Home to School Transport - Children with Additional Needs

Information on Service Standards

Introduction

The aim of the service is to provide an efficient and reliable service for children who receive home to school transport because of their additional needs. We rely on the close cooperation of parents and carers with staff in Pupil and Parent Services, who administer all applications and appeals for transport and the council’s Central Transport Unit, who organise the transport on a day-to-day basis, to deliver the service.

The guidance below is for parents, schools and transport operators. It gives the minimum standard of service that should be provided.

Pupil and Parent Services

Pupil and Parent Services are part of the Council’s Learning and Children Group. The team is based at Gateshead Civic Centre and they administer applications and the appeals process should a request for assistance be refused. They can be contacted at the address below:

Gateshead Civic Centre
Regent Street
Gateshead
NE8 1HH
Telephone: 0191 433 3626

Central Transport Unit

The Central Transport Unit is part of the Council’s Local Environmental Services Group. The team is based at the Park Road depot and they arrange the transport for children on a daily basis once applications are approved. They can be contacted on 0191 433 7474 or 0191 433 7473.

Office hours for both teams are Monday - Thursday 8.00-5pm & Friday 8.00 to 4.30pm.

Staff in both teams aim to assist with enquiries; provide advice; explain procedures; and undertake risk assessments

The Central Transport team will obtain quotes from contractors and undertake regular on-site monitoring checks of contractors to ensure they are complying with their contracts.
Entitlement

Children with additional needs may be assisted with transport to and from their school but this is not an automatic right. Entitlement is explained in the Council’s Policy for Home to School Transport which can be found on the Council’s website at the following address:


A copy of the policy is also available from Pupil and Parent Services.

Application for Assistance with Home to School Transport

Parents and carers have to apply for transport by completing an application form and returning it to:

Pupil and Parent Services
Gateshead Civic Centre
Regent Street
Gateshead
NE8 1HH
0191 433 3626

Where possible decisions on transport applications are made in 10 working days. Assistance for your child may be through provision of a place in a taxi or mini-bus or by issuing a free bus pass. Where a bus pass is awarded a current passport size photograph will need to be provided.


Appeals

If an application for assistance with transport is turned down then parents and carers may appeal in writing to Pupil and Parent Services at the Civic Centre stating why they disagree with the decision to refuse assistance. The Director of Children’s Services or their nominee deals with all appeals. These decisions are where possible, made within ten working days of receipt of the appeal by Pupil and Parent Services.

The Director’s decision is final.

Health and Safety

The Additional Needs Transport Team has developed a risk assessment document in conjunction with the Health and Safety section of the council. This sets out a series of identified potential risks and control measures put in place to minimise the risk while transporting pupils. Risk assessments will normally be based on the information provided by parents/carers on the transport application form. Exceptionally, in order to ensure that the risk assessment is sufficiently thorough, parents/carers may be asked to supply further information or to become more directly involved in the process.

Information and Responsibilities of Parents and Carers

Parents and carers have an important role to play in the delivery of this service. They can assist Pupil and Parent Services officers and contractors by:
• Providing Pupil and Parent Services with as much information as possible regarding the transport of their child. For example, medical conditions; make, model and size of wheelchair; type of appropriate car seat to be used.
• Ensuring children are ready to be collected in the morning. Any delay can cause parents of other children on the route unnecessary concern.
• Taking children to the vehicle. Please note escorts and drivers are expected to remain with the vehicle, particularly if there are any children already on it.
• Ensuring a responsible adult collects children from the vehicle on their return home. Drivers cannot wait for parents and carers as they often have other duties to fulfil and other families may be inconvenienced. If no one appears to collect a child after a maximum five minutes contractors are instructed to complete the remainder of the journey and then, if there is still nobody available, take the child to the duty social workers at Gateshead Civic Centre. (Telephone 0191 433 3000)
• If there is a problem on a particular morning, contact the contractor on the number provided and ring the Central Transport Unit on 0191 433 7473 or 0191 433 7474.
• Provide the Central Transport Unit with the name, address and contact telephone numbers of a responsible adult who may be available for your child to be collected from/dropped off at in the event of an emergency.
• Ensuring that, if children are provided with a bus pass, they always have their pass with them when using public transport.

Behaviour of Children

Ultimately the behaviour of children on Home to School Transport is the responsibility of parents and carers.

While everything reasonable will be done to resolve problems, transport may be withdrawn if a child’s behaviour is unacceptable and is a danger to those travelling on the transport and other road users. Where transport has been withdrawn due to behaviour the council is not obliged to provide alternative transport and does not remove the requirement for the child to attend school.

Continuity of Service

Most contracts have been established for a two-year period from September 2010 (with an option to extend for a further 12 months) to promote continuity of service, as much as possible. Contracts will, in future, continue to be arranged in this way.

We expect the contractor to endeavour to use the same drivers and escorts to promote consistency where possible. However, there may be occasions where this is not possible should staff be on leave, unwell or resign from their position.

The Central Transport Unit will endeavour to minimise changes in transport arrangements for individual children. However, they may arrange for children to be added to or removed from a contract dependent on the circumstances and the availability of space. This is to ensure the Council uses its resources in the most effective and efficient way. It may mean a change in the collection and drop off time of a child but this is essential to ensure resources are used properly.
Where new arrangements for transport of a child are required, the child will, if possible, be added to an existing contract. If there is no space available on an existing contract, quotes for a new contract will be required from operators before the contract is awarded. This may take several days.

The Central Transport Unit will try to accommodate family needs as far as possible but the timetabling of transport cannot always be arranged to fit in with parents or carers domestic arrangements.

**Provision of Escorts**

Where it is judged necessary by transport staff following a risk assessment, contractors providing the service will be required to provide an escort to accompany children for the duration of their journey.

**Role of the Driver and Escort**

All Escorts on home to school transport contracts for children with additional needs must be aged over 18 and employed by operators contracted to provide the service on behalf of the Council.

All drivers and escorts undergo a Criminal Records Bureau check.

Their role is to:

- supervise, maintain proper standards of behaviour and ensure the safety of passengers being transported to and from establishments on the contract vehicle.
- travel on the vehicle with the passengers throughout the whole length of the journey from the first appointed pick-up point until the last passenger has safely left the vehicle.
- ensure passengers are seated and well behaved, gangways are kept clear, and the driver is not distracted during the journey.
- supervise and assist passengers to board and alight from the vehicle at the points identified; this may involve assistance with lifting in certain instances. No passenger should enter or leave moving transport.
- ensure that passengers on the vehicle are never left unsupervised.
- ensure, where necessary, that children are supervised by a responsible adult when crossing a road to their home or establishment.
- supervise passengers safely in the mornings from the vehicle to the establishment to be met by a responsible adult.
- collect passengers in the afternoon from the establishment and escort them safely onto the waiting vehicle.

Drivers and escorts do not administer punishment but try to resolve any troublesome situation as effectively as possible and report any incident, accident or misbehaviour to the head teacher, parents and the authorised officer who will agree on any further action.

Drivers and escorts must ensure the completion of the journey for all the children in their care.

Drivers and escorts must secure all passengers with the appropriate harnesses and seat belts. They must also ensure wheelchairs are secured in the restraining system provided in the vehicle.
Drivers and escorts must not smoke on the vehicle during the transportation of pupils and must at all times conduct themselves appropriately with regard to their language and appearance.

**Comments, Complaints and Compliments**

Any comments, complaints and compliments regarding the application/appeals process can be made by contacting Pupil and Parent Services on 0191 433 3626.

Any comments, complaints and compliments on the delivery of the Home to School Transport service can be made by contacting the Central Transport Unit on 0191 433 7473 and 0191 433 7474.

Information about the Council’s Complaints and Compliments procedures can be obtained by contacting the relevant department listed above or via email to the Gateshead Council’s on Haveyoursay@gateshead.gov.uk or via the online ‘Have Your Say’ form on the Gateshead Council website www.gateshead.gov.uk