

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Travel Assistance Policy for Looked After Children and Young People

July 2017

Overview

- Looked after children and young people will, as far as possible, share the normal expectations and day to day experiences of all children
- Wherever possible children and young people who live close to their school should travel in the same way as their peers by:
 - Being walked to school by their carer; or
 - Walking alone if they are of an appropriate age and can do so safely; or
 - Being driven by their carer and dropped off
- Children and young people who live further away from their school but live in the Borough should also travel in the same way as their peers where possible by:
 - Being driven there by their carer and dropped off; or
 - Reaching school by public transport if they are of an appropriate age and can do so safely
- Where possible the disruption of schooling due to changes in care placements, should be avoided. Where necessary, this should be timed to take place when less disruptive to schooling
- The onus will be on foster carers to provide transport wherever possible
- Independent travel will be promoted and encouraged as soon as practicable for the individual
- Use of taxis will only be approved in exceptional circumstances and where it is deemed necessary to keep children and young people safe

1 Introduction

1.1 Southend-on-Sea Borough Council (SBC) has a duty to provide travel assistance to meet the needs of all Children and Young People under its care.

1.2 This policy details the travel assistance procedures for Looked After Children and Young People including those under foster care and residential care.

1.3 This policy has been developed to ensure the safe and efficient provision of transport for Looked After Children and Young People between home, school, leisure and contact.

2 Transport Policy Principles

2.1 As a Corporate Parent, SBC has a responsibility to meet the care and development needs of its children. As with other children, Looked After Children and Young People can require travel assistance for a wide variety of reasons.

2.2 It is important that in meeting these needs, Looked After Children and Young People are (as much as possible) provided for in the same way as other children and

that different levels of self-reliance and independence are recognised, encouraged and catered for.

2.3 SBC should ensure that the stability and continuity of care and education, is promoted, in the interests of maximising life chances.

2.4 Where possible the disruption of schooling due to changes in care placements, should be avoided. Where necessary, this should be timed to take place when less disruptive to schooling (unless an emergency placement is required, for example, if there are Child Protection concerns or the breakdown of a placement).

2.5 Travel assistance may be provided to facilitate continuity of schooling from a new care placement until an appropriate school transfer point is reached. Education stability is crucial and therefore the child should (where possible) continue their education in their current school.

2.6 In the same way, it is essential that Looked After Children and Young People should be provided with travel assistance to enable them to have contact with their birth families or significant others, at a frequency usually set by the court and detailed in their care plan.

3 Home to School Travel Assistance

3.1 Nursery, Reception and Key Stage 1 – children should stay at the setting that they were at prior to becoming looked after (unless in exceptional circumstances). The child should go to the school that is local, as far as possible, to their placement unless the placement is short term or until a permanency plan is implemented. As a matter of principle, the Council would expect carers to make their own arrangements to get the child to school with the Council paying the return mileage for the journey. Young looked after children should not be transported in taxis on a daily basis.

3.2 Key Stage 2 – the presumption is that children stay at the setting that they were at prior to becoming looked after (unless in exceptional circumstances). The Council would expect carers to make their own arrangements to get the child to school and the Council will pay the return mileage for the journey, or accompany them to use public transport as appropriate. Changes to a school place will only be considered in the child's best interests at the point at which the permanency plan is due to be implemented or where the distance travelled is excessive.

3.3 Key Stage 3 – The first presumption would be that children and young people will walk or use public transport with a Council-funded travel pass. The second presumption would be for the carer to ensure they get to school with the Council paying the return mileage for the journey. If that is not viable, or if the placement is short term (until a permanency plan is implemented), then using a taxi may be justified, or, if the child/young person needs transport to be provided for their attendance. This decision will be reviewed on a termly basis and consideration given before the summer term to whether a change of school be made for the following year.

3.4 Key Stage 4 – The first presumption should be that the young person takes themselves to school by public transport with a Council-funded travel pass. Any change of school should be minimised during Key Stage 4 and therefore there is a stronger presumption against any change of school. The child's educational placement must be reviewed during the summer term of Year 9 and this review must

include a review of arrangements of getting to school. If that is not viable, or if the placement is short term (until a permanency plan is implemented), then using a taxi may be justified, or, if the child/young person needs transport to be provided for their attendance. This decision will be reviewed on a termly basis and consideration given before the summer term to whether a change of school be made for the following year.

3.5 Home to school travel assistance for Looked After Children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is covered by the Council's Special Educational Needs Travel Assistance Policy

4 Transport Expectations of Foster Carers

4.1 Foster Carers will be expected to undertake 'normal' parental duties, which will include taking a child to school, access to leisure activities and contact.

4.2 There may be practical reasons why it is not possible for the foster carer to provide transport for the child, for example, the foster carer does not drive or does not have access to a car, or they may have foster children from different families. Other exceptional circumstances would include cases where a significant safeguarding risk can be evidenced e.g. transporting a looked after child with challenging behaviour. Every effort should be made, however, to ensure that carers do provide the transport so that foster children do not feel different, for example, by arriving at school in a taxi.

4.3 Foster carers are able to claim all mileage incurred as a direct result of their fostering responsibilities, for example, school transport, transport to & from contact, etc.

5 Travel Assistance for Contact Visits

5.1 Arrangements for contact are facilitated by the Contact Coordinator.

5.2 Contact at a foster carer's home, particularly for babies and younger children, will be encouraged by the Council, where it is safe enough to do so. This will mean less reliance on travel arrangements and children being transported around.

5.3 If it is agreed that contact should take place at a venue other than the foster carer's home, the foster carer should be the first choice for transporting the child to and from the contact venue.

5.4 If the foster carer is unable to transport a child to and from the contact venue, the provision of transport will be a last resort once all other possibilities have been explored.

5.5 Contact travel arrangements are made by the Transport and Contracts Team. For transport to be approved for contact purposes, all of the following criteria must be met:

The Contact Coordinator confirms that:

- the foster carer cannot transport the child to the contact venue **and** cannot act as a passenger assistant; **and**

The Contact Coordinator confirms with the child's social worker that:

- There is no safe and trusted family member to offer transport; **and**
- There is no other staff member able to provide transport (e.g. a social services assistant).

5.6 Requests for transport for contact purposes should incorporate a minimum of three working days' notice, to enable the Council to arrange the most cost effective provision and avoid expensive short-notice arrangements.

5.7 Older children and young people may choose to transport themselves to contact if able and appropriate to do so. For those children and young people who would like to make the journey themselves but might require assistance to do so, further support may be provided via the Council's Independent Travel Training service. Details of how to obtain a bus pass for independent travel can be obtained via the Council.

5.8 Parents will be asked to give written permission for their child/ren to share transport with other looked after children to attend contact as appropriate.

6 Procedure for Arranging Transport for Looked After Children and Young People

6.1 Requests for home to school travel assistance must be fully completed by the child's social worker and be agreed by the Council. Travel arrangements for contact will be requested by the Contact Coordinator. Under no circumstances must a member of children's social care staff other than the Contact Coordinator enter into arranging transport directly with a taxi or transport company, unless the transport is required for out of hours emergency purposes (see Section 7).

6.2 There is no legal duty on the Council to provide passenger assistants for those to whom it provides transport in connection with education or social care services. However, the Council has a duty of care to all those for whom it provides such transport and fulfilling that duty may involve the provision of a passenger assistant. Requests for a passenger assistant must be fully justified by the child's social worker and subject to a risk assessment. The Contact Coordinator will ultimately determine whether a Passenger Assistant is required.

7 Emergency and Out of Hours Transport

7.1 Following agreement by the Council emergency transport can be provided.

7.2 Where transport is required out of hours with little or no notice, then this will be sourced by the Council. This transport must be sourced from the Council's approved transport provider list.

8 Accessing Social Care, including Respite / Short Breaks for Disabled Children

8.1 Certain children with disabilities may have been assessed as having a social care need. This need can include attendance at respite / short breaks provision.

8.2 Travel assistance to social care or similar provision will be provided where it is deemed necessary to meet the child's needs. Where, as a result of an assessment, it is deemed necessary for transport to meet the needs of the child, which will be considered on an individual basis, this will either be organised by the respite provider or the Council. This will be provided free of charge.

8.3 Requests for transport for respite purposes must, wherever possible, incorporate a minimum of three working days' notice, to enable the Council to arrange the most cost effective provision and avoid expensive short-notice arrangements.

9. Resolving Disputes

Where there is an issue regarding responsibility for transporting a looked after child to and from school, contact and social activities, this should be dealt with locally. If however the matter is irresolvable at this level, this should be escalated to the senior manager responsible for the fostering budget.