.
  - b) agree to a review of safer walking routes, with a view to bring a proposal to committee in March 2024.
  - c) endorse the partnership working with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority in relation to shared public bus routes.
- Voting arrangements: Co-opted members of the Committee are eligible to vote on this item.

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# 1. Background

## 1.1 Statutory Responsibilities

Parents and carers have a duty under the Education Act 1996 to ensure that their children attend school and to make the necessary travel arrangements, including accompanying them where appropriate on their journey to and from school. Parents and carers are also responsible for their children until they arrive at school and after they leave at the end of the school day.

The Education Act 1996 places a duty on local authorities to make such travel arrangements they consider necessary to facilitate the attendance at school for 'eligible children'. Eligible children are categorised as;

- those who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to school as a result of mobility issues associated with their Special Education Need and/or Disability (SEND)
- those living outside of statutory walking distance (beyond 2 miles if below the age of 8 or beyond 3 miles if aged between 8 and 16)
- some children in receipt of free school meals
- children of parents in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credits
- some post-16 students
- children who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to their nearest suitable school because of the nature of the route is deemed to be 'unavailable' (unsafe) to walk

## 1.2 Discretionary Powers

Local authorities also have discretionary powers to go beyond their statutory duties and to provide transport for children who are not entitled to free transport. In doing so, they must consult with parents and must act reasonably when determining their travel policy.

1.3 Most notably, the Council has historically used its discretionary powers to extend the statutory two-mile 'walking distance' to include children from the age of 8 up to the point at which they transfer to secondary school at age 11, so the Council operates a primary/ secondary split in terms of the walking distance criterion, rather than an under 8/ over 8 split. This recognises the fact that in Cambridgeshire, children transfer from primary to secondary school at age 11.

## 1.4 Current Picture

The Children and Young People (CYP) Committee adopted the [Transport Transformation Strategy \(Item 5 refers\)](#) in November 2022 with a view to influence and create impactful changes to the way the council delivers on the above statutory duties.

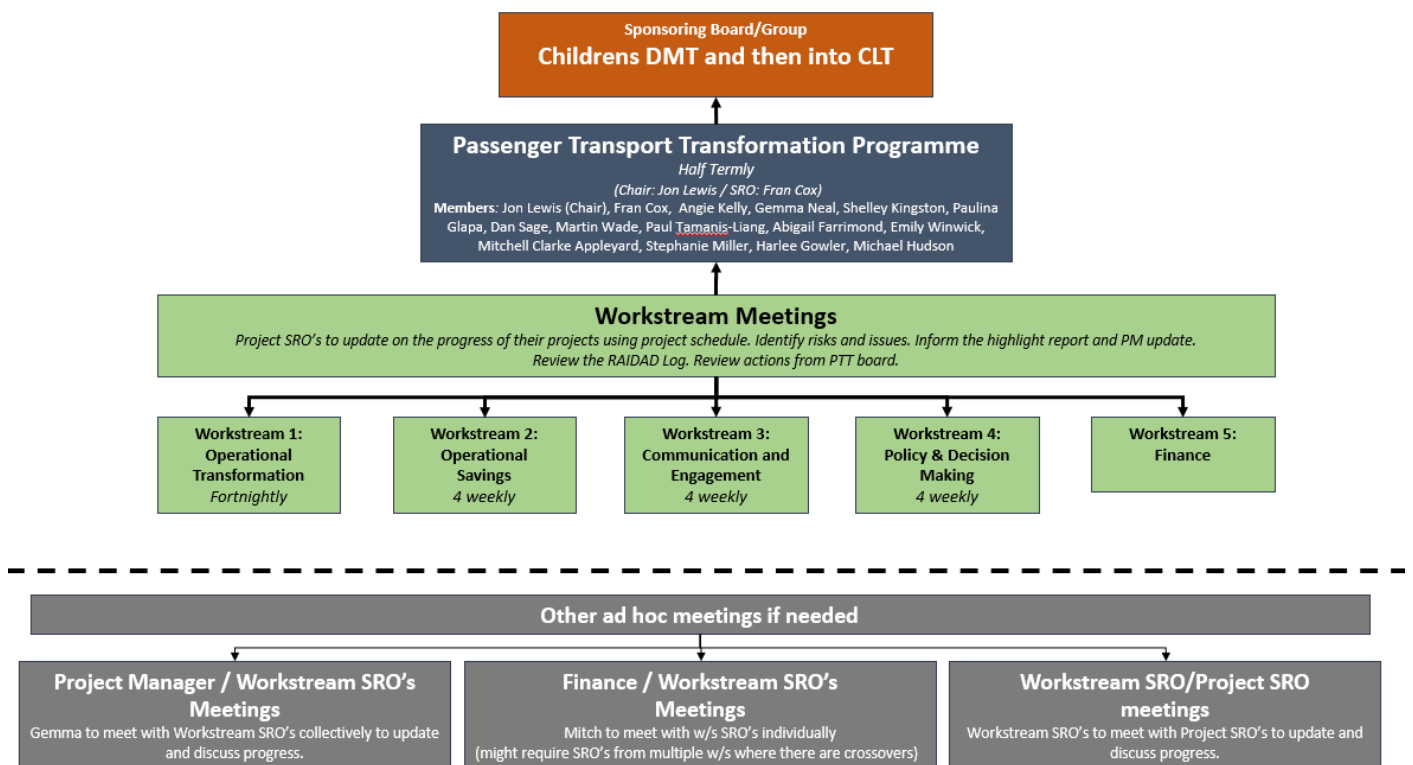
1.5 The Strategy has been in place for one year and the purpose of this report is to detail the progress and activity that has taken place in that time.

## 2. Main Issues

2.1 The transformation programme that sits under the strategy has 5 workstreams:

- Operational Transformation
- Operational Savings
- Communication and Engagement
- Policy and Decision Making
- Finance

2.2 The programme is governed by programme board which oversees all activity on a half termly basis. The details of the governance arrangements are outlined below.



### Operational Transformation

2.3 This workstream aims to diversify the council's route to market to mitigate the evidenced fragility and uncertainty of the transport providers as reported on last year. Whilst contract hand backs have reduced this year, these still occur, making the sole use of private hire operators unwise.

2.4 A number of key projects have been explored this year. These have included the reintroduction of the use of community transport through our approved dynamic purchasing system (DPS) framework. In terms of working with Community Transport, in addition to FACT having been approved to bid for routes on the DPS there is an intent to approach other community operators within Cambridgeshire to ascertain their interest in providing Home to School Transport and joining the DPS. A number of other delivery mechanisms

have been explored including partnership with the NHS Ambulance Service as well as working with special provisions to consider how they may be able to provide transport as part of their offer. The alternate transport model, which includes whole school contracts, devolved budget and the school transport self-delivery model, is still under investigation, and may present opportunities for diversifying the current transport offer and take pressure off the market. However in a context where partner agencies including schools and blue light services are under a tremendous amount of pressure already, there is no appetite to take on additional responsibilities or risk.

- 2.5 A significant amount of work has been undertaken by the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA) and the council's Business Intelligence team to review the data around the contracted home to school bus network and match to the current public bus network to ascertain the feasibility to integrate routes. The CPCA has identified two public bus routes where they believe that there is the highest probability that integration would be achievable. Work is ongoing, but if successful integration of routes could take place by August 2024.
- 2.6 This approach would not only deliver a tangible saving to the council per student, but it would improve the commercial viability of some of the bus networks providing a more resilient service for all members of the public. Should this approach be successful, the council and CPCA are keen to explore how this approach might be widened across the bus network.
- 2.7 Alongside the above, work has intensified from a service perspective around supplier and market engagement. The new operating structure has allowed for more capacity for officers to undertake meaningful engagement with our existing transport providers. All intelligence gained from engagement sessions is being processed and where appropriate fed back into DPS adjustments. An example of this is mileage variation.

### Operational Savings

- 2.8 Work is ongoing to seek operational savings within the routes that are currently delivered. This has included clean sheet reviews with the special school providers, and a constant critical review of high-cost single occupancy routes. This review is done in partnership with parents, schools, and officers within the transport service, and requires careful engagement and thoughtful consideration given to successfully transitioning students into shared arrangements. Many of these routes represent a significant saving for the council, but reduction also contributes to other targets, such as reducing the number of vehicles on the road, and the promotion of independence for our children and young people that use our service. Much of the policy, management of resources and communication and engagement work has a direct impact on both project areas.
- 2.9 A review has also been undertaken of routes to out of county placements. Given the current limited number of special school places in county it has been concluded that there are no options to consolidate any of these routes at the current time. That being said, there are a significant number of new places in the pipeline and all parents of a child in a special school have been written too to seek their views on moving their child's placement to a provision closer to their home when it is available. Understandably we have not had a high uptake from parents on this approach as children and young people will likely be settled in placement.

- 2.10 Very positively we have launched our volunteer driver scheme, both for members of the public and staff at the council. This offers volunteers who have the appropriate DBS and insurance in place, the opportunity to undertake school trips and be paid mileage.

### Communication and Engagement

- 2.11 Feedback from parents made it very clear that to improve our service delivery, we needed to improve our external and internal communications. Revised application forms have been developed alongside improvements on the website and information shared with parents.
- 2.12 Equally, internal communications with both SEND services and social care services have been developed to ensure that frontline workers who are working with families and discuss transport are fully briefed on eligibility and the processes around application. An engagement officer has been recruited to provide a consistent focus on this aspect of our customer service to ensure we are continually listening to our service users. Officers are also developing a transport eligibility engagement plan to ensure that relevant information provision is shared with children, young people and families at key points within their education journey, whether that be when applying for a mainstream school place, or when exploring school options as a part of the statutory assessment process.
- 2.13 In addition to this, the website is undergoing a redesign. Available information has been updated to reflect recent policy changes however, this new design will ensure that this information is streamlined, easily accessible and user friendly for all our service users.

### Policy and Decision Making

- 2.14 The Committee will be aware of the full-scale policy review that was undertaken in the Spring, with new policies being adopted this September. Easy Read versions of the policies have been developed and are available on the website. This will ensure all service users are able to access and understand the policies.
- 2.15 A critical aspect of the Transformation has been the development and implementation of revised decision making and governance processes. Previously decisions made around eligibility were held at officer level, whereas this has now all moved to senior officer level to ensure consistency and robust decision making against the new policies.
- 2.16 The improved forms that have been developed have allowed for greater depth of information to be present when making decisions. Amended appeal processes have also been created and will be implemented through the Autumn Term to ensure parents have an appropriate right of appeal.
- 2.17 New placement processes in SEND will be implemented in the winter, allowing for transport officers to be present at the point of placement discussion. This will allow for conversations around the appropriateness of transport and type offered. Personal Budgets and parental mileage will be offered where appropriate before the consideration of a high-cost taxi. Through this process, officers will have a greater understanding of the forecasted growth and presenting levels of need which will be channelled back into the commissioning strategies outlined in workstream 1.

## Finance

- 2.18 Whilst it was not the sole focus of the Transport Transformation Strategy to generate savings, it was an identified outcome given the increasing pressure the statutory delivery of transport is having on the council financially. Last year's outturns are included below for context:

Budget Area	22/23 Budget	22/23 Actual	Variance
Transport Mainstream	9,748,842	10,480,053	731,211
Transport Special	17,744,352	19,645,827	1,901,475
Transport Children in Care	1,629,623	2,122,063	492,440
Passenger Transport	29,122,817	32,247,943	<b>3,125,126</b>

- 2.19 Whilst much of the pressure which is still present this year is due to increased demand, complexity of the service users and inflation, it was felt that the above activity should have some financial impact.
- 2.20 A savings tracker has been developed with a view to understanding and logging the impact that the activity of the strategy is having.
- 2.21 An overview of the savings logged to date can be found at Appendix 1. There is some concern that despite exploration, some of the activity which was intended to deliver a saving has not been possible (for example, out of county placements). However, it is too early yet to see the impact of the revised policy and governance arrangements for decisions, and it is anticipated that this will have a positive impact in terms of saving.
- 2.22 The current in-year position is reflected below.

Budget Area	23/24 Net Budget	23/24 Forecast	Forecast Outturn
Transport Mainstream	11,197,354	12,457,434	1,260,080
Transport Special	21,201,100	23,403,507	2,202,407
Transport Children in Care	1,946,137	1,992,137	46,000
<b>Passenger Transport</b>	<b>34,344,591</b>	<b>37,858,078</b>	<b>3,508,487</b>

- 2.23 This inflationary impact continues to be a live issue for the delivery of home to school transport. Alongside this, the growth of children and young people with SEND continues to rise above what is forecast.
- 2.24 Work is underway to determine the financial impact of the unprecedented levels of in-year applications into the county which will not have been factored into the budget setting last year given the timing of the applications. Equally, the summer Year 7 secondary school place allocation round saw 5% higher retention of pupils from Primary into Secondary on

previous years transfer rates. The impact of this has meant pressure on secondary school places and consequently more young people are being placed in schools over 3 miles from their home address and therefore eligible for transport.

### Safer walking routes

- 2.25 Addressing childhood obesity is seen as the most pressing Public Health issue. In Cambridgeshire around 19% of Reception children have an unhealthy weight, this increases to around 32% in Year 6. Active travel encourages children along with their families to be more active which will not only contribute to healthy weight but also their overall health. Obesity is associated with a range of poor physical and mental health outcomes. There is evidence that children who have an unhealthy weight are very likely to retain it into adulthood.
- 2.26 In line with the agenda to promote active travel, and as part of the transport policy review, 10 routes were noted as being currently assessed as unsafe for walking but showing potential for becoming safe on reassessment. It is officers' opinion that with a thorough review of all routes currently deemed unsafe, there will be more routes that might be made safe with some additional investment.
- 2.27 This additional investment may range from landscaping, through to the implementation of a zebra crossing or increased lighting. Officers would like to propose a full-scale review of all unsafe routes to conclude what capital investment may be needed to make the route safe. This information will be matched against the current cost of transport and the environmental impact of the requirement of a vehicle route rather than a cycle/walking route through a triple bottom line analysis.
- 2.28 Officers propose that the outcome of this review should be brought back to the Committee in March 2024 with further recommendations regarding how to take this piece of work forward.

## 3. Alignment with ambitions

- 3.1 Net zero carbon emissions for Cambridgeshire by 2045, and our communities and natural environment are supported to adapt and thrive as the climate changes

The report above sets out the implications for this ambition in 2.7

- 3.2 Travel across the county is safer and more environmentally sustainable

The report above sets out the implications for this ambition. The entire strategy and all activity undertaken as a result aims to improve travel to school for our children and young people, promoting sustainable methods of transport at every opportunity.

- 3.3 Health inequalities are reduced

There are no significant implications within this category.

3.4 People enjoy healthy, safe, and independent lives through timely support that is most suited to their needs

The report above sets out the implications for this ambition. The entire strategy and all activity undertaken as a result aims to promote independent travel to school wherever possible.

3.5 Helping people out of poverty and income inequality

There are no significant implications within this category.

3.6 Places and communities prosper because they have a resilient and inclusive economy, access to good quality public services and social justice is prioritised

The report above sets out the implications for this ambition in 2.2.

3.7 Children and young people have opportunities to thrive

The report above sets out the implications for this ambition. The entire strategy and all activity undertaken as a result aims to enable children and young people to access appropriate educational provision.

Have the resource implications been cleared by Finance? Yes  
Name of Financial Officer: Martin Wade

Have the procurement/contractual/ Council Contract Procedure Rules implications been cleared by the Head of Procurement and Commercial? Yes  
Name of Officer: Clare Ellis

Has the impact on statutory, legal and risk implications been cleared by the Council's Monitoring Officer or Pathfinder Legal? Yes  
Name of Legal Officer: Debbie Carter-Hughes

Have the equality and diversity implications been cleared by your EqIA Super User? Yes  
Name of Officer: Josette Kennington

Have any engagement and communication implications been cleared by Communications? Yes  
Name of Officer: Simon Cobby

Have any localism and Local Member involvement issues been cleared by your Service Contact? Yes  
Name of Officer: Jonathan Lewis

Have any Public Health implications been cleared by Public Health? Yes  
Name of Officer: Val Thomas



## 4. Source documents

- 4.1 [CYP Committee report 29.11.22 - Item 5 - Transport Transformation](#)

## Appendix 1 Savings Tracker

As of 3 October 2023

Transformation Investment into Savings	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26	Total
Investment Budget	54,000	161,000	161,000	107,000	483,000
Actual spend to date	57,388	30,835			
Forecast spend	57,388	140,605	161,000	107,000	465,993
Variance from budget (+ overspend)	3,388	-20,395	0	0	-17,007

Savings Summary	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26	Total
Total Savings Target	-50,000	-401,000	-582,000	-171,000	-1,204,000
Identified savings to date	-43,421	-206,532	-53,234	0	-303,186
Variance from savings plan (+ under recovery)	6,579	194,468	528,766	171,000	900,814

Detailed savings breakdown	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26	Total
<b>Alternative Methods of Transport</b>					
<b>Self-Delivery Model – In Toto</b>					
Savings target	0	0	0	0	0
Identified savings to date	0	0	0	0	0
Variance from savings plan (+ under recovery)	0	0	0	0	0
<b>CPCA Partnership</b>					
Savings target	0	0	0	0	0
Identified savings to date	0	0	0	0	0
Variance from savings plan (+ under recovery)	0	0	0	0	0

Detailed savings breakdown	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26	Total
<b>Workstream 2: Operational Savings</b>					
<b>Recruitment scheme for casual and volunteer drivers</b>					
Savings target		-30,000	0	0	-30,000
Identified savings to date		0			0

Variance from savings plan (+ under recovery)	30,000	0	0	30,000
<b>Review of high-cost single routes (SEND)</b>				
Savings target	-50,000	-100,000	-100,000	0
Identified savings to date	-10,612	-94,068	-7,061	0
Variance from savings plan (+ under recovery)	39,388	5,932	92,939	0
<b>Clean sheet reviews</b>				
Savings target	0	-101,000	-312,000	-171,000
Identified savings to date	-32,809	-70,575	-17,973	0
Variance from savings plan (+ under recovery)	-32,809	30,425	294,027	171,000
<b>Consolidation of out of county placements (SEND)</b>				
Savings target	0	-100,000	0	0
Identified savings to date	0	0	0	0
Variance from savings plan (+ under recovery)	0	100,000	0	0
<b>Review of PTBs</b>				
Savings target	0	0	0	0
Identified savings to date	0	-3,122	-1,635	0
Variance from savings plan (+ under recovery)	0	-3,122	-1,635	0

Detailed savings breakdown	22/23	23/24	24/25	25/26	Total
<b>Workstream 4: Policy &amp; Decision Making</b>					
<b>Management of transport demand and decision-making review</b>					
Savings target		-70,000	-170,000		-240,000
Identified savings to date		-38,766	-26,564		-65,330
Savings not possible (No walking distance policy change)		25,826	18,447		44,273
Savings not possible (No withdrawal of free transport to low income SEND pupils)		65,333	46,667		112,000
Variance from savings plan (+ under recovery)		31,234	143,436		

No savings identified in business case					
<b><u>Workstream 1: Operational Transformation</u></b>	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b><u>Workstream 3: Communication and Engagement</u></b>	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
<b><u>Workstream 5: Finance</u></b>	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>