

Staff Zoom meeting 24th September 2020

Thank you all for the hard work you have conducted since the start of the new school term. It has been a challenging period, which has required us to adapt to new working hours and routes, but also for our passengers who, with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities, have had to go through a period of change, both in service provider and for many the routes they are being transported on.

Reasons for what we are doing.

Maintain jobs, provide full employment

Provide much-needed transport

Protect WCT – safety net

Maintain jobs – Surrey Choices closed their doors in March, along with Community Hub work and Woking Borough Centres. However, we have continued to pay staff who were allocated to these roles at 100% of pay (other than one month when we paid 80%).

Provide much needed transport – in order to keep staff employed, and to deliver a much-needed transport response to the pandemic, we undertook work, which one would not normally associate with community transport. In the main, we became a parcel delivery service, delivering food parcels to those shielding, communication devices to care homes so that GP's could hold consultations, collected food from supermarkets and delivered it to the Woking food bank, plus countless other ad hoc tasks required by Surrey County Council, Woking Borough Council, the NHS and local groups.

In this area we excelled, thanks to all staff - from those working in the office taking requests and arranging transport (vehicles and staff), to the majority of you fulfilling our promises. These are unprecedented times, and the outlook seems to indicate that it will be sometime before we return to pre-Covid conditions.

Protect WCT – Safety net – This last reason is linked to the heart of why we are here, and the type of work we undertake. WCT was formed nearly 30 years ago to provide a transport service for older people and those with reduced mobility. The service began with a small dial-a-ride and Woking Borough Centre service. Over the years WCT has grown, and we are now providing essential transport services for the NHS, Schools, Care Homes, Community Groups, as well as our core work of Dial-a-Ride, and Woking Borough Centres. This expansion has enabled us to provide further jobs, as well as increasing our vehicle fleet, which has provided us with the ability to allocate more vehicles to dial-a-ride and centre work throughout the day.

Last year we completed over 127,000 journeys, a record for us! The additional work we have undertaken since March, and the school work that we are currently doing, has protected jobs, and enabled WCT to maintain its highly respected status within the NHS, Surrey County Council, Woking Borough Council and many other organisations. It is this status, which will hold us in good stead when we emerge from this pandemic. Should Surrey Choices, and the NHS not return services to pre-pandemic levels, we will be able to continue providing employment and services through the school work we are currently doing. However, as and when Surrey Choices and the NHS return, we will start to move staff back to the type of work they were undertaking before lockdown. I see this as a gradual process, and we will prioritise moving staff back who have supported us most throughout the last 7 months.

I have been made aware of some staff who only want to complete the number of hours they are contracted to work – I understand this position. However, as explained during the last Zoom meeting this extra work is only until Christmas, and should be considered as in lieu of the time off since March. We are trying to maintain all staff on their pre-Covid contracted hours, but if we are forced to begin changing contracts to represent the current situation, we may not be able to protect all jobs.

We currently have 54 tasks, let's call them routes. These routes range from 1 day a week to 5 days a week. If we start to amend contracts in order to reflect the current commitments, we will only require 54 staff to work on a contracted hours basis. We currently have 66 staff members (Drivers/Passenger Assistants). This would mean that 12 staff will be offered zero hour contracts.

Example of contract change:

Currently working week on/week off (26 weeks per year), 2 week's holiday plus Bank Holidays, which fall on a working week.

26 weeks per year, 4 hours per day

Pay: £95.51 per week £415.00 per month £4,980.00 per year

Term time only contract, 4 hours per day (39 weeks per year), 13 weeks holiday.

Pay: £142.86 per week £620.75 per month £7,449.00 per year

To be clear, if the above were to happen it would not only increase the number of days a driver/PA's worked, but also reduce the number of staff required, as two staff members working week on week off, would be replaced with one staff member working a term-time only contract. This is not something I want to do.

There is light at the end of the tunnel: Surrey Choices have started to return, albeit in a far reduced capacity to pre-Covid levels. We are currently providing 3 routes, with a 4th planned to start on 1st October.

I will be holding a Zoom meeting with a North West Surrey CCG Director, on the 13th October to discuss future hospital transport requirements, and our dial-a-ride numbers are growing, which requires more vehicles to be deployed on this service.

We will receive the first two electric vehicles on the 5th October, and potentially another 5 electric vehicles before the 31st October 2021. Plans to relocate WCT and our garage to a new purpose built location are well advanced, and will provide us with office, garage, and parking space to meet our needs now and long into the future. The anticipated move date is the summer 2022.

Nobody knows what the future holds, but I can say with some certainty that the next six months will be challenging for all, but if we work together, we will have a far better chance of protecting all jobs, and ensuring that WCT is well placed to take advantage of the opportunities that present once the current pandemic is over.

Thank you.

Kind regards

Guy

G Padfield-Wilkins

Managing Director & CEO