



Stirling Council

Children's Services Transport Policy

Stirling Council has high expectations for all children and young people and is firm in its commitment to work with others to achieve the Scottish Executive's vision for a Scotland where children and young people are safe, nurtured, healthy, achieving, active, included, respected and responsible. It recognises that to do this it must arrange its services such that individual needs are catered for where possible and excellent services are available to all children and young people.

Stirling Council is also committed to promoting sustainability in both the services it delivers and in its local communities. The Council is committed to safeguarding the quality of life of its citizens and the local environment for present and future generations.

Along with its community planning partners, Stirling Council shares a core vision for the Stirling Council area as an area where all children and young people will be safe, enjoy good health and have access to a wide range of positive experiences and opportunities to enable them to achieve their potential. Enabling access to services, including through provision of transport, is a key component of this vision.

Children's Services provides transport to children on a number of different criteria. This policy replaces previous policies on Home to School Transport (Standard Circular 701) and SEN transport Arrangements (Standard Circular 702).

The core function of Children's Services Transport Policy is to meet the statutory requirements in providing transport. School travel planning arrangements are not covered within this document.

The provision of distance entitled Home to School transport is provided in line with the 1980 Education (Scotland) Act 1980, Section 2 covers Distance Entitled school transport.

The provision of transport to children with additional support needs is covered within Section 3, Transport for Children with additional support needs. The current arrangements relate to previous Special Educational Needs policy and a revised Additional Support Needs Section will ultimately replace this section. On an interim basis the existing arrangements will continue to be used where appropriate.

As the needs of more children are provided within their local schools, it is recognised that school transport services will become further integrated. The formation of one transport policy reflects that provision of transport services should be integrated and co-ordinated.

In providing transport for children a number of criteria should be met. Services should be

- High quality
- Safe
- Responsive to changing demands
- Cost effective and represent best value

Whilst the core function is to provide services for children, it is recognised that in some areas school service may support a valuable local public transport service.

It is recognised that to provide a high quality service all stakeholders require to understand not only their rights but also their responsibilities. This includes children, parents, schools, operators and council staff.

Responsibilities and roles of Stirling Council in providing transport services for children

Children's Services and Environment Services jointly provide transport services for children. A division of key responsibilities and functions is listed below.

Children's Services is responsible for

- Determining and reviewing the policy and eligibility criteria for access to school and other transport for children.
- Determining client specifications in relation to service level, quality and effectiveness in line with council policy, national legislation and the objectives of the transport service as defined by this policy.
- Assessing suitability of walking routes in line with the Safety Route policy (Section 4)

The Transport Co-ordination Unit acts as an agent on behalf of Children's Services in procuring transport for children.

The Transport Co-ordination Unit is responsible for

- Managing the day to day delivery and administration of transport services
- Arranging for the specification, tendering and letting of school transport contracts in line with the agreed requirements of Children's Services
- Monitoring and inspecting compliance of operators with contract requirements
- Maintaining accurate records relating to the payment of all operators and monitoring variance in line with contract specifications.
- Processing payments for all contracts in line with financial requirements from both Children's Services and Audit
- Determining distance entitlement in line with the council policy (Section 2) and ensuring that appropriate distance measurements are undertaken
- Providing professional advice on transport matters to Children's Services when requested
- Liaising with Children's Services on all aspects of service delivery such as performance appraisal, policy developments/review, safety issues and pupil behaviour

Section 2

Distance Entitlement

1.0 Free home to school transport will be provided to:

- Children under 8 years of age, where the distance from home to school exceeds 2 miles by the shortest available safe route.
- Children over 8 years of age, where the distance from home to school exceeds 3 miles by the shortest available safe route.

1.1 Private Roads

Where the distance from the child's home address to the public road network exceeds the distance/age criteria as defined above, the local authority will make provision. This will be either through a parental contract with a parent receiving a mileage allowance for undertaking the journey or, in exceptional circumstances only, through extending the route of a hired vehicle to cover the stretch of private road. Transport Co-ordination will assess and recommend the most appropriate solution to Children's Services who will make the final decision.

2.0 Parents Conveyance/Supervision

Parents/Guardians are required to make arrangements for conveying / supervising their children to the nearest private road end, bus stop or uplift point for the school route. Transport Co-ordination will specify the recommended pick-up point.

3.0 Accessing Transport Services

In providing access to transport services it may be necessary for a child to walk an aggregated distance up to the distances highlighted above. These distances include the home to pick-up point and the drop-off point to catchment establishment. For the avoidance of doubt the distances above apply for the morning and afternoon journeys separately.

4.0 Timings

Primary school children should not arrive at school more than 15 minutes before the school begins, likewise, departure should not be more than 15 minutes after school finishes. Some services may be combined services and as such may stop at another establishment to pick up children.

Secondary age children should not arrive at school more than 30 minutes before the school begins, likewise, departure should not be more than 30 minutes after school finishes. Some services may be combined services and as such may stop at another establishment to pick up children.

Whilst every effort will be made to meet a specification of 15/30 minutes, in some cases, for example, where public transport is utilised, this may not always be possible.

5.0 Denominational Children

Parents or Guardians of Roman Catholic children can choose the Roman Catholic school they wish their children to attend. Free home to school transport will be provided where the distance by the shortest walking route exceeds 2 or 3 miles (depending on the age of the child) and the school is the nearest Roman Catholic school.

Where parents choose a Roman Catholic school other than the nearest, free transport will not be provided and the responsibility for transporting children to and from school will belong to the parents or guardians and will be at their own cost.

6.0 Mode of Transport

The mode of transport provided to entitled children travelling to school will be the most economically advantageous to Stirling Council within quality standards laid down by Children's Services and Transport Co-ordination Unit.

7.0 Placing Requests

In no circumstances will free transport be provided for children attending school as a result of a placing request. For the avoidance of doubt this also includes non-denominational children who choose to attend a Roman Catholic school. It is unlikely that transport arrangements will be available outwith the catchment area, however a small number of additional needs transport may operate, and as such this may be accessed by the Privilege Pass Scheme (Section 5).

8.0 Alternative Placement

Where children are unable to attend their catchment school due to over capacity appropriate transport will be provided according to normal distance entitled eligibility criteria as defined within 1.0.

9.0 School Closure

Where a school is closed permanently, relocated children who reside in the catchment area will be provided with free transport on the basis of the distance entitlement set out in 1.0 to their new catchment school.

10.0 Concessionary Travel

Stirling Council allocates surplus spaces to non-entitled children through the Privilege Pass Scheme (Section 5). The Privilege Pass Scheme provides an enhanced service option where surplus spaces exist and a child is not entitled to free transport.

11.0 Misbehaviour

Distance entitled transport will be withdrawn in instances where a child demonstrates consistent and serious misbehaviour whilst on any vehicle used for the transport of children. Withdrawal of provision including period of withdrawal will be on the recommendation of the Director of Children's Services following consultation with the headteacher and parents/guardians.

As a result of withdrawal of free transport by the council it will be the responsibility of parents/guardians to ensure their child's attendance at school at their own cost.

Children's Services behaviour standards are laid out in Section 6 which includes the Council's Pupil Acceptable Standards Statement.

Section 3

Additional Support Needs / Special Educational Needs

(Policy in the process of being revised and will be updated during academic session 2006/07)

Section 4

Safety Route Eligibility

In addition to distance entitlement, free home to school transport will be provided when a route is assessed as being unsuitable for a child to walk to school whilst accompanied by an adult. Even where statutory distances are not reached safety route criteria can apply if no other suitable walking route exists that does not exceed the distance criteria.

Where a route is classed as suitable, a parent can request a review of the route to be undertaken. Where such a request for review is received Stirling Council will either

- (a) undertake a review of the route, or
- (b) provide the parent with a copy of the most recent safety assessment of that route

It should be noted that any review requires a physical assessment of the route and this may take time to arrange. The target will be for the safety route reviews to be completed within 28 days.

Where a route is deemed as unsuitable, transport provision will be organised. This may be in the form of providing transport or paying a parental allowance per mile. Safety route eligibility will be subject to review where network improvements take place.

For the purposes of defining the suitability of walking routes an assessment of the following criteria will be taken into account:

Footpaths

- availability
- condition
- width

- Street Lighting
- Patrol Crossings

- Road Traffic Management
 - speed limits
 - frequency and type of vehicles

In assessing the suitability of any route, the assessment is made on the basis that a child is supervised by either a parent or carer. Where a parent / carer allows a child to walk unsupervised, the parent or carer is still responsible for the safety of that child.

In assessing any route the combination of the above factors is reviewed. So what is acceptable for a road with high traffic volume is different from what is acceptable for routes with low or very low traffic volume.

Assessments will be undertaken by Children's Services with advice and assistance from the Council's Transport Co-ordination Unit, road safety experts and the Police where necessary

Section 5

Privilege Pass Scheme (Formerly Concessionary Spaces)

Where a child is not entitled to transport either under distance entitlement (Section 2), Additional Needs (Section 3) or Safety Route eligibility (Section 4) they may apply for a surplus space. Stirling Council's allocation of surplus spaces is now undertaken through the Privilege Pass Scheme.

The Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 allows Local Authorities to charge for surplus spaces on vehicles. In Stirling this is managed through the Privilege Pass Scheme. The level of charge will be reviewed on an annual basis and the scheme publicised on the Council's website and in schools. In order to support the Council's aim of social inclusion free access to surplus spaces will continue to be provided for children who are in receipt of free school meals and who wish to access a place.

Privilege Passes can only be provided:

- On contracted bus/taxi services where the service is not a registered service. If the bus is registered children will normally be issued with a season ticket or pay their fare. In such cases it is not possible to provide Privilege Passes.
- Where surplus capacity exists. Additional capacity cannot be added for non-entitled children.

Applications can be made on a termly or annual basis to Children's Services. Privilege Passes are issued on a termly or annual basis. No refund will be made for absence or periods where the child does not access the service, for example family holidays or inclement weather.

Privilege places only exist where there are surplus spaces. If a new entitled child requires a space, a surplus space may require to be surrendered. Any payments already made will be refunded on a pro rata basis. The Council will endeavour to give reasonable notice, not less than 2 weeks, if a Privilege Place requires to be withdrawn.

Spaces are allocated on a first come first served basis.

Section 6

Acceptable Behaviour

Children's Services works in partnership to provide transport services for children, with a number of services also providing local bus services to communities.

Misbehaviour which is left unchecked, often progresses to unacceptable levels both in terms of safety and comfort of other users. Working with parents, schools, operators and children, the Council aims to provide services that are safe and fit for purpose.

All children travelling on Council provided transport are required to adhere to the Pupil Acceptable Standard Statement (PASS) scheme. The PASS scheme details both the rights and the responsibilities of children using the provided services. Failure to adhere to the PASS scheme may result in the withdrawal of entitlement to transport services.

The PASS standards are as follows:

Children's Services contracts with local companies to provide home to school transport. Together we aim to:

- Deliver safe, fit for purpose integrated transport for children.
- Make sure services run on time and are not over full.
- Where possible integrate School Transport and Local Bus Services to benefit not only children but local communities.
- Provide a safe, welcoming environment to children, the public and employees on all vehicles.
- Ensure that staff are well trained, helpful and equipped to assist children. Ensure that drivers are aware of how to raise concerns with both school and their own company structures.
- Investigate specific complaints and take appropriate action to ensure that events are not repeated.
- Identify misbehaviour by various methods including CCTV and communicate individual cases of misbehaviour to parents/carers.

As a passenger using School Transport you can help by:

- Using the correct bus and ensuring that you use a seatbelt where provided.
Do not damage or misuse any equipment on the bus.
- Arriving in plenty of time at the point where you get the bus.
The driver is unable to wait if you are not on time.
Ensure that you carry and show your boarding pass or season ticket when requested.
- Being aware that your bus may not only be provided to get you to school but that other people from your local community may also be using this bus. Be courteous to other passengers.
- Remaining seated whilst the vehicle is moving.
Do not smoke, eat or drink whilst on the vehicle. Do not drop litter on the bus.
Place your school bag in a safe place, clear of the aisle.
Do not shout, annoy or harrass any other person on the vehicle.
- Listening to and following instructions given by any driver or member of staff.
Tell the driver if you have any concerns over your journey.
Do not distract the driver from getting the vehicle safely to your bus stop.
Appreciate that the driver can raise problems with your school directly.
Be courteous to your driver and any other member of staff.
- Reporting any difficulties or misbehaviour to the driver and your school.

The school will contact your parents if they receive complaints about you on the bus. If you misbehave or do not follow the above guidance you may lose your entitlement to free school transport and your parents will have to make alternative arrangements to get you to school. This may involve a longer journey.

Each school where school transport is provided will nominate a member of their Senior Management Team to act as the designated school transport contact.

Where unacceptable behaviour has taken place on a vehicle a number of options are available to schools and Children's Services. These may include being allocated to a different vehicle, a temporary suspension of transport entitlement, requests for parents to supervise their child to school and, in cases of extreme or persistent misbehaviour, the removal of transport provision.

Where transport is removed, parents will be responsible for making and funding alternative transport arrangements.

Pilot projects involving the use of CCTV on some joint school and public services have been successful in reducing the number of reported incidents of misbehaviour. CCTV is a valuable tool in targeting where problems exist. Further roll out of CCTV will reflect both the incidents of misbehaviour and the financial ability to fund systems.

Section 7

Statutory Guidelines on Provision of Seatbelts

Taxis

All motor cars must have front and rear seat belts fitted and passengers must use them.

The Road Vehicle (Construction and Use) [Amendment] (No. 2) Reg. 1996

Minibuses and coaches carrying 3 or more children must be fitted with seat belts.

The minimum requirement is for a lap belt to be fitted to each seat used by a child aged 3 to 16.

Special Notes: The above regulations do not apply to buses (see definitions below).
The responsibility for ensuring the wearing of seat belts, lies with parents/guardians and individual children.

DEFINITIONS

A minibus is defined as a vehicle constructed to carry between 9 and 16 passengers in addition to the driver.

A bus is defined as a vehicle constructed to carry 17 or more passengers and not capable of exceeding 60mph.

A coach is defined as a bus with a maximum gross weight of more than 7.5 tonnes and with a maximum speed exceeding 60mph.

The speed of 60mph refers to the designed speed of the vehicle rather than to any speed limiting device fitted to the vehicle.

Section 8

Concerns and Complaints

Children's Services transport is procured by the Council's Transport Co-ordination Unit. Transport Co-ordination act as an agent on behalf of Children's Services.

Any queries over the operation or timing of a service should be made initially to the operator of the service. Where an unsatisfactory response is received, a complaint should be made to the Transport Co-ordination Unit who will liaise, where necessary, with Children's Services to investigate and address concerns raised.

Concerns regarding behaviour of children using a provided service should be addressed direct to the relevant school. Schools will take active steps to investigate and address issues of misbehaviour raised with them. In extreme cases, access to provided transport may be withdrawn in line with the PASS scheme (Section 6).

Concerns about the conduct of any transport operator or employees of transport operators should be made to the Council's Transport Co-ordination Unit. All concerns will be investigated and in extreme cases may result in a request for a driver to be removed or in termination of contract.

If you have any comments on Children's Services Transport Policy these should be made to Children's Services, Planning and Resources. The Head of Planning & Resources within Children's Services has overall responsibility for all transport services for children. If you are unhappy with the response from any of the above areas, you may request a review.