

## Home to School Travel and Transport Policy

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## **1. Introduction**

It is the responsibility of parents/carers to ensure that their children of school age attend school (Section 444, Education Act 1996, inserted by the Education and Inspections Act 2006). In most cases, Northumberland County Council has no legal responsibility to offer direct assistance for this. However, we recognise the significant benefits to pupils' health and safety that comes from using sustainable means of travel to school. Consequently, we support cycling, scooting, walking, local bus services and car sharing. Further information regarding local bus services, timetables and season ticket costs can be found by visiting the [school transport webpage](#) and by visiting the [Sustainable Transport to Schools webpage](#) information is provided on walking, cycling or using scooters and other initiatives to reduce the use of cars for the school journey.

Words defined in the Glossary are highlighted wherever they occur in this policy. The glossary can be found at the end of the policy statement

Other than supporting travel arrangements for pupils with disabilities or mobility problems (further information on this is provided at para 4.8), the Council's statutory duty is limited to supporting a child's attendance at school by providing transport arrangements for those families that live beyond the statutory walking distance from the nearest appropriate school (section 508B, Education Act 1996, inserted by the Education and Inspections Act 2006). This policy outlines the way in which the local authority fulfils this duty and allocates transport to entitled pupils. It also seeks to explain how parents, pupils and schools have a joint responsibility to ensure that children travel safely to school. As mentioned above, Northumberland County Council also has a statutory duty to offer travel support for children who cannot walk to school as a result of their **disability, mobility problems or special educational needs** (The Children and Families Act 2014 (Part 3, s30: Children and Young People with SEN or Disabilities & s14 of Schedule 2 of the SEND Regulations 2014) and this is also covered in this policy.

## **2. Roles & Responsibilities of the County Council & Parents**

Where their children don't qualify for travel support, the Council recommends parents should consider:

- (i) arranging for their children to travel in safety between the home and the transport picking-up and setting-down points;
- (ii) imparting the Green Cross Code and the guidance for pedestrians in the Highway Code to all their children (whether they walk or use another mode of transport);
- (iii) arranging Bikeability training if they cycle to school;
- (iv) accompanying their child to and from school as required, relative to the risks faced and the child's proficiency;
- (v) waiting with/for their children at the appropriate pick-up and set-down points in the morning

and afternoon.

The Council and schools will ensure safety in, around and on school premises by:

- (i) restricting car-based drop-off and pick-up arrangements on school grounds;
- (ii) introducing local rules regarding the drop-off and pick-up of pupils outside of school premises;
- (iii) applying behaviour codes of conduct for pupils accessing the school transport service or using public transport.

Where travel support is provided by the County Council, pupils are collected as close to their home as is reasonably possible. Where this is not possible, some pupils may have to walk a reasonable distance to a pickup point in the morning (and home in the afternoon from the drop-off point). The same road safety considerations will apply as with an assessment of a walking route to school (see para 4.6). The pickup/setting down point will not exceed a mile from the pupil's home. If it does, then feeder transport will be provided. Please note, private driveways or roads not owned or maintained by Northumberland County Council are not included in such measurements.

The Council is only able to take responsibility for arranging for the transport to turn up at the designated pick-up point each morning and at the drop-off point each afternoon. To make sure that travel arrangements work well, parents/carers will need to make arrangements for their children to get safely to the pick-up point and to get home after being dropped off. Parents/carers will also need to:

- Get their children ready for school;
- Provide up to date contact information (landline and mobile phone numbers as well as email addresses) to their child's school, to the School Transport Team and to their child's transport provider - contact details for the School Transport Team are provided at the end of this policy;
- Notify us by completing a new transport application if the child's address changes;
- Tell the School Transport Team about any medical needs their child has, including any medicines carried;
- Fully co-operate with the County Council and their child's school if any behaviour issues arise when they are accessing the school transport service.

If there are persistent problems affecting the Council's ability to transport children safely (including issues about children's behaviour), the Council may not be able to continue to provide transport.

### **3. Child Safeguarding**

Whilst the Council recognises that safeguarding is everybody's responsibility, it will ensure that

all frontline staff have appropriate training and induction and receive regular briefings so that they understand their roles and responsibilities and are confident in carrying them out (further information is provided at paras 17-17.1). All drivers and passenger assistants deployed on school transport contracts are required to be in receipt of a satisfactory DBS check at least once every three years. Schools, settings, children, young people and their parents or carers, or any member of the community should feel secure that they can raise any issues or concerns about the safety or welfare of children and know that they will be listened to and taken seriously. For example, if anyone is concerned that a child may be being bullied, mistreated or exploited while on school transport, they should let the Council know immediately by contacting the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), tel 01670 536400. Further information is provided via [safeguarding children](#)

#### 4. Entitlement to free travel support

The Council only provides free travel support to children who are:

- Of **compulsory school age**;
- **Resident** in Northumberland;
- Attending their nearest and appropriate **qualifying school**, or
- Attending their nearest school chosen on grounds of **religion or belief**;
- Living beyond the **statutory walking distance** for their age, or
- Living within the statutory walking distance for their age but the walking route is deemed **“unavailable”** for safety reasons by the County Council, or
- Qualifying for **“extended rights”** on the grounds of low income, or
- Unable to walk to school as a result of their **disability, mobility problems or special educational needs**.

##### 4.1 Children of compulsory school age

This policy covers Home to School Transport arrangements for children of **compulsory school age** who attend a publicly funded school. A separate policy is applied for students aged over 16 which can be accessed by visiting the [school transport webpage](#)

Children entitled to 2, 3 and 4 year old early education are not entitled by law to free transport, and Northumberland County Council will not normally provide free transport for a child attending a nursery class in a school or a Private Voluntary or Independent (PVI) setting, irrespective of the distance from home. This is also the case for children with **disabilities** and/or **special educational needs** and it remains the responsibility of the parent/carer to transport their children between home and the early years setting.

However, a child aged 4 and over admitted on a full time basis to a reception class will be eligible to receive free transport in accordance with the provisions of this policy.

#### **4.2 Resident in Northumberland**

Northumberland County Council will only consider making arrangements for the provision of free transport to residents of Northumberland. Families of children who live outside of Northumberland but who attend schools in Northumberland are advised to approach their own local authority (i.e. the local authority they pay their Council Tax to) to find out if their children will qualify for travel support.

#### **4.3 Attending the Nearest Appropriate Qualifying School**

Reference to the “nearest” **qualifying school** is taken to mean the **qualifying school** nearest to the child’s home address with places available at the time an application for a school place should have been made. “Appropriate” means that the school must provide an education appropriate to the age, ability and aptitude of the child, and any **special educational needs** that the child may have.

In general the County Council does not provide travel support to enable pupils to attend other schools. However, there is sometimes spare seating capacity on contracted school transport vehicles arranged for pupils who meet the eligibility criteria, and we may be able to make these spare seats available to children not qualifying for free school transport for this reason. There is a charge for transport provided on this basis. We cannot guarantee that this will continue throughout a child’s attendance at an establishment, so families should not make school choices which rely on this. Further details can be found in the Concessionary Travel Policy which can be accessed by visiting the [school transport webpage](#) Parents should bear in mind that if they enroll their child into a school which is not the nearest to their home this may result in their child not being entitled to free travel support.

In Northumberland, the **qualifying school** is always the catchment area school but, in some cases, there can be two qualifying schools: the catchment area school and the nearest school to the home address (in some cases the catchment area school is not always the nearest school to a home address). Information on school catchment areas can be found on the [school admissions webpage](#)

The nearest school is determined by measuring the shortest **available route** by road from the home address main entrance that opens onto a road or street that is maintained at public expense to the main school entrance that meets the public highway. The measurement of the shortest **available route** is undertaken by the County Council’s approved GIS system QGIS 2.12.0-Lyon

For the purposes of school transport, the home address is deemed to be the child’s main residence, i.e. where they live most of the time Monday to Friday. In some cases, the Council

may be able to offer transport assistance through its concessionary travel scheme (see para 13) to those families where child care is split between parents living at different addresses on alternative days or weeks. However, there is no guarantee of assistance and a charge will be made where we can offer transport support from more than one address. Eligibility for free transport will not be assessed to/from a grandparents' address or a childminder's address. It is also the case that transport will not be provided to and from a grandparent's address or a childminder's address.

A new application for transport will need to be submitted in the event of a child moving to a new address. The application will be assessed in accordance with the eligibility criteria outlined in this policy.

#### **4.4. Home to school transport on the grounds of religion or belief**

Northumberland County Council has a discretionary policy of providing free travel support for children attending a school out of the **catchment** area when the parent has expressed a preference for their child to be educated at a school with a particular ethos because they adhere to a particular faith, or belief. In Northumberland, transport support will only be provided to the nearest faith school to home provided that it is of the same denomination to which the parent or child adheres to (e.g. Roman Catholic children attending a Roman Catholic school or Church of England children attending a Church of England school). However, a parent will need to satisfy the Council of the genuine nature of the religious belief and that the application is made in good faith. The burden of proof lies with the child's parent/parents. Parents are required to provide proof of faith by providing documentary evidence such as a baptismal certificate at the point of submitting an application for school transport and that such religious education is not available within the **catchment** school. Parents who profess a philosophical belief in, for example, atheism or humanism are required to provide proof of such beliefs by providing documentary evidence such as a statement of atheism at the point of submitting an application for school transport. Only journeys considered to be reasonable by the County Council both in terms of journey times (see section 15) and cost of provision will be considered.

#### **4.5 Statutory Walking Distances**

The statutory walking distances are over two miles for children under 8 years of age and over three miles for children aged 8 years and over. The measurement of statutory walking distances is the shortest walking route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk with reasonable safety. Northumberland has chosen to extend the use of the two mile distance for all children up to the end of Year 4.

The walking distance is measured using the County Council's approved GIS system, the current version being QGIS 2.12.0-Lyon. Distance measures between home and school will be strictly applied. This means that in some cases pupils living in the same street or even adjoining properties may not all be eligible for free home to school transport.

Routes are measured from the home address main entrance that opens onto a road or street that is maintained at public expense to the main school entrance. Private driveways or roads not owned or maintained by Northumberland County Council are not included in the measurements.

Routes from home to school are regularly reviewed by the Local Authority. If a route from home to school is measured and found to be under the qualifying distance, free home to school transport will be withdrawn with a full term's notice.

#### **4.6 Safety of Walking Routes**

Decisions about the safety of walking routes follow the guidelines on the Assessment of Walking Routes issued by Road Safety GB. Such assessments address issues from a road safety perspective. They do not consider matters of personal security such as the safety issues that could arise from children travelling alone. These are deemed to be the responsibility of parents to decide whether they need to accompany their child or not.

Where the Local Authority believes that there is no available walking route that is considered safe to walk, accompanied as necessary, travel support may be provided for pupils living under the qualifying distance.

If the Local Authority assesses that a route is safe for a child to walk, accompanied as necessary, then parents are responsible for deciding how their child will travel to school, for making any necessary arrangements (e.g. to take account of work commitments etc.) to support this and for any costs. This may be in any way that parents feel is appropriate for their child, e.g. walking, cycling or using a local bus service.

#### **4.7 “Extended Rights to Transport” for Low Income Families**

The Education & Inspections Act 2006 extended the right to receive free school transport to children from low income families where they are entitled to free school meals or whose parents are entitled to the maximum level of Working Tax Credit. The level of entitlement to Working Tax Credit is identified on the notice issued by HM Revenue and Customs. Proof of entitlement by means of the Working Tax Credit notice issued by HM Revenue and Customs should be submitted in its entirety with the transport application form. Children granted transport on the grounds of low income will remain eligible for the entirety of the **academic year** for which the assessment is made. In each subsequent year the child's eligibility will be reassessed at the beginning of June.

A child may be eligible under this scheme if he/she is

- aged 8 years of age but under 11 years and who lives more than two miles from the **catchment** or nearest and appropriate qualifying school
- aged between 11 and 16 years of age in order to support their attendance at a school between two and six miles from their home and there are no more than two suitable nearer



schools.

- aged between 11 and 16 years of age in order to support their attendance at the nearest school preferred by reason of their **religion or belief** over two miles up to a maximum distance of 15 miles.

#### **4.8 Disabilities, Mobility Problems and/or Special Educational Needs.**

Pupils with **disabilities** and/or **special educational needs** or **mobility problems** have the same entitlement to home to school travel support as any other pupil within the education system. Northumberland County Council's responsibility towards this group of pupils falls within the general duty outlined above in section 4.1-4.6. In addition, the County Council may also provide home-school travel support as a reasonable adjustment to a child's **disability** in cases where the child lives within the statutory walking distance of the school.

- A person has a **disability** (s6 Equality Act 2010) if they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term adverse effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities.

A child may also be eligible for travel assistance under Schedule 35B of the Education Act 1996 if they are of **compulsory school age**, attending a **qualifying school** within walking distance and, as a result of their **disability, special educational needs** or mobility problems, they cannot reasonably be expected to walk to the school (provided the local authority has not made arrangements for them to attend a **qualifying school** nearer their home).

It is the individual needs of each child, rather than whether an EHCP is held, that shall determine whether or how home-school travel arrangements are made. In deciding whether a pupil with a **disability** and/or a special educational need and/or mobility problem should have home-school travel support, the County Council will have regard to the circumstances of the particular case and take account of the following factors:

- whether the EHCP says that a child needs to be at a school that is sufficiently far from their home for them that they have a transport entitlement;
- whether the child has physical or mental health needs which mean that they can't safely walk to school even if the school is nearby; and
- whether the child has needs which mean that they require particular transport arrangements to be put in place for them, e.g. travelling alone or under the care of a passenger assistant;

In such cases the Council will also consider:

- the distance between the child's home and school;
- the nature of the walking route between home and school which is available to the child;
- the nature of the child's **disability special educational needs or mobility problems**

#### **4.8.1 Assessment of eligibility for children with Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCPs)**

In the case of children with EHCPs or who are being assessed for an EHCP, the child's eligibility for free home-school transport will be considered by the appropriate SEN Officer when parents submit a request for home-school transport (this will be via an online application form from January 2020).

Each pupil's particular circumstances will be taken on their merits, following consideration of written evidence from professional sources such as occupational therapists, educational psychologists, pediatricians, GPs, consultants and social workers concerning the type and extent of a child's physical, medical, sensory and developmental difficulties. In cases where it is clear that the child meets the eligibility criteria (i.e. they either attend their nearest suitable school that is located more than the statutory walking distance from their home address or they live within walking distance of their nearest suitable school but qualify for travel support on the basis of their special educational needs, **disability** or mobility problem) and the parent's expressed wish is for travel support to be arranged, the SEN Officer will inform the parent of its decision to provide transport and appropriate transport arrangements will be made by the school transport team.

In such cases, consideration will also be given to:

- (i) what the appropriate form of transport should be in view of the child's circumstances; and
- (ii) the appropriateness of whether a passenger transport assistant should be provided

Adopting a triage approach to risk assessment will ensure that the core transport arrangements put in place will be sufficient for the vast majority of children accessing the school transport service. More child specific risk assessments will be required for a minority of children with more complex needs.

### **5. Independent Travel Training for children with EHCPs**

A key aim in determining travel assistance is to support the general objective to increase the

independence of the child and that support will be reviewed on a periodic basis. Such reviews will consider whether the pupil still requires travel assistance and, if so, whether existing transport arrangements remains appropriate in light of their age, development and increasing independence.

Northumberland County Council promotes independent travel to support young people in the transition from using a taxi to using public transport. In partnership with schools, colleges and training providers, it works to support those young people who have the potential to gain personally from focused support to prepare and equip themselves in their everyday life, including how to get to and from school or college.

The provision of Independent Travel Training (ITT) will enable young people to travel independently between home and school or college utilising public transport when appropriate. ITT helps to provide young people with the skills they need to travel independently. Independent travel is a crucial life skill that helps to give a young person the freedom to fulfill their potential and live a full life. Travel training has been shown to have positive effects on the lives of young people who are trained as well as those around them. Successful travel training, for example can enable families to do more things, both as a family as well as providing more time for separate activities. Travel training is a very important skill for life. Being able to travel with less support allows the trainee to do more social and educational activities and helps them to maintain better relationships. Independent travel skills also help to open up employment opportunities after leaving school. This all contributes to a more fulfilled life.

During the review process for those young people who have an EHCP and who have the potential to benefit from ITT, independent travel will be discussed. If appropriate, an individual travel support plan will be drawn up so that the young person can receive further support to prepare them for independent travel when they start their new school/college.

On a related matter, the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) entitles passholders who include people with a disability and resident in England to free off-peak travel on local bus services throughout England. Further details on eligibility criteria and how to apply for a disabled person's bus pass are available via [concessionary travel for disabled people](#)

## **6. Parental preference for a school**

The general policy of the Council towards parents who express a preference for a place at a school other than their child's **catchment** area school is that the parent, in exercising such a preference, becomes wholly responsible for making home-school transport arrangements, unless the preferred school is closest to the home address as measured by the County Council's approved GIS system. The same applies to children who have EHCPs, including those who attend special schools as well as children with **special educational needs**, a

mobility problem or a **disability** but not an EHCP. Parents should be aware that transport will only be provided to a preferred school if that school is the nearest school to where they live which can meet any special needs which they have, and is beyond the statutory walking distance. Information on school **catchment** areas can be found on the [school admissions webpage](#)

In the case of a pupil with a EHCP, if the parents' preferred choice of school is further away from the child's home than another school that can meet the child's **special educational needs**, the Local Authority may agree to name the preferred school on condition that the parent agrees to take full responsibility for getting their child to and from school and for paying any costs that arise as a consequence of doing so for the entire time their child is at that school. In such cases the Council will name two schools in the EHCP - the nearer school and the parents' preferred choice of school - that are able to meet the child's needs.

## **7. Pupils not educated in a mainstream school**

Children of statutory school age who are temporarily unable to attend school may need alternative education programmes arranged for them through approved alternative providers. Transport requests for children on such programmes are made on behalf of the children via the Council's Inclusion Team. Children attending alternative educational provision have the same entitlement to home to school transport as any other pupil within the education system.

## **8. Looked After Children & Children from Armed Forces Families**

Arrangements for children who have been placed with foster carers may differ slightly, as the school attended by the child may be set by the Local Authority, which would make that school the nearest qualifying school. Whilst Northumberland County Council is clear that this policy applies to all Looked After Children, it will take account of the particular circumstances of Looked After Children. Foster carers are advised to agree arrangements for the provision of transport to and from school with the child's social worker prior to placement.

Northumberland County Council signed the Armed Forces Covenant in 2012. It is a commitment that those who serve in the Armed Forces, whether regular or reserve, those who have served in the past, and their families, should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public and commercial services. Whilst Northumberland County Council is clear that this policy applies to all children from armed forces backgrounds, it will give special consideration in some cases where it is appropriate.

## **9. Out of county placements**

Taking into account their particular needs, it may be appropriate in some cases for a child to be placed in an educational provision outside of Northumberland. In such cases, appropriate transport arrangements will be put in place following discussion with parents/carers and the Council's **Special Educational Needs & Disabilities** Team. Children attending school on a daily basis will have home-school transport provided in accordance with the programme of attendance drawn up by the school concerned in consultation with the parent and the County Council. There will also be cases where a child will qualify for free transport support to a school located in a neighbouring local authority area on the basis that it is the nearest school to their home address.

## **10. Pupils placed in residential provision**

The general principles set out above also apply where the Council places a pupil in a residential school. The Council will provide transport to and from school if the pupil's needs are so significant and complex that it would compromise his or her health or safety to travel by public transport or the journey by public transport is so complex that it would not be reasonable to expect the pupil to undertake it accompanied by the parent if necessary. In exceptional circumstances, when no other suitable transport exists, parents / carers may be asked to transport their child in their own car. Where a parent consents to such an arrangement, they will be paid a travel allowance as a contribution to the costs incurred.

The Council will provide assistance with travel at the beginning and end of the week for weekly boarders and at the beginning and end of each half-term / term for half-termly / termly boarders.

## **11. Post-16 students**

Transport for Post 16 students is provided via a separate policy. The Post 16 transport policy can be found at [school transport webpage](#). Students should familiarise themselves with the policy prior to enrolling on courses as they may not be eligible for travel support and a non-refundable £50 administration is payable at the point of application unless the student is from a low income background.

## **12. Exceptional arrangements**

In exceptional circumstances, transport may be provided for other reasons such as a family placed in emergency accommodation following being made homeless, domestic abuse, or a parental **disability** or medical issue. Each individual request for transport assistance will be considered on its own merit and Northumberland County Council may, at its sole discretion, provide transport, without charge, for children falling outside the general policy. The County Council will seek on all occasions to take decisions that are in accordance with the relevant

legislation, which constitute a reasonable response to the circumstances that pertain, and which take account of the resources that are available.

Any requests for transport within this category must be made in writing either by email or letter to the Passenger Transport Manager, Local Services, County Hall, Morpeth. NE61 2EF or email [schooltransport@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:schooltransport@northumberland.gov.uk). Children granted transport on the grounds of exceptional circumstances will have their entitlement regularly reviewed as appropriate, e.g., short term medical needs will be reviewed on a frequent basis.

For the avoidance of doubt, the County Council will **not** provide transport for pupils: -

- To enable attendance at assessment days;
- To attend medical appointments (such as dental, hospital or General Practitioner appointments) More information on help available for low income families is provided via [HTCS](#);
- For off-site educational visits, placements, etc. - nothing other than transport at the normal start and finish time of the school day;
- Home from after school activities/clubs;
- Or reimburse any costs incurred before an eligible application for transport is made to the Council and a reasonable time period (usually 10 working days) has elapsed to allow for an assessment of the application and implementation of travel arrangements.

In addition the County Council will not fund additional journeys or fund any extra routes which are undertaken by contracted transport providers following requests by parents/carers without the prior approval of the County Council.

### **13. Concessionary travel**

Spare seats may be available for purchase in return for a concessionary fare on contracted home to school transport vehicles. Parents are advised that there are not always spare seats available and that they can be withdrawn should that seat be needed for a child entitled to free school transport. A child can also be displaced if it becomes necessary to reorganise a route or hire a smaller vehicle. In cases where a place needs to be withdrawn, refunds will be made on a pro rata basis.

The purchase of spare seats in return for a concessionary fare are subject to places remaining after all free and Post-16 transport applications have been processed. Parents cannot be advised as to whether their child has a place until late-September, at the earliest. It would be wise to make contingency arrangements for the beginning of the school year and never be solely reliant on the availability of a seat for the reasons outlined above. Further details of the concessionary travel scheme can be found via [school transport webpage](#)

### **14. Transport provision during the school day**

Travel arrangements will not be made by the Council for a child who travels between education

institutions during the school day. Where a child moves from one establishment to another in order to receive education, that cost will fall to the school with which the child is registered.

#### **14.1 Times of operation**

The duty to provide transport only applies to school travel arrangements at times which coincide with the normal start of the school day and school to home transport arrangements at the normal end of the school day. The school day is deemed to be the session times, as approved by the governing body of the **qualifying school**. However, if a school has an earlier finish time one day a week school transport arrangements will normally operate at the times that are in place for the other four days of the school week.

#### **14.2 Type of Travel assistance**

The County Council will determine the most appropriate means of travel support between home and school using the most economic form of transport available, with due regard to the pupil's special needs, health and maturity.

Transport assistance may be by way of:

- walking passenger transport assistant;
- passenger transport assistant on public transport or on contracted school transport;
- independent travel training;
- bus passes or travel cards to travel on public transport. (Bus passes may be usable at other times depending on the policies of the operator);
- contracted transport arranged and funded by the Council through the use of approved and pre-vetted licensed taxi, minibus and coach operators;
- travel allowance or a personal budget may be agreed in exceptional circumstances which will result in parents or carers being paid to transport their child themselves, but only when there is no other suitable transport available.

Where bus passes or season tickets are provided on public transport, it will enable travel between two points with a particular bus company. Home to school transport is only provided on the basis of a child travelling between the family home (or designated pick-up point) and the qualifying school.

Where an entitlement to transport exists and no transport is available, parents who are willing to convey their own children to school may be awarded a travel allowance. Currently, the travel allowance will enable a parent to claim 29 pence a mile for two return journeys a day between home and school. The distance between home and school will be calculated using the Council's current version of its GIS measuring tool.

Very occasionally, the Council is unable to provide transport due to a child's medical condition or behaviour. In these situations, it may be able to offer a parent/carer a Personal Transport Budget (PTB). A PTB is granted entirely at the discretion of the Local Authority and only provided where it is the most cost-effective option for Northumberland County Council to meet its statutory duties. It will therefore not automatically be given and is unlikely to be available where existing suitable transport is in operation locally. The PTB is a payment designed to help parents make any arrangements needed, and can be used in any way to facilitate their child's access to school.

### **14.3 Changes to transport arrangements**

For all pupils, the County Council may decide to vary the provision of transport in order to make effective use of resources. Parents and carers will be given at least one week's notice of any such changes. On other occasions, changes to travel arrangements may need to be made at short notice due to external circumstances.

### **14.4 Nobody at home procedures**

Parent or carers are expected to be at home or at the designated alighting point after school when the operator drops children off. Where a parent or carer of a child of first school age is absent, operators must immediately contact the school transport team and school for further guidance. Every effort will then be made to contact the family and arrange for them to collect their child. If this fails then the child must be re-assured and kept on board the vehicle and never left alone. The operator will then continue with the school transport service so as not to delay the timely arrival home of other children on board the vehicle. Once all other children are dropped off, they should make another attempt to return the child home. If there is still not a responsible adult at home, the operator must seek further advice from the school transport team or the child's school. As a last resort, the Children's Services Duty Social Worker may need to be contacted and the child may need to be taken to the nearest social services office that is open or police station. If a parent or carer regularly failed to be available to collect their child then the travel assistance offered to their child would be withdrawn. Furthermore, the matter would be referred to the Children's Services Duty Social Worker.

## **15. Journey Time Guidance**

The County Council will make every effort to ensure that a child's home to school journey to an appropriate school is not too long. In general, the following maximum journey times apply:

- 90 minutes per day for first, middle and primary school age pupils (4-13)
- 150 minutes per day for high and secondary school age pupils (11-16)

These times may be extended in some exceptional circumstances but the County Council will



make every reasonable effort to arrange transport within these times.

Children should be at pick-up points in the morning at least 5 minutes before pick-up times.

Every effort is made to ensure that waiting times on school premises are kept to the minimum. Waiting times should normally be no longer than 15 minutes.

## **16 Carriage of Wheelchairs**

The Council is concerned to ensure the health & safety of children who are transported in wheelchairs. It will take steps to ensure that its contractors deploy drivers and, where necessary, passenger assistants on its school transport contracts that know how to correctly secure wheelchair passengers in their vehicles and operate any specialist equipment including ramps and passenger lifts. Monitoring exercises will be undertaken on transport providers to ensure wheelchair passengers are transported safely.

Seat belts will be fitted and must be worn by pupils. Failure to do so will result in the pupil's place in the vehicle being suspended until they agree to put the seatbelt on. Parents must supply and fit car seats or booster seats for their children in the vehicle if they are not required by law. Specialist child passenger harnesses (e.g. Crellings) will be fitted by the contractor's staff where a risk assessment identifies the need to fit one for a pupil. Where fitted on vehicles, childproof locks will be secured during the journey.

## **17 Drivers and Passenger Transport Assistants**

The safety and welfare of pupils is the Council's first priority. Where the Council has decided to provide transport it will also, where considered necessary following risk assessment, provide a passenger assistant to supervise the pupil's journey. However, it is not normally the case that passenger assistants are provided on vehicles that transport children to mainstream schools (the usual exception to this is to care for a child with medical needs). Where provided, the same driver and passenger assistant will be used on each route serving a special school as much as possible. The presence or otherwise of one or more passenger assistants will be dependent upon a number of factors, including the number of pupils being transported, their age and their needs.

### **17.1 Briefing & training of contractor staff**

The Council will ensure that contract personnel (drivers and passenger assistants) receive appropriate briefing on a pupil's needs. More specifically, they will be provided with relevant information contained in a child's EHCP, information provided by their parent/carer via the transport application form as well as by teaching staff at the child's school to ensure the school transport service is delivered safely and appropriately. This information will relate to the child's

needs as well as steps that need to be taken to ensure they are taken into account when putting travel support in place.

The Council will ensure that all frontline staff, including drivers and passenger assistants, receive appropriate training. They are required to attend a rolling programme of briefing sessions organised by the County Council which will also cover child safeguarding. For frontline staff deployed on contracts involving the deployment of wheelchair accessible vehicles, moving and handling training as well as training on how to correctly load and secure a wheelchair and apply a passenger restraint will be compulsory. Another mandatory requirement is to attend emergency CPR first aid and anaphylaxis awareness training.

For drivers and passenger assistants transporting children with **special educational needs, disabilities** and **mobility problems**, disability awareness training will be provided. Arrangements will also be made for such staff to be briefed on the needs of the children they transport by a school's Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) or other appropriate staff. More child-specific training (which can involve the administration of rescue medication) is also provided to ensure a passenger assistant is able to discharge their duty of care to children with a diagnosis of epilepsy and/or diabetes. In such cases, parental consent is sought first before any training/briefing is arranged. Other more bespoke training is provided as and when required, e.g. Managing Challenging Behaviour for frontline staff.

When transport is arranged by the County Council, the contractor will ensure that their drivers and (where deployed) passenger assistants:

- are in receipt of satisfactory enhanced Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) checks;
- are trained in how to evacuate the vehicle taking into account the needs of the passengers;
- carry visible photographic identification;
- are aware of each child's details (nature of their special educational needs and any special requirements) and emergency contact information for every child (required for children with special needs);
- do not eat, smoke, or drink alcoholic beverages on the vehicle or in the presence of pupils. They will not offer food or drink to pupils and pupils should not offer food or drink to each other. If they are observed doing so, the transport staff will take steps to stop it happening;
- pay particular attention to seating arrangements of himself/herself and pupils on the transport as agreed with the Council and the school that the pupils attend. The seating plan will take into account the needs of the pupils;
- are courteous and polite to pupils, parent/carers and school staff.

## 18 School Transport in Adverse Weather

During periods of adverse weather, some or all school transport services may not operate, or alternatively operate a curtailed service depending upon local road conditions.

Decisions to cancel or amend school transport services are taken in the interests of the safety and welfare of pupils, school transport drivers and other road users. These decisions are taken by transport providers in liaison with schools, as the parties most aware of local weather and road conditions.

### **18.1 Cancellation of services**

Any decision to cancel or amend the operation of some or all school transport services to an education establishment will be made by the transport provider following consultation with the head teacher or his/her deputy and the school transport team and will have regard to the prevailing and forecast weather and road conditions along with any advice from Northumbria Police and/or any other appropriate agency.

In the event of the journey to school being cancelled by the transport provider on the grounds of adverse weather conditions, the operator will not be responsible for conveying pupils home in the afternoon. In such circumstances, parents of pupils who normally travel on school transport are asked not to bring their children to school themselves.

Should parents ignore this advice and, at their own risk, choose to bring their children to school, then the parents become responsible for conveying their children home again at the end of the school day, or earlier, if it becomes necessary to send all pupils home and close the school due to worsening weather conditions.

There may also be relevant announcements on local radio.

Information will be posted on the council's school closure web page which can be accessed at [Important Alerts & Reminders](#) as well as its facebook and twitter sites. However, it is not always possible to alert parents of service cancellations or route variations in a timely manner, depending upon developing localised weather conditions. As such pupils should wait no longer than 20 minutes at the designated pick-up point, and, if no school transport vehicle arrives, then return home or follow the instructions given by their parent or carer regarding the situation.

It is clearly important that parents/guardians retain a means of communication with their children should the school transport service not operate, and it must be stressed that the responsibility for the safety and welfare of children prior to boarding the school transport service remains with the parent or carer.

### **18.2 Early closure of schools**

Should weather conditions deteriorate significantly during the course of the school day, the head teacher or their deputy may decide to close the school to all pupils or to those who travel

by school transport. In such circumstances, transport providers are required to provide the necessary vehicles to transport the pupils home at the earliest opportunity.

### **18.3 Winter treatment of school transport routes**

Winter maintenance of school transport routes is primarily dependant upon the priority category of the various roads used. As school transport services travel on roads throughout Northumberland, there is no guarantee that winter maintenance treatment will be possible in the case of individual school transport services. Priority 1 routes include A class roads and other busy roads linking communities. Gritting and snow clearing on all other roads can only commence once these primary routes have been treated.

### **18.4 Connecting or “Feeder” transport**

Where connecting transport arrangements have been put in place, it is the responsibility of the operator of both the connecting and mainline service to advise the other should their element of the service require to be withdrawn or amended. Should either vehicle be delayed or fail to reach the connecting point, at no time should a pupil be allowed to leave the vehicle and be left unattended.

### **18.5 Public transport buses**

Some school pupils and college students travel to their educational establishment on season tickets by means of the public transport network. Their parents/carers will need to contact the public transport providers to find out about any disruption to their services. Please visit the [school transport webpage](#) for further information and links to the websites of the major providers of public bus services in Northumberland.

## **19 Behaviour on School Transport**

Parents and children themselves are responsible for their behaviour on transport.

It is expected that each school will promote appropriate standards of behaviour by children on their journey to and from school. Legislation empowers head teachers to take action (including exclusion from school transport) to address unacceptable behaviour even though it takes place outside the school premises.

Parents are required to confirm that they will make every effort to ensure their child behaves appropriately if they are awarded free transport following submission of an application for school transport. A leaflet outlining how pupils are expected to behave on home to school transport is issued to parents before places on transport are first allocated. Where a safety issue has been brought to the attention of the school, then the school must, in law, deal with it. Failure to do this would be negligent. For example, if a parent informed a school that children were regularly fighting on the journey and distracting the driver from their important task of

driving safely and that this was happening once the vehicle left the school, the school must then take some action. For example, they must warn parents of the problem.

### **19.1 Withdrawal of School Transport**

Children who misbehave on school transport may have their entitlement/travel pass removed from them. The withdrawal of the pass may be either temporary or permanent.

Depending on the nature of the first offence, a parent may receive an initial “warning” letter informing them of the misbehaviour of their child and reminding them of the standards of behaviour that children should display when accessing the school transport service. A further instance of misbehaviour is likely to result in a “final warning” letter being sent to their parent/carer advising them that their child will be excluded from using the school transport service should they continue to misbehave. For more serious offences, exclusion from school transport may be immediate.

Temporary withdrawal of transport will be for a specified number of weeks whilst permanent withdrawal will mean exclusion for the remainder of the period that the child is in attendance at the school.

The withdrawal of transport, either temporary or permanent, shall not imply that travel arrangements were not necessary and should not be provided, but rather that the arrangements were necessary and had been made, but the child’s behaviour was such that they cannot take advantage of it.

In such circumstances, the parent will need to arrange and pay for their own transport in order to meet their duty to ensure that their child continues to attend school

### **20 Appeals Review Procedure**

If a parent/carer is refused transport assistance for their child following an application they will be sent a letter advising them of the reason for the refusal. They have the right to ask for a review of this decision. The review process is a two stage procedure.

At Stage One, parents can challenge a decision about:

- Their child’s eligibility
- The distance measurement in relation to statutory walking distances; or
- The safety of the route

In cases where the provision of travel support has been agreed by the County Council, parents also have the right to ask for a review of the transport arrangements offered.

Parents/carers must set out clearly, in writing, why they believe that the County Council should

reconsider their decision, enclosing any relevant information that may support their case. They may only request a review based upon their child's or their family's personal circumstances or the application of the Home to School Travel and Transport Policy but not about the policy itself. If a parent/carer wishes to contest the actual wording in the policy they should follow the complaints process as outlined in para 21 below.

A review of a parent's/carer's case will not be triggered or undertaken over the phone as it must be submitted either by letter or email. A parent/carer should write setting out their reasons to the Passenger Transport Manager, County Hall, Morpeth NE61 2EF within 20 working days of the date on the email advising them that they have been refused support or email: [schooltransportappeals@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:schooltransportappeals@northumberland.gov.uk). They will be advised of the outcome of the review in writing within 20 working days of the receipt of their correspondence.

If a Stage One appeal is unsuccessful a parent/carer can seek a Stage Two appeal. Details of how this process will work will be enclosed with the decision letter if the Stage One appeal confirms the original decision. A parent's or carer's case will be put before a panel for their consideration. The panel members are independent and impartial, i.e. they will not have previously been involved in considering the matter. They will not consider your application without the submission of relevant supporting information.

A parent/carer should submit their appeal form within 20 working days of receipt of the Stage One written decision notification. They will receive correspondence confirming that their appeal form has been received and advising them of the appeal date (which will be within 40 working days of receipt of a written request for a Stage Two appeal). Whilst a parent does not attend the hearing itself a parent can make verbal representation of their case to the chair of the Appeal Panel. A letter outlining the outcome of the Panel's decision will be sent to the parent/carer within 5 working days of the appeal.

If the parent/carer win their review, then their child will be allocated transport within 10 working days following the date of the panel hearing. They will not be entitled to claim a refund on transport costs incurred before the date when their request for a panel review was received. If they lose their review, they will not be able to appeal again. If there have been significant and material changes in their circumstances that require a new decision, then a parent/carer may make a separate application to the Council.

Further information and guidance in relation to the Council's school transport appeals process can be found via the [school transport webpage](#)

## **21 Complaints Procedure**

A school transport complaint is a complaint about how the local authority has carried out (or

failed to carry out) its transport responsibilities in relation to children and young people attending a mainstream or special school, alternative provision or further education college. It can also include the way a Stage One Appeal and Stage Two Review was undertaken. It can be made by a parent/carer of a child who is, or will be, 4-16 years old at the relevant time. Any such complaints should be submitted to the Council under our Complaints Procedure which can be accessed via [Make a Complaint](#). However, any complaint solely about the outcome of the review will not be considered under this procedure, i.e. a parent/carer can only complain about how the appeal was handled.

Complaints and appeals must first be taken up with the local authority and their appeals process and/or complaints process must be fully exhausted before a parent/carer considers contacting the Local Government Ombudsman (LGO). The LGO is an independent organisation that looks into complaints against councils. A complaint to the Ombudsman is justified where there is a “failure to comply with procedural rules or if there are any other irregularities in the way the appeal has been handled”.

Further information can be found at [Local Government Ombudsman/](#). Any complaint should outline the case, set out the decision taken by the local authority and include any other relevant documentation, for example any advice or decisions from the LGO where appropriate.

**22 Further information** For further information in relation to this policy please contact the School Transport Team tel 0345 600 6400 and ask for the Passenger Transport Manager (school transport) or visit the [school transport webpage](#)

### **23 Contact details for the School Transport Team**

The school transport team can be contacted by telephone 0345 600 6400 (Contact Centre) or 01670 624839 (Direct Line) or by email:

[schooltransport@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:schooltransport@northumberland.gov.uk) for issues/enquiries relating to transport to mainstream schools &

[SEN.Transport@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:SEN.Transport@northumberland.gov.uk) for issues/enquiries relating to transport to special schools

### **24 School transport application process**

A parent/carer can submit an application via [pre-16 school transport application \(for children attending mainstream schools only\)](#)

A parent/carer can submit an application via [pre-16 school transport application \(for children with EHCPs attending either a special school or a mainstream school\)](#)

## **25 Replacing lost or damaged bus passes**

If your child has lost or damaged their bus pass you will have to replace it at your own cost. If it is a bus pass produced by Northumberland County Council, please call our contact centre on 0345 600 6400.

For passes issued for travel on Arriva contact the business administration team at Arriva on 0191 520 4144 and for Go North East passes contact Go North East Customer Services on 0191 420 5050

## **26 Glossary**

### ***Academic year:***

Is defined by The School Information(England) Regulations 2008 as a period commencing with 1st August and ending with the next 31st July.

### ***Available route:***



A route will be “available” if it is a route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, can walk with reasonable safety to school.

***Compulsory school age:***

A child becomes of **compulsory school age** at the beginning of the term following the term in which their fifth birthday falls. For the purposes of this definition, the Autumn Term is defined as 1 September to 31 December inclusive, the Spring Term as 1 January to 31 March inclusive and the Summer Term as 1 April to 31 August inclusive. **Compulsory school age** ceases on the last Friday in June in the school year in which the child reaches the age of 16.

***Catchment area:***

May be referred to as the designated area, means the geographical area from which a school will expect to take children. All Northumberland schools, except Roman Catholic Schools, have a **catchment area**. Children attending a school outside their catchment area will not normally receive free transport. If there is a difference between a school’s or academy’s version of a **catchment area** and the Council’s version, then for the purposes of this policy the Council’s version shall be applied. The Council’s school catchment area map can be found [here](#)

***Categories of eligible children;***

There are four categories of eligible children; (i) children who attend their nearest appropriate school which is located beyond the statutory walking distance (ii) children with special educational needs, a disability or a mobility problem where they cannot reasonably be expected to walk to their nearest appropriate school (iii) children who live within the statutory walking distance of their nearest appropriate school but the walking route is deemed unsafe to walk by the Local Authority & (iv) children qualifying for free school meals or whose parents/carers receive Working Tax Credit at the maximum rate and meet the eligibility criteria contained in Extended Rights to Transport Legislation.

***Defined walking distance:***

Either two miles (if the child is under 8 years old), or three miles (if the child is 8 years old or older, though the two mile threshold is extended until a child finishes Y4 in Northumberland). This is measured by the “nearest **available route**”. The route is not necessarily the shortest distance by road. It is measured by the shortest route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, may walk with reasonable safety.

***Disability***

A person has a disability if they have (a) a physical impairment and (b) that impairment has a substantial and long-term effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities. A chronic health condition may constitute a disability.

***Definition of age 8:***

A child will be considered to be aged 8 or over in the academic year following that in which they actually attain the age of 8.

***Low Income eligibility assessment:***

HM Revenue and Customs issue a “tax credits award notice” detailing the breakdown and amount of the award. Part two of the award notice gives details of “How we work out your tax credits” including details of the full WTC elements. This is the maximum amount a customer can receive in **WTC** in any year. It then lists “any reduction due to your income” and shows the net amount payable. Free transport under the extended provisions will be allocated according to this figure.

You will need to be able to prove that you are eligible for either free school meals or working tax credit by submitting the relevant documentation.

***Mobility problems***

A mobility problem includes children with temporary or less severe medical conditions which are not a disability under the Equality Act 2010.

***Religion or belief:***

The definition of “religion” includes those religions widely recognised in this country such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Rastafarianism, Baha’i, Zoroastrianism and Jainism faiths.

Denominations or sects within a religion can be considered as a religion or religious belief, such as Catholicism or Protestantism within Christianity. The main limitation on what constitutes a “religion” is that it must have a clear structure and belief system.

For a “belief” to be worthy of protection, it must be worthy of respect in a democratic society; and not be incompatible with human dignity or the fundamental rights of the child. Examples of beliefs that are protected are Humanism and Atheism.

Travel arrangements may be allocated for attendance at a school on non-denominational grounds where the catchment school is a voluntary aided faith school.

***Qualifying school:***

These are community, foundation or voluntary schools; community or foundation special schools; non-maintained special schools; pupil referral units; maintained nursery schools or city technology colleges (CTC), city colleges for the technology of the arts (CCTA) or academies, including free schools and University Technical Colleges (UTC).

***Special educational needs***

A child or young person has special educational needs if her or she has a learning difficulty or

disability which calls for special educational provision to be made to him or her.

***Working Tax Credit (WTC):***

It is a state benefit in the United Kingdom made to people who work and have a low income. It is gradually being phased out as claimants are transferred onto Universal Credit.