

Cabinet – 15 March 2017

Home to School Transport Revised Policy 2017/18

Portfolio: Councillor Burley – Children’s Services and education

Service: Children’s Services

Wards: All

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: No

1. Summary

- 1.1 This report seeks Cabinet approval of a revised home to school transport policy for 2017/18.
- 1.2 At their meeting on 14 December 2016, Cabinet considered the findings from the consultation on the home to school transport policy in the Borough of Walsall that had been carried out in the autumn term. A number of policy changes were recommended and accepted. Cabinet requested that a revised policy be prepared and issued for consultation in the New Year.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet approve the revised home to school transport policy in Walsall with full implementation from September 2017.

3. Report Detail

- 3.1 Consultation on the revised policy ran from 13 January to 28 February 2017.
- 3.2 The consultation involved:
 - Publication of the draft revised policy on the Council’s website along with with a consultation document and an invitation to comment;
 - A consultation document, including the draft revised policy, was issued to stakeholders including all schools and other relevant organisations in Walsall via The Link schools newsletter;
 - A letter was sent to parents/carers of young people with special educational need and disabilities who use home to school transport. The letter referred them to the revised policy and invited them to comment;
 - Meetings were held with Parent Participation groups and with head teachers of special schools in Walsall. The meetings included a briefing on the draft revised policy and the opportunity for discussion and comment.

3.3 In response to the consultation:

There was extensive consultation on the policy and budget options for transport in the autumn. These were reported in a Cabinet report on 14 December and in a Cabinet report on the budget on 8 February. There have been five responses to the revised policy.

The responses were to the effect that:

- One parent commented that the policy was much clearer than the current one, including the information on how to appeal. There is a request for more information on what evidence would be required to support an application and / or appeal.
- More information was requested from the Parents' Participation group on how assessments for Independent Travel Training will work.
- Two parents commented that the Council has tried to implement every proposal but one with the new transport proposal for 2017; parents have been ignored and disabled children and their families have been targeted. The lack of transport to respite and the charges for post 16 transport could have devastating effects for families particularly those with out of borough placements. Children have to remain in some form of education until at least the age of 18 and it is discrimination to charge those over the age of 16.
- One school's senior leader commented positively on the greater clarity in the assessment criteria and regular review; on Independent Travel training being a good idea, providing the criteria were clear and suggesting involving the school in the process; on travel budgets being a good idea; while expressing concern that some families may not be able to contribute to the costs of post 16 transport.
- Parents' representatives commented that the process of consultation on the policy options was in general a positive one and that parents feel they have influenced the outcome.

3.4 **Summary of Changes to the Policy**

The main changes proposed to the home to home to school transport policy are:

Under 'General eligibility':

- Raising the 'walking distance' from home to school for children aged 8-11 of age (Years 5 and 6) from 2 to 3 miles before free transport is provided, but
- Retaining support with transport for children who are 'rising 5s'.

For children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities:

- Strengthen the way eligibility for new transport support is assessed, that will enable the Council to defend challenges in relation to SEN transport; and
- Ensure, at least annually, that the transport needs of children are reviewed.

Developing new forms of transport support for young people with special educational needs and disabilities:

- Independent Travel Training for young people for whom this is appropriate and in consultation with parents;
- Personal Travel Budgets where these represent best value and are wanted by parents / carers.

For young people with special educational needs and disabilities who are over the age of 16 and at school, college or with a training provider:

- A scheme of contributions to the costs of post 16 SEND transport. The new policy is to obtain financial contributions towards the cost of transport of £600 per year, or £300 per year from low income families;
- A proposal in the consultation to withdraw financial support for all post 16 SEND transport was not accepted by Cabinet in December and has been withdrawn.

The draft revised home to school transport policy for 2017 / 18 is attached as Appendix 1.

Appendix 2 includes information for parents on Independent Travel training, Personal Travel budgets and Special educational needs transport services.

4. Council Priorities

4.1 The Council's purpose is to 'Reduce inequalities and maximise potential'. Its four priorities are:

- Pursue inclusive economic growth
- Make a positive difference to the lives of Walsall people
- Children are safe from harm, happy and learning well with self-belief, aspiration and support to be their best
- Safe, resilient and prospering communities.

4.2 The changes proposed to this service will ensure the continuation of suitable, safe home to school travel assistance for eligible children in accordance with the Council's statutory duties. Travel support enables children to access education. Independent Travel Training leads to the acquisition of an important life skill. The policy contributes to the Council priority of ensuring that 'Children are safe from harm, are happy and learning well, with self-belief, aspiration and support to be their best'. Providing good transport accessibility also contributes to the priority area of 'Safe, resilient and prospering communities'.

5. Risk Management

5.1 The impact of the reduction in the level of support for the transport of students aged 16 or over and who have special educational needs and disabilities can be mitigated through the availability and claiming of concessionary fares and bursaries or grants that can be obtained via the student's post 16 school or college. Support for the 130 students who are post 16 is the main area of discretionary expenditure on home to school transport by the Council.

- 5.2 The granting of Personal Travel Budgets to families will not have an impact on any benefits they may receive or their tax position, as the Personal Travel Budget is for the benefit of their child/children.
- 5.3 Children who are 'rising 5s in Reception year will remain eligible for transport support though this is a discretionary service as national guidance stipulates eligibility at age 5.
- 5.4 Also, there are four children of nursery age who are transported. This will cease in September 2017 as nursery transport is not statutory obligation. Similarly, any remaining costs of transport of children to short breaks provision will not be met by the Home to School Transport budget. Further, the eligibility of children with special educational needs who live within statutory walking distance of their school and who are receiving transport support on a discretionary basis (40 pupils) will be re-assessed.
- 5.5 Budget pressures remain a concern and they continue to be monitored. Although there has been just under a 10% increase in the number of children transported with special educational needs and disabilities transported in the past 12 months, the Transport Team has reduced the average cost per child through optimising routes and through negotiations with providers.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1 For 2015/16 financial year, Home to School Transport reported an overspend position of £0.348m against a total budget of £1.781m. Permanent corporate investment identified for demand led children services was included within the 2016/17 budget in order to fund the ongoing pressure within transport services.
- 6.2 The current forecast for 2016/17 is an overspend position of £0.352m against a total budget of £1.871m. Of the £2.223m total costs, £1.860m can be attributed to statutory provision with the remaining £0.363m supporting transport over and above the statutory requirements but included within the existing transport policy. Those services are detailed in Section 5 of the report.
- 6.3 With regard the overspend of £0.352m, this is partly being managed and funded via efficiencies across Children's Services (circa £0.180m), with the remaining balance of £0.172m currently contributing towards Children Services reported net overspend position for 2016/17. Delays in the implementation of a revised Home to School Transport Policy along with an increase in the number of pupils receiving home to school transport have contributed to the overspend position reported.
- 6.4 As part of the 2016/17 budget setting, saving proposals of £0.250m for 2016/17 and £0.225m for 2017/18 were approved to be delivered via a review and the implementation of a revised Transport policy along with a number of identified operational efficiencies.
- 6.5 Following the outcome of consultation, as detailed in the 14th December 2016 Cabinet report, 'Home to School Transport Consultation', it was approved that a revised home to school transport policy be issued for further consultation. It was recommended within the report that post 16 transport support remain instead of

being removed. This item was identified to deliver circa £0.200m of the required transport savings detailed in paragraph 6.4 for 2017/18 and in the light of this, the saving proposal for 2017/18 (£0.225m) was withdrawn in full.

6.6 Transport services have considered cost reductions to deliver the 2016/17 saving proposal as well as reduce the remaining overspend position currently being reported. Detail of proposed full year cost reductions are set out below:

- Children's Services have reviewed a proportion of the existing young people who receive home to school transport to consider how changes to the transport policy including the development of Personal Travel Budgets and Independent Travel Training could impact on the existing transport provision and the associated costs. If successfully adopted cost reductions of circa £0.130m are anticipated.
- Within the revised policy, as detailed within the report, if parental contributions are sought for those young people who receive home to school transport and are post 16, contributions of circa £0.050m are identified, which would mitigate some of the existing transport costs.
- As part of the re-tendering exercise for home to school transport currently taking place, alternative approaches to procuring this service are being considered. Anticipating delivering this new framework as a Dynamic Purchasing System and then utilising a 'whole school routes' via one provider rather than multiple individual transport firms, could lead to a potential cost reduction of circa £0.100m once all whole school routes are awarded.

6.7 These options have the potential to reduce current costs by circa £0.280m per annum. This would leave a remaining overspend position of £0.072m. At present a pressure of circa £0.150m (which represents the remaining pressure of £0.072m plus an allowance for part year affect of implementing the above saving options) is included within the directorates 2017/18 action plan, with alternative mitigating action identified from across Children's services. There is however no further contingency built into the 2017/18 action plan and therefore should the identified savings not be delivered or further demand increases take effect, a net overspend position would arise in this service area.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 The Council has to ensure that Home to School Transport arrangements are set within the context of the Education Act, 1996, Section 509(1). This obliges Local Authorities to make transport arrangements if they consider it necessary to facilitate a pupil's attendance at school. Section 509(2) of the Act states that if the Local Authorities considers transport to be necessary, it must be provided free of charge. Section 508C of the Act gives Local Authorities discretionary powers to make school travel arrangements for other children not covered by section 508B. Such transport does not have to be provided free of charge.

7.2 The SEND Code of Practice 2015 says that the Local Offer must include information about arrangements for transport provision; including those up to age 25 with an Education Health and Care plan, and this should include Local Authorities' policy statements. Each Local Authority must have clear general

policies relating to transport for children with special educational needs or disabilities that must be made available to parents and young people. Such policies will set out the transport arrangements that are over and above those required by the Education Act 1996 (Section 508B).

- 7.3 Local Authorities have a duty to prepare and publish an annual transport policy statement specifying the arrangements for the provision of transport or otherwise that the authority considers it necessary to make to facilitate attendance of all persons of sixth form age receiving education or training (section 509AA of the Education Act 1996).

8. Procurement Implications/Social Value

Contracts to provide home to school transport are awarded via a framework agreement. Private contractors (bus and taxi services) are largely Walsall based companies. Bids are also received and services provided by some local not for profit community transport organisations.

An options appraisal for a re-tendering exercise is currently underway where alternative types of framework delivery are being considered. The current Transport Framework expires August 31, 2017 (end of this school year) and will be extended for 4 months up to 31st December 2017 (as a one year extension is already built in this contract). The new Framework will be tendered during this time and then commence on 1st January 2018.

9. Property Implications

There are no property implications arising from this report.

10. Health and Wellbeing Implications

- 10.1 The most relevant Marmot principle is the principle of enabling all children and young people to maximise their capabilities and have control over their lives. The overall intention of the home to school transport duties is to:

- Ensure that learners are able to access the education and training of their choice
- Ensure that, if support for access to education is required, this will be assessed, provided or enabled where possible.

Ensuring that children and young people get to school safely and on time is a long established responsibility of a Local Authority. Additional home to school transport support is available for children from low income families. Suitable transport enables children with severe, profound and multiple special educational needs or disabilities to access and benefit from education. The new policy includes the offer of Independent Travel Training in Walsall that encourages the acquisition of an important life skill.

11. Staffing Implications

There are no staffing implications arising from this report.

12. Equality Implications

- 12.1 The home to school transport helps to ensure that children and young people are able to access education regardless of their ethnicity, culture, religion, family background, learning difficulties or disabilities, gender or ability. Additional support with home to school transport ('extended rights') is available for children from low income families.
- 12.2 The proposals to develop Independent Travel Training and Personal Travel Budgets will both increase opportunities for children and young people for getting around– travelling independently is an important life skill.
- 12.4 An EQIA assessment was carried out during the consultation on both the transport policy consultation and the budget consultation. Both assessments were included in the respective reports to Cabinet.

13. Consultation

- 13.1 The consultation exercise is described in section 3.2 of this report where the findings are presented.

Background Papers

- Cabinet 7 September 2016 Agenda Item 7:
Home to School Transport Review Consultation.
- Cabinet 14 December 2016 Agenda Item 14:
Home to School Transport Consultation.
- Cabinet 8 February 2017 Agenda Item 11:
Corporate Budget Plan 2016/17 -2019/20.

Author

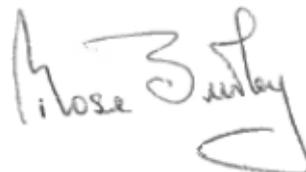
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Signed
David Haley
Executive Director
6 March 2016



Signed
Councillor Burley
Portfolio Holder
6 March 2016



Walsall Council

Home to School Transport Policy 2017/18

Introduction

This document sets out Walsall Council's policy for providing home to school transport. It describes the circumstances in which the Council will provide free home to school transport and the transport services that are available.

This policy has been produced in accordance with the requirements of the 1996 Education Act, as amended by Part 6 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006, and subsequent guidance issued by the Department for Education.

The Education Act 1996 places a legal duty and a responsibility on parents to ensure that their school aged children registered at a school attend regularly, and to make any necessary arrangements to ensure that they attend school.

The Council must provide free transport to and from school to those children eligible if they are aged between 5 and 16 ('statutory school age').

Section 1: General Eligibility

Children of compulsory school age

Pupils will qualify for free home to school transport if:

- They are a resident of the Borough of Walsall; and
- They are 5-8 years of age and live more than 2 miles from their nearest suitable school; or
- They are 8-16 years of age (at the end of the school year in which they reach 16) and live more than 3 miles from their nearest suitable school.

Transport is to the nearest 'suitable school'. That is the nearest qualifying school with places available that provides education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child and any special educational needs that the child may have.

This may not necessarily be the school of the parents' preference. The Council does not have a duty to transport children to school unless the criteria in this paragraph are met.

Children from low income families

Entitlement to free home to school transport is extended to pupils from low income groups. Children from low income families are defined as those who are entitled to Free School Meals due to their income or whose family receives the maximum Working Tax Credits and

- They are a resident in the Borough of Walsall; and
- They are 8-11 years of age and living more than 2 miles from their nearest appropriate school; or

- They are 11-16 years of age and attend one of the nearest three appropriate schools as long as the school is more than 2 miles but less than 6 miles from the child's home address; or
- They are 11-16 years of age and the nearest school is preferred on grounds of 'religion' or 'belief' if it is more than 2 miles but less than 15 miles from the child's home address.

Children below statutory school age

Free travel assistance is provided only to children who are below statutory school age who are attending a Reception class in a state funded infant or primary school as 'rising 5s', and where there is an entitlement to transport as set out above.

Home address and change of address

Free travel assistance is provided from the child's permanent home address to the school where they are on roll. A child's 'home' is the place where he/she is habitually and normally resident. If a child spends time at more than one address during the school week, eligibility for travel assistance will be assessed from their home address as recorded by the school and any travel arrangements will apply to that address only. When a family moves to a new address, eligibility for travel assistance will be re-assessed using the policy in place at the time of the move.

For children in Year 10 or Year 11, travel assistance to a school in Walsall or elsewhere may be provided if transfer to a school closer to home is impractical, because of syllabus or entry requirements, and where the distance between home and school by the shortest walking route is 3 miles or greater.

Change of school

Sometimes 'Managed Moves' are arranged where a child attends another school for an initial period before going on roll at that school. Travel assistance will be provided during that period where the child meets the eligibility criteria of the home to school distance or low family income.

In some cases, a child may attend a Short Stay School (Pupil Referral Unit) or similar provision for a period of time. Assistance with travel will be provided so long as the eligibility criteria are met.

Exceptional circumstances

In exceptional or extenuating circumstances, the Council may use its discretion to provide transport for those children who do not meet the eligibility criteria for travel support.

These circumstances might be:

- i) Children with a temporary medical condition where usual travel to school arrangements are impeded by the medical condition. The parent/carer must submit evidence to outline why they were unable to get the child to school themselves and to provide written evidence from the child's GP or hospital consultant stating why they were unable to walk to school and the likely period of their incapacity.

- ii) Children in the care of the Local Authority and those with further special circumstances may also be supported. For instance, where a Looked After Child moves placements and needs to stay at the school they currently attend.
- iii) If the available walking route is unsafe, even for a child accompanied by an adult, taking into account the age of the child and the nature of the route. A route may be deemed to be unsafe following an assessment by Council staff.

Denominational travel

The Council ceased to provide transport assistance to faith schools from September 2015, other than to pupils who qualify for this through the low income criteria described above. However, any children currently receiving free transport assistance in the form of a bus pass will continue to do so while they are eligible up the age of 16, or until they move to another school (whichever is earlier).

Distances

Distances for the assessment of travel are measured according to the shortest available walking route. This is a route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, can walk with reasonable safety to school.

Types of transport support provided

Bus pass: Travel assistance is usually provided as a bus pass for use on public bus services.

Independent travel training (with bus pass): an accredited training scheme is available to secondary school age students, where this is appropriate.

Personal Travel Budgets: The payment of travelling expenses in the form of a personal travel budget, a mileage or a cycling allowance may be offered as alternatives where this is cost effective.

Where there are two or more eligible children living at the same address, attending the same school and mileage has been agreed for one child, an additional mileage allowance will not be paid as both or all children are expected to travel together. Where a family has two or more children attending different qualifying schools, the mileage for the entire route will be paid based on the optimum route defined by the Local Authority.

Coaches, minibuses and individual taxis: Depending on the nature of the travel need of an eligible pupil, vehicle types such as these may be provided where it is cost effective and where they only alternative to a bus pass.

Section 2: Children with special educational needs and/or disabilities

Eligibility

Most children with an Education, Health and Care plan or a statement of special educational needs do not require any additional specialist support with home to school transport beyond a bus pass or a place on a contracted coach. If additional transport assistance is necessary, the Council will arrange the most suitable form of transport provision that takes account the needs of the child. Each child will be assessed on an individual basis to identify their particular transport requirements.

Transport assistance will be provided for a child with special educational needs of statutory school age under the General Eligibility criteria that are set out in Section 1 of this policy. If parents opt for and the child attends a school that is a greater distance from home than the school that is named by the Local Authority as the appropriate or nearest suitable school, then the Council will not meet any additional costs of travel.

Transport assistance may be provided for pupils who are resident in the Borough of Walsall regardless of the distance between their home and the nearest appropriate school on the grounds of:

Physical, sensory or medical need. Children who cannot reasonably walk to school even when accompanied by an adult because of associated health and safety issues related to their special educational needs or to their disability as defined by the Equality Act 2010.

Significant special needs, in which case the Local Authority will have regard to:

- The age of the pupil
- The appropriateness of the walking route
- The special educational needs of the pupil
- Whether the pupil has physical, medical or social communication difficulties that would exclude them from using public transport
- Whether the pupil would be vulnerable and at risk of danger if they used public transport
- The efficient use of resources
- Any other individual circumstances.

The assessment of the need for transport support will cover both eligibility for support and the type of transport provision. A review will take place annually, ordinarily as part of the annual review of the statement or Education, Health and Care plan. The provision of vehicular transport may cease to be needed as a young person becomes more independent.

Residential schools

Children and young people who attend a residential school that has been named in their statement of special educational need or their Education, Health and Care Plan as the most appropriate school to meet their needs, will be allowed a maximum of 6 return journeys from/to their school each year (at the beginning and end of each half term).

Parents/carers can alternatively be reimbursed for the cost of the journey at an agreed rate that is based on the actual mileage to and from the school, or can seek an Personal Travel Budget. For 52 week placements, 8 return journeys are allowed.

Forms of travel assistance

When young people are assessed as eligible for free travel assistance to school, the decision on the type of transport will be based on an assessment of their needs and the efficient use of the Council's resources.

Walsall offers a range of transport support for children with special educational needs and disabilities as detailed below:

Independent Travel Training (ITT). The aim of Independent Travel Training (ITT) is to give young people with SEND the skills and confidence to travel independently using public transport to and from school or college. Following an assessment of whether ITT is appropriate for them, Walsall Council's ITT scheme provides young people with their own personal travel programme to learn how to travel independently. Students are accompanied to and from school or college until they are ready to make the journey independently.

A young person's travel pass will be provided once the travel training is completed. Alternatively, and subject to further training, support to buy a bicycle for use in getting to and from school or college may be provided.

Bus Pass/travel card: This is provided for use on public bus services where this is appropriate.

Cycle scheme/ cycle training sessions: The Council offers cycle training for young people. Financial support for cycle purchase is also available for young people as an alternative to a travel card. A one-off cycle grant (to the value of £300) will be made to young people with special educational needs and disabilities of secondary school age who complete both an independent travel training scheme and a cycle training scheme.

Personal Travel Budget (PTB): A Personal Travel Budget is an allowance provided in advance by the Council to parents or carers of children with SEND who are eligible for travel assistance. The budget allows families to make their own arrangements for travel such as covering the costs of driving or making arrangements with other families. The budget is based on the distance from home to the school, for one round trip per school day and a mileage rate of 45 pence per mile plus an agreed amount for wear and tear.

Motability cars: The parents of some children may be in receipt of the higher rate mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance (DLA). This gives them access to the Motability scheme that supplies vehicles, adapted or not. If a Motability car has been provided for the benefit of child with a disability, this may be taken into account, as part of a discussion with parents, in determining any transport arrangements. Reasonable evidence as to why the Motability vehicle is not available for the child to get to school must be submitted before any other transport can be provided. A Personal Travel Budget for mileage purposes may be agreed. Wear and tear costs are included in the Motability agreement.

Vehicles: The Council may transport children/young people to and from school in private hire vehicles. These are full size coaches, minibuses, adapted vehicles, separate or shared

taxis. The type of vehicle will be the most appropriate to the child's needs. Children with special educational needs and disabilities may have specific needs that require the use of specialist vehicles.

Pupil attendants: Where appropriate, a pupil attendant will be provided through the authority's contract with the vehicle operator. Pupil attendants are responsible for the supervision of pupils on the journey to and from school and for assisting children with entry into and out of the vehicle. They will supervise the behaviour and safety of children so that the driver is unhindered in his/her duties. Pupil attendants will be deployed where:

- The pupil is of primary school age;
- There are 10 or more young people on a vehicle;
- The young person has medical needs, particularly where rescue medication is required;
- An individual pupil's needs create a health and safety risk to themselves and to others on the vehicle;
- An assessment of the pupils on the vehicle and the journey to be undertaken highlights a health and safety risk to passengers on the vehicle.

Other points

Some special needs travel assistance is provided through private hire vehicles, such as buses, minibuses and taxis. Contracts are awarded through a tendering process. The transport provider may change from time to time as a result of retendering or for other operational reasons.

Where transport is provided, a child will be expected to join an existing transport route and share the vehicle with other pupils unless there are circumstances which are supported by evidence that this is not appropriate.

All coach and some minibus services collect and drop off children at designated 'pick up points' along their routes. Parents are responsible for getting children to and collecting children from those pick up points.

Parents/carers receive a 'Home to School Transport- A guide for passengers and their parents' handbook once transport has been awarded. This sets out our service standards, provides information on how the service works and how parents/carers can help to make it run smoothly.

Section 3: Post 16 transport

A revised Post 16 transport policy was posted on the Council's website on 30 May 2016. It is updated annually and is published at that time as it applies to young people moving into post 16 education and training in September 2016. Walsall no longer provides direct transport support for young people aged 16-18 other than those with special educational needs or disabilities.

At the discretion of the Council, the Post 16 policy indicates that some students with special educational needs may be entitled to help with transport to help their participation in education or training. This can be extended beyond age 19. The Council will also consider the post 19 student's income. This provision is at the discretion of the Local Authority.

The post 16 policy document updates information on concessionary fares (which this Council supports) and points to sources of information and financial assistance with transport, such as government bursaries.

From September 2017, a new policy for post 16 students with special educational needs and disabilities will come into effect. It is based on the principle that the student or their family will contribute towards the cost of the transport provided:

- 1) Students with special educational needs and disabilities are eligible for help with transport to enable them to participate in education or training. Eligibility will be conditional upon the student attending the nearest appropriate school or college offering the majority of the course. The school or college will be more than 3 miles by the shortest available walking route from the home address for the student to qualify for transport support, unless this is overridden by the student's special educational needs or disabilities.
- 2) An Independent Travel Training assessment will be offered to all post 16 students with special educational needs and disabilities. Once a student has completed an Independent Travel Training scheme, the Council will pay the cost of a regional travel card for the period of the course of study (unless the student qualifies for a Disabled Person's card, which is free of charge). The Council has the discretion to subsidise this card for early morning travel if there is genuine hardship
- 3) Travel assistance will be offered to qualifying students from low income families, subject to a contribution from the student/parent of £300 per year to the cost of transport. Young people from low income groups are defined as those entitled to free school meals and those whose households are in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credit.
- 4) Travel assistance will be offered to qualifying students from other families, subject to a contribution from the student/parent of £600 per year to the cost of transport. This will be for transport by contracted coach, minibus or taxi. The same principle will apply to other forms of transport support such as personal travel budgets or mileage allowances.

- 5) To be eligible for assistance, a student must be under 19 years of age at the beginning of the first year of their course. For courses starting in the autumn term, the academic year starts on 1 September. Support will continue until the end of the academic year in which the student completes the course of study.

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Section 4: General information

Journeys covered

Where transport is provided, this will be limited to the journey to school at the beginning of the school day and the journey home at the end of the school day. There is no provision for routes to be altered to take account of medical appointments, short breaks etc. Transport is not provided for work experience, to other educational settings or to short breaks. If a child becomes ill or is sent home from school because of misbehaviour, it is the responsibility of their parent/carer to arrange for the collection of their child.

Poor behaviour on transport

The Local Authority may withdraw travel assistance where a child's behaviour is unacceptable on public transport or on contracted vehicles. In such cases, the parent or carer would be responsible for getting their child to and from school at their own expense.

CCTV on buses

CCTV (closed circuit television) systems are used on contracted coaches and minibuses for reasons of safety and security. The scheme meets the requirements of the Council's Information Governance and CCTV policies. A Data Protection Agreement for Data Processors and a Privacy Impact Assessment have been completed.

How to apply

Bus pass applications are submitted via email. Parents/carers obtain and complete an application form and return it to buspassapplications@walsall.gov.uk by Friday 11 August 2017 for the start of term in September. The Council is unable to accept applications by post.

Applications received by the due date will be processed and parents/carers will be given a date to come and collect the pass from the Civic Centre. No passes will be sent by post.

For further information on special needs and disabilities transport support, Independent Travel Training, Personal Travel Budgets and how to apply, please contact the Transport Team in Children's Services on 01922 653761/653762 or email sentransport@walsall.gov.uk

Complaints and Contact information

Any complaints should be referred in the first instance to the Children's Services Transport Manager.

The Transport Team
Walsall Children's Services
The Civic Centre
Darwall Street
Walsall, WS1 1TP
Tel 01922 653761 or 01922 653762; email sentransport@walsall.gov.uk

Section 5: Travel assistance appeals

Stage 1 – Staff in the Transport team will provide in writing the reasons for the rejection of an application for travel assistance. Parents have a right of appeal against a decision by the authority not to offer travel assistance for their child or against the transport arrangements offered. Parents wishing to appeal have 20 working days from receipt of the local authority's home to school transport decision to make a written request asking for a review of the decision. The written request should explain why the authority's decision should be reviewed. Within 20 days of receipt of this request the Children's Services Transport Manager should review the original decision and send a written notification of the decision to the parents who have appealed.

Stage 2 – Review by an appeal panel; a parent has 20 working days from receipt of their stage 1 decision letter to make written request to escalate the matter to stage 2. Within 40 days of receipt by the authority of a parental request an appeal panel will consider written and/or verbal representation from both the parents and officers involved and give a detailed written notification of outcome setting out the following:

- The nature of the decision reached
- How the review was conducted
- Information about other departments and/or agencies that were consulted as part of the process
- What factors were considered
- The rationale for the decision reached
- Information about the parents' right to put the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman.

There is a further right of complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman if complainants consider that there was a failure to comply with the procedural rules under this policy or if there are any other irregularities in the way their appeal has been handled. If the complainant considers the decision of the independent panel to be flawed on public law grounds, the complainant may also apply for judicial review.

Full details are provided in Appendix1.

Appendix 1: Travel assistance appeals

Introduction

Walsall Council has adopted appeals procedures that have been recommended to all local authorities by the Department for Education. The intention is to ensure a consistent approach across all local authorities, and to provide a completely impartial second stage, for those cases that are not resolved at the first stage.

The appeals process sets out a clear and transparent two stage process for parents/carers who wish to challenge a decision about:

- the transport arrangements offered;
- their child's eligibility;
- the distance measurement in relation to statutory walking distances; and
- the safety of the route.

The appeals process is shown as a flow chart, below.

Stage one: Review by a senior officer

A parent has 20 working days from receipt of the local authority's home to school transport decision to make a written request asking for a review of the decision.

The written request should detail why the parent believes the decision should be reviewed and give details of any personal and/or family circumstances the parent believes should be considered when the decision is reviewed.

Within 20 working days of receipt of the parent's written request a senior officer reviews the original decision and sends the parent a detailed written notification of the outcome of their review, setting out:

- the nature of the decision reached;
- how the review was conducted (including the standard followed e.g. national Road Safety standards and guidance);
- information about other departments and/or agencies that were consulted as part of the process;
- what factors were considered;
- the rationale for the decision reached;
- information about how the parent can escalate their case to stage two (if appropriate).

Stage two: Review by an independent appeal panel

A parent has 20 working days from receipt of the local authority's stage one written decision notification to make a written request to escalate the matter to stage two.

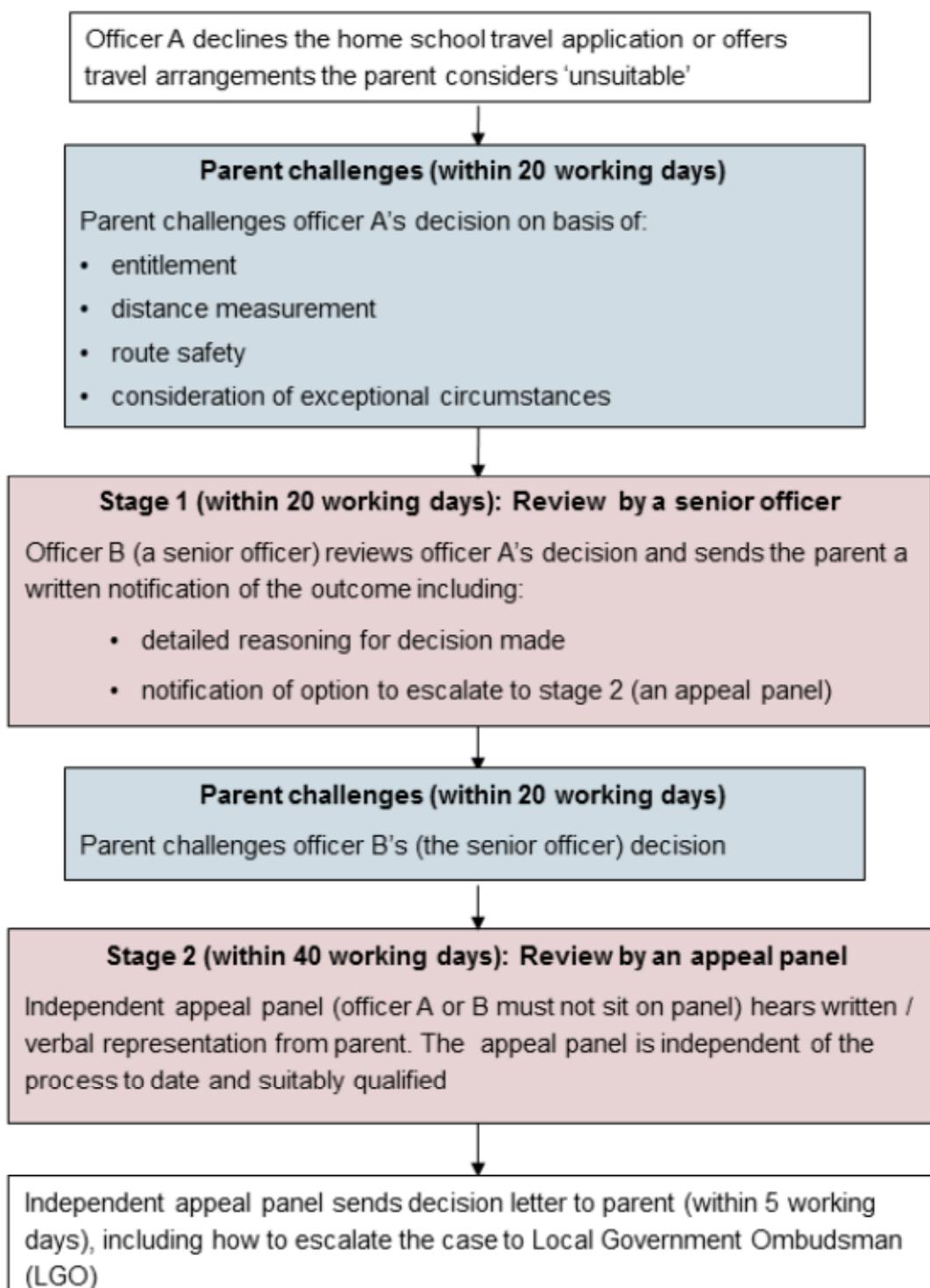
Within 40 working days of receipt of the parents request an independent appeal panel considers written and verbal representations from both the parent and officers involved in the case and gives a detailed written notification of the outcome, setting out:

- the nature of the decision reached;
- how the review was conducted (including the standard followed e.g. national Road Safety guidance and standards);
- information about other departments and/or agencies that were consulted as part of the process;
- what factors were considered;
- the rationale for the decision reached;
- Information about the parent's right to put the matter to the Local Government Ombudsman (see below).

The independent appeal panel members should be independent of the process to date and suitably experienced, to ensure a balance is achieved between meeting the needs of the parents and the local authority, and that road safety requirements are complied with and no child is placed at unnecessary risk.

Local Government Ombudsman

Parents have a right of complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman, but only if there is evidence of a failure by the council to comply with the procedural rules or if there are any other irregularities in the way the appeal has been handled. If the complainant considers the decision of the independent panel to be flawed on public law grounds, the complainant may also apply for judicial review.



Appendix 2 Information for parents

1. Accredited Independent Travel Scheme



This service is open to pupils who currently access Home to School Transport Service to school either through coach or taxi.

Independent Travel Training can be a daunting process for Parents and Carers, but ITT is centred around the pupil with parent/carers wishes and feelings taken into account before training starts.

Independent Travel Training is provided to give the pupils more freedom and independence for school life, and accessing the wider world of work in later years.

Current School Transport will never be removed until the young person is fully capable of Independent Travel Training.

Please contact me on the details below for more info.

Karen Wright

Travel Support Officer

Home to School Transport

Walsall Council

01922 652663

karen.wright@walsall.sch.uk



2. Personal Travel Budgets



What is a Personal Transport Budget

A Personal Transport Budget (PTB) is a sum of money provided to parents or carers of children with Special Education Needs (SEN) who are eligible for travel assistance.

PTBs enable families to arrange their child's home to school travel arrangements in a way that suits their circumstances best.

How it works

Where it has been identified that a PTB may be beneficial to the family, a travel support Officer from the SEN Transport Team will discuss with the parent or main carer, any barriers that may arise. By barriers we mean issues that prevent the family getting their child to school independently.

If everyone is in agreement, a personal allowance is sought, and a budget amount agreed, then payments are made to the family at the beginning of each School Term.

If you decide to take up the PTB we will ask you to sign an agreement. This sets out your role and the council's role in the PTB process to keep your child safe and ensure that their attendance and ability to learn is not negatively affected by travel to and from school. The council will then make the arrangements to transfer the PTB payments to your bank account.

The only condition is that a child must maintain satisfactory attendance at school for payment to be made.

We will not be concerned about usual infrequent absences, as we know children regularly experience sniffles and colds from time to time.

What are the benefits of PTBs?

Provide choice and control over how you get your child to and from school on time in a way that suits you, your child and your family.

The allowance enables families to make flexible arrangements, and monitor the quality of their child's transport directly.



How much will my PTB be?

The amount you receive will be based on the distance between home and school for the days that your child attends school.

Each PTB will be tailored to the needs of each family.

Pence per mile may be agreed individually based on distance / vehicle and other individual factors.

Other costs may also be paid instead of mileage (i.e. bus passes, family / friend's time / mileage for them to transport / escort, the cost of something for one sibling to facilitate an eligible sibling to get to school, etc.)



How do I get a PTB?

Please use the contact information on this leaflet and the SEN transport team will deal with your request. And based on the information that they know about your child's current travel requirements, the SEN Transport Team will calculate a PTB for you.

If you have any questions about how this amount is calculated, then please do not hesitate to contact them



Can I stop the PTB if it doesn't work out?

PTB arrangements are voluntary. You can stop your PTB if your circumstances change substantially but we will need sufficient notice to arrange alternative forms of travel assistance. We can also help with advice on how to use the PTB if you would like it and / or the PTB can be adjusted if needs or circumstances change.

WE WANT TO MAKE PTB'S WORK FOR YOU...

All family circumstances are different and we will consider every family situation as unique.

Will it have an impact on other benefits?

We would hope not. You will need to contact your local Tax Office to answer this question. This allowance may be under a tax threshold. But the Council recognizes this is money we provide on behalf of **your child** to meet our statutory duty to get them to school.

Will I regularly need to show the council how I am spending the PTB?

No. We want to keep the flexibility and control with you, and we will keep our monitoring to a minimum. We will identify any potential issues through your child's school attendance.

What about future years?

The Council is committed to provide the most appropriate travel assistance for your child.

If the circumstances are right, other forms of travel may be more appropriate for your child such as **Independent Travel Training**.

If your child is assessed as being ready to learn to travel independently then our dedicated team will work with you to ensure a smooth transition takes place.

We will only expect young people to travel independently when it is safe to do so and they have the ability.

Independent travel is an important life skill that helps your child access social and future employment opportunities.

You can start now supporting or training your child to travel independently, or you can talk to the SEN transport team about Independent Travel Training.

**For further information
please contact**

Karen Wright

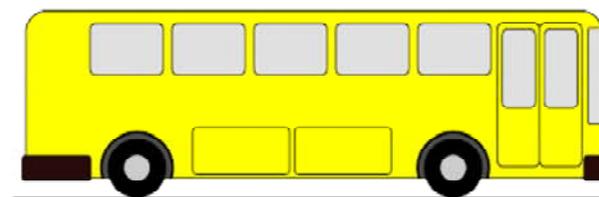
On

01922 652663

or

karen.wright@walsall.gov.uk

**Children's SEN
Transport
Service**



**Personal Transport
Budget**

3. Home to School Transport

- A guide for Passengers and their Parents

Introduction

Your Home to School transport team is made up of:

Andrea Cooke – Transport Manager

Ashley Thomas – Assistant Transport Officer

Nichola Pemberton – Assistant Transport Officer

We are responsible for the Home to School Transport arrangements for your children.

Our aim is to provide a high quality transport service with minimum delay and maximum care and attention. We are committed to providing the best possible service and welcome any suggestions you may have.

Our office is open between 08:00 and 16:45 Monday – Friday and we can be contacted in the following ways:

Telephone 01922 653761 or 01922 653762

Email: sentransport@walsall.gov.uk

A member of the team should always be on hand between these hours to answer your queries or deal with your request.

Whilst we make every effort to answer your call immediately sometimes this is not possible. For instance during September we are at our busiest and you may find the telephones engaged. Please leave a message on our answer phone and we will call you back within 24 hours.

Information for parents

Walsall Children Services in partnership with parents, carers, schools and contractors aims to provide a high quality transport service to pupils who live in Walsall.

We want you to feel happy about the transport arrangements made for your child. This information sheet tells you about how we make those arrangements and how you can help us make sure they work smoothly.

Transport Arrangements:

- Are made by the Transport Team once a start date has been agreed.
- Are usually made within 7 to 10 working days, but it may be a little longer if specialist arrangements are required.
- May be for a taxi, minibus or coach.

If your child starts school before transport arrangements can be made, you may choose to transport your child temporarily.

The Transport Team will inform you of:

- The pick up time
- The pick up point, which will be within reasonable walking distance from the child's home
- Details of the contractor, including telephone contact details.

It may be necessary for pick up times and points to change when other pupils are added or taken off the vehicle and on some occasions for the contractor to change. We will notify you of any changes.

Journey times will generally not exceed one hour in each direction for pupils attending schools within the borough of Walsall.

Transport arrangements are made around the child and existing routes. These cannot be varied to suit domestic or work arrangements.

Pupil Attendants:

- Are provided through the contractor as required
- Are responsible for your child's safety while on the vehicle
- Will welcome your child onto the vehicle
- Will check that your child is seated comfortably and securely before the vehicle moves off
- Will ensure the safety of your child throughout the journey

Pupil attendants are not responsible for taking children to or from the vehicle.

Behaviour on the Vehicle:

For the health and safety of all pupils, children must remain seated with the seatbelt fastened throughout the whole journey.

Parents / carers are responsible for any damage caused to the vehicle by their child.

Walsall Children Services reserves the right to stop providing transport on a temporary or permanent basis to pupils who persistently misbehave on the vehicle or jeopardise safety on the vehicle.

What can passengers expect?

What can you expect from Drivers and Attendants when you are transported?

Your safety will remain their responsibility until you are handed over to a responsible adult.

- Meet with you and your parents / carers prior to the start your school year / term.
- A polite greeting and friendly relationship – never using their horn unless it is an emergency.
- They will report unsafe behaviour to parents, school and Transport Team.

- They will ensure all passengers remain seated in a 3-point seat belt while in the vehicle.
- They will have your details and route schedule which will be kept confidential.
- Your Driver and Attendant will be dressed in smart appearance with identification and Hi-Vis vest.
- They will always secure you and your wheelchair and all doors and windows with safety locks.
- They will not use a mobile phone while the vehicle is moving and no one is allowed to smoke.
- You can expect no unauthorised passengers to be in your vehicle unless it is an emergency.
- They will not discuss any issues / complaints / concerns in front of you.
- You will be assisted safely to enter and exit the vehicle and must not occupy a front seat.
- They will wait 3 minutes for you to arrive at your stop and then proceed to other children.
- They will communicate clearly and calm you if you become agitated or unhappy.

What happens when there is an emergency or if I am unwell during the journey?

In the event of a **medical emergency** your driver / attendant will immediately contact the **Emergency Services on 999 (or 112 mobile)** and follow the instructions they are given.

If you become unwell:

Outward Journey (to school)

- If you become unwell, the driver will telephone your parent / carer to decide if you should return home or proceed to school / journey.

Return journey (from school)

- If you become unwell on a journey home, the driver will divert to take you directly to the home address. Once you are home safely, the driver will continue to take the remaining passengers home.

In the event of a minor accident involving the vehicle, the Council Assisted Transport Team immediately informed and, if necessary, the emergency services called to check that the passengers are unharmed.

In the event of a breakdown, the driver will immediately contact their base, your parent / carers and the Transport Team and arrange for another suitable vehicle to arrive within one hour of the reported breakdown to carry you on to your destination.

What parents/carers can expect from the transport company:

All drivers/passenger assistants will:

- ✓ Wear identification badges
- ✓ Have an enhanced DBS check
- ✓ Have a reasonable grasp of the English language

- ✓ Have read and understood the Passenger Safety Plan
- ✓ Contact the parents/carers to arrange a convenient time for a home visit to take place prior to the operation of a new contract
- ✓ Be presentable and have a clean appearance
- ✓ Treat students/parents/carers in a respectful and courteous manner
- ✓ The vehicle provided will be fit for purpose and the company will make a replacement vehicle available should this be required
- ✓ The vehicle provided is always operated to a high standard of cleanliness
- ✓ All seats in vehicles have a working seatbelt, and passenger restraints and wheelchair securing devices are provided as required
- ✓ Drivers/passenger assistants are fully trained in operating any ancillary equipment fitted to a vehicle e.g. tail lift, wheelchair securing equipment, passenger harnesses etc.
- ✓ Drivers provide a high standard of driving
- ✓ Drivers/passenger assistants are aware of their duties and responsibilities, particularly in the event of an emergency
- ✓ Drivers/passenger assistants do not smoke during the performance of the contract
- ✓ Upon arrival at the agreed collection or drop-off time, drivers wait for up to three minutes
- ✓ Drivers/passenger assistants keep parents/carers informed of any significant delay to transport
- ✓ Transport companies notify the SEN Transport Team of any incident or accident affecting the students
- ✓ Transport companies avoid, where possible, changes in drivers/passenger assistants.

What parents/carers can do to help transport to run smoothly?

Ensure that your child is ready five minutes before the company is due to arrive. Drivers are only able to wait for a maximum of three minutes after the agreed pick up time for each student. However, drivers should not be made to wait for three minutes on a regular basis because if waiting is repeated along the route, all students will be late for school. If a vehicle arrives on time but your child is not ready or is not ready after the three minute waiting time, transport to school becomes the responsibility of the parents/carers.

Take your child to the vehicle (the driver/passenger assistant is not expected to escort them from the house to the vehicle).

Be at home in time to receive your child on their return from school.

Informing the transport company/driver/passenger assistant as soon as possible if your child is not attending school for any reason (e.g. illness). In addition, do not forget to inform the school.

Informing the transport company/driver/passenger assistant if your child does not use transport in the morning (for whatever reason) and you take your child to school later that day, but you would like the transport company to bring the child home in the afternoon.

Informing the transport company/driver/passenger assistant if you collect your child from school during the day (e.g. to take him/her to a medical appointment) meaning they do not need transport home at the end of the school day.

Ensuring the passenger assistant/driver is aware of anything affecting your child on a particular day.

Ensuring, where possible, your child is aware of appropriate behaviour whilst travelling to and from school.

Ensuring your child does not leave personal belongings on the vehicle. If this does occur, parents/carers should contact the transport company/driver/passenger assistant.

Providing us (on the application form) with the name, telephone number and relationship to your child of at least one adult who can take responsibility for your child in an emergency if you are not available.

Informing us of any changes that might affect the transport arrangements, including but not limited to: changes to your address; changes to your contact details or those of your emergency contact(s); allergies or medication (please note that drivers and passenger assistants are not authorised to administer medication or undertake any form of medical intervention); or if your child is getting a new wheelchair.

Notifying us of any problems with the transport so that these can be addressed in a timely and appropriate way.

Providing positive feedback on transport companies so that this can be fed back to them and good practice can be shared with other transport companies.

Frequently Asked Questions

Are there any journeys for which you cannot provide transport?

If your child is entitled to transport assistance, we can only provide transport between their permanent home address and school, and at the usual school start and finish times. It is not possible for us to provide transport:

Between one school and another

For work experience placements

For activity weeks

To medical appointments (e.g. dentist, hospital)

If your child is ill and needs to be collected from school (or returned mid-week/mid-term if they are a weekly or termly boarder)

To or from a location that is not your normal home address (e.g. childminder, grandparents) unless there are exceptional circumstances

To or from induction/enrolment days at colleges

Respite

How can I be sure the transport is safe?

We take every precaution to ensure your child's safety when travelling on the vehicle. In particular we ensure that:

All drivers and passenger assistants have an enhanced DBS check undertaken by Walsall Metropolitan Borough Council

All students joining the transport network have a Passenger Travel Plan so that drivers/passenger assistants understand each child or young person's needs; these are sent out to parents to be updated on an annual basis.

All transport companies arrange a home visit at a time that is convenient to the family to ensure the driver/passenger assistant can meet the student, prior to the transport commencing

Site visits take place to check: the roadworthiness of vehicles (e.g. inspecting tyres); that contract terms are being met (e.g. if we have asked the transport company to supply a passenger assistant, there is one being provided); the safety of the site, traffic flow and, drivers and passenger assistants use of equipment (e.g. tail lifts for wheelchairs)

Any concerns raised by parents/carers, schools or anyone else supporting children and young people and their families (e.g. Social Worker) are fully investigated in a timely way

From time to time, special schools may provide training for drivers/passenger assistants on topics that relate specifically to the students they are transporting.

What happens if my child requires medication on board transport?

Drivers and passenger assistants are not authorised to administer medication or to undertake any form of medical intervention. However, we can still transport students with medical needs and these will be included on the Passenger Safety Plan. In the event of an emergency, the vehicle will stop in a safe place and a member of staff will call 999. If a parent/carer does not want their child travel on board transport because no medication can be administered, the authority can offer mileage reimbursement as an alternative.

What should I do if the transport arrangements are not working well?

If parents/carers have any concerns regarding the safety and appropriateness of the transport being provided for their child, they should contact us immediately. We can discuss the issue and where necessary take follow-up action with the transport company concerned.

We are aware that some parents/carers are reluctant to contact us when problems arise because they are concerned that transport may be removed from their child or the driver/passenger assistant will find out that they have reported an issue. However, we do not withdraw assistance because a parent/carer has raised concerns and we can investigate most issues in a way that does not identify the source of the information.

We would encourage parents/carers to report problems as they arise, as this allows us to address them at an early stage in case the issue escalates and more significant action needs to be taken.

The types of concerns that parents/carers contact us to discuss include:

Frequent changes of driver or passenger assistant, particularly if there is no notice (over and above changes due to sickness, annual leave, training courses etc.)

Early or late running (although when a new contract begins, there will be a settling in period within which the timings may vary as the driver gets used to the route)

Lack of understanding of a student's needs

Unsafe practices (for example, students exiting a minibus from a side door facing into the road, not providing a booster seat for a child under 12 years old / 135 cm in height)

Poor communication (for example, not contacting parents/carers to advise about changes to collection or drop off times, or changes to drivers/passenger assistants)

Where a breach of contract is identified, we can take various forms of action against the transport company.

Is it possible to change the collection/drop-off time?

The transport company will inform the parents/carers of the collection and drop-off times that are necessary to ensure their child and other passengers arrive at school on time and that journey times are minimised at both ends of the day. As the timings need to support the efficient operation of the route, family circumstances (e.g. work commitments, siblings attending different schools) cannot be taken into account. If parents/carers contact us to raise this as an issue, we will check the route order with the transport company to see if any alterations can be made, but unfortunately this is usually not possible. In addition, due to changes to the transport network (for example, students joining or leaving a vehicle due to school moves or changes of address), the collection and drop-off times may change over time, but every effort will be made to provide parents/carers with notice at any alterations.

What happens if I cannot meet my child at the designated drop-off time?

A responsible adult must be at home to receive the child or young person at the agreed time they are returned from school. Transport staff cannot wait for an adult to arrive as this not only makes other students late home, but it places an inappropriate level of responsibility on drivers and passenger assistants. To ensure your child's safety, if there is no-one available at home to meet your child, we will take the child to our safe house where they will await your collection. The address is:

**My Place
60 Walstead Road West
Walsall
WS5 4PE**

In the event that an adult is unavailable to receive the student, the parents/carers will be advised of their responsibility to ensure someone is available in the future. If this recurs the transport may be withdrawn until officers are satisfied that proper arrangements are in place.

What happens in bad weather?

In severe weather conditions (e.g. snow, storms, floods) it may be necessary to either change or cancel transport arrangements for safety reasons. It is an individual driver's decision as to whether they can operate or take a certain route, as they are the only responsible party who is aware of all the facts. It is vital that they put the safety of the students first and this means that we cannot insist that the transport runs, or that a child or young person is taken directly to their home if there is no safe route available. If you are advised by the transport company that your child's morning journey has been cancelled, you should assume that the afternoon journey will also be cancelled, unless you hear otherwise.

Parents/carers who have chosen to take their children to school during bad weather should ensure they have confirmed return transport arrangements for their child before leaving them at school. Transport is arranged to run at set times and therefore if a school decides to close early due to adverse weather, it may not be possible for transport companies to arrive earlier than normal. Therefore the school will need to ensure that students are supervised until they are collected. If a parent/carer does not want their child to attend school during bad weather (perhaps due to concerns that they could get stranded at the school or during the journey) they should contact the transport company to inform them at the earliest opportunity.

In bad weather conditions, parents/carers are advised to regularly check the Walsall Council's website www.walsall.gov.uk and to listen to local radio. If parents/carers suspect that the school is closed but there is nothing on the website or the radio, they should contact

the school directly before travelling. Parents/carers should also contact the school if they are unable to travel due to bad weather but the school is open.

What happens if my child is ill and cannot go to school?

If your child is unwell and unable to attend school, you should contact the transport company the night prior to travel. If your child only shows signs of being ill on the morning of travel, parents/carers must call the transport company as soon as possible before the transport is due to arrive. Parents/carers should provide the transport company with an estimated return date and contact them again when their child has recovered and transport needs reinstating.

The transport has not turned up. What should I do?

Usually the transport company would contact the parent/carers to let them know there has been a delay. However, if you do not receive a call, contact them to ask for an update. If the vehicle is often late, parents/carers should contact us so that this can be investigated.

What can be done if the transport company keeps changing the driver/passenger assistant, as my child is having difficulty coping with this?

We recognise that for some students with special educational needs, change can be very unsettling. Where consistency of staffing has been recognised as being important to a child or young person, this is included in the Passenger Safety Plan. However, some changes are inevitable (for example, due to sickness, holiday entitlement, course attendance, staff turnover) and alterations may need to be made from time to time to ensure the most efficient use of the available resources.

When changes are made, the transport company should notify the parents/carers in advance (where possible) and provide an opportunity for the new member of staff to meet the student before any journeys are undertaken. Any changes made by the local authority (such as through school reviews which are necessary to ensure arrangements continue to reflect student's needs and that public sector procurement regulations are met), will be communicated to parents/carers as far in advance as possible.

My child is now transported by a different transport company but we preferred the old one. Can this be changed back?

The local authority has to ensure that transport arrangements are safe and appropriate for all students and that contracts are managed in line with public sector procurement regulations. Therefore the periodic review and retendering of contracts is unavoidable due to our legal obligations and these can result in a change to the type of vehicle, the route or the transport company.

However, officers will always notify parents/carers of any changes in advance and the new transport company should arrange for the driver/passenger assistant to undertake a home visit prior to the new transport starting. We have carried out checks on all the transport companies being used to ensure they meet our standards and they are all expected to maintain the same level of service. However, if parents/carers have any concerns, they should report these to us immediately so that they can be fully investigated.

What can be done to help if my child is struggling to use the school bus?

We aim to support students to travel on buses with their peers whenever it is safe and appropriate for them to do so. However, we recognise that some students with special educational needs and/or a disability can find this challenging. Therefore parents/carers

should contact us to discuss their child's transport needs so that officers can work with the school and travel training experts to identify and overcome the barriers they are facing.

What happens if we move house?

If you are planning to move house, you must contact us to discuss this as a change in circumstances may affect your child's eligibility for transport assistance. We can advise on the type of form you will need to complete and the evidence we will require (e.g. a copy of the exchange of contracts for a mortgage or the tenancy agreement for a rental). In general, parents/carers need to allow five working days for entitlement to be re-assessed and if the student remains entitled to assistance, another five working days to put new arrangements in place (this can take longer if there are no spare seats and transport has to be procured).