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To: Scrutiny Committee – 13 September 2023

Subject: Short Focused Inquiry – Home to School Transport

Classification: **Unrestricted**

1. Introduction

- a) At its meeting of 7 July 2021, the Scrutiny Committee agreed that the work programme for Short Focused Inquiries (SFIs) should include an inquiry into home to school transport in Kent. The first meeting of the Home to School Transport SFI took place on 8 November 2021. The SFI's report was finalised in late December 2021.
- b) Oral evidence was gathered from the following people/organisations:
- Mr David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, KCC
 - Mr Alan Brookes, Chair of the Kent Association of Headteachers
 - Mr Craig Chapman, Head of Fair Access, KCC
 - Mr Norman Kemp, Chair of the Kent branch of the Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT), and Company Director of Nu-Venture bus operator
 - Representatives of the Kent Youth County Council
 - Mr Phil Lightowler, Head of Public Transport, KCC
 - Mrs Shellina Prendergast, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills, KCC
- c) In addition, the Committee received written evidence from a variety of sources, including the following:
- KCC Members, who provided feedback from their own division's perspective
 - Mr Steve Manion – KCC Member, Dover North, and Chairman of the Regulations Appeals Panel for Home to School Transport
 - Essex County Council
 - Contracted home to school transport operators
 - BUSK, a national organisation that works to improve passenger transport safety.
- d) The development of the SFI report and relevant recommendations was delegated to the group of KCC Members undertaking the inquiry. The report represents the outcome of their focused work, discussion, debate and careful exploration of the issues on a cross-party basis (akin to the Select Committee process).

- e) While the SFI group has undertaken all the practical work, as an informal body, it does not have authority to require a response from the Executive. This report is presented to seek the Scrutiny Committee's authority to refer the report to the Executive and require a response via the normal Scrutiny arrangements.
- f) As the Members of the SFI group reviewed the evidence, engaged with witnesses and determined the recommendations based on that active work undertaken by them, it is not for the Scrutiny Committee to seek to amend the report and recommendations. Now that the SFI report has been finalised, the Scrutiny Committee may either formally refer the report to the Executive for response or it may reject the report and take no further action on the matter.
- g) It is important to highlight that the SFI report was developed in late 2021. As such, the findings and recommendations reflect issues as identified by the SFI group at the time of the enquiry. Certain aspects of the Home to School Transport landscape may have changed since the inquiry. This has occurred with Select Committees in the past; it is important to confirm that the work reflects the position at the time of the inquiry, and it is not viable to revisit the investigation to update it in a substantive way through the SFI process. It is recommended that, should the Scrutiny Committee approve the referral of the report to the Executive, that this approach includes a request for any such response to clarify and explain where the current situation differs from that described in the report, and outlines how this may impact on any of the SFI recommendations.
- h) The SFI report, which includes the recommendations and main findings of the inquiry, is in **Appendix 1**.

2. Recommendation:

The Scrutiny Committee is asked to refer the Home to School Transport Short Focused Inquiry Report (Appendix 1) to the Executive, and require:

- That a response be prepared for presentation to the Scrutiny Committee within 3 months.
- That the response addresses how the Home to School Transport position has developed or changed since the report was developed in 2021.

3. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Home to School Transport – Short Focused Inquiry (SFI) Report

4. Background Documents

The SFIs' work programme was agreed by the Scrutiny Committee on 7 July 2021. A link to the meeting's agenda pack is provided below.

<https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/documents/g8737/Public%20reports%20pack%2007th-Jul-2021%2010.00%20Scrutiny%20Committee.pdf?T=10>

5. Contact details

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