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CABINET STATEMENT

TITLE: INITIAL RESPONSE TO THE FINDINGS OF THE INDEPENDENT HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT INQUIRY

DATE: 8th January 2009

**BY: Councillor Russell Roberts, Leader of the Council
Councillor Andrew Morgan, Cabinet Member for Transport and Customer Care**

We consider the report of the Independent Inquiry Team to be both frank and thorough, and that it has acted and will doubtless continue to act as a catalyst for great change in the Home-to-School Transport Service. Consequently, we would like to place on record our gratitude to the Independent Inquiry Team for the professional and timely manner in which they undertook such a complex task, in very difficult circumstances.

The Home to School Transport problems were deeply embarrassing to a Council which prides itself on the general high standard of services it delivers and as a consequence the Council has implemented robust and far-reaching measures in response.

The inquiry has unearthed a catalogue of inter-related matters, which culminated in last September's chaotic situation, rather than any single event or oversight triggering the problems.

In the immediate aftermath of the problematic period it was apparent that the (then) existing management arrangements had failed and new arrangements have now been introduced. After great deliberation, appropriate action has been swiftly taken against two senior officers.

The Council is focused and clear in its commitment to implement a major overhaul of the service so that it becomes truly fit for purpose. To this end a comprehensive programme of business re-engineering designed to address the deficiencies identified alongside a complete overhaul and re-structure of the unit is already underway.

The Council has already undertaken a number of proactive and robust measures to avoid a recurrence of the problems experienced in 2008:

- The commissioning of an Independent Inquiry, the results of which will be made public and considered by the Council's Overview & Scrutiny Committee as requested by us both.
- The introduction of the Council's Strategic Projects Director to take over the management of Highways, Transportation & Fleet Division.
- Appropriate action taken against two senior officers;
- A comprehensive programme of business re-engineering designed to address the deficiencies identified within the Home-to-School Transport Service; and
- A commitment to improve officer accountability.

The transformation of the service is one of the key priorities facing the Council and will require an input and a commitment from beyond the Environmental Services Group.

Whilst a number of the policy and procedure improvements designed by the review team are being implemented swiftly, some of the broader service delivery and staff-related matters will need sufficient time to develop to ensure robust and long-lasting solutions are set in place.

A new management arrangement has already been introduced within the Environmental Services Group and a systematic overhaul of the entire Home to School Transport Service will be designed and implemented by the Service Director now responsible, assisted by experienced independent officers from outside the service area, as soon as is practicable.

We have requested for regular progress reports to be presented to the Corporate Management Team and Cabinet so as to ensure that the necessary changes to the Home-to-School Transport Service are implemented in a timely fashion.