



REPORT ON THE PROPOSED ASN (ADDITIONAL SUPPORT NEEDS) HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

Report by Chief Officer Education and Children's Services

PURPOSE

- 1.1 This Report provides elected members of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar with an overview of a standalone ASN Home to School Transport Policy and to seek approval for its adoption.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 The Home to School Transport Policy was updated in 2019 and again in 2024. In these updates Section 14 of the 2011 Home to School Transport Policy was excluded and the accompanying report highlighted that Section 14 of the 2011 Home to School Transport Policy remained as the relevant policy guidance for ASN Home to School Transport. The 2024 refresh of the Home to School Transport Policy focused on the entitlement and application process along with clarifying that ASN vehicles are not covered by that policy in terms of "spare places".
- 2.2 If adopted, the attached ASN Home to School Transport Policy would now supersede Section 14 of the 2011 Home to School Transport Policy as the relevant policy guidance for ASN Transport. It would be the standalone policy on the provision of ASN Transport to pupils by the Comhairle. This provides more operational clarity, as the provision of ASN Transport is managed and operated by the Education and Children's Services Department along with the relevant budget.
- 2.3 The Home to School Transport service is operated and managed by the Transportation Section of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar and associated budgets were transferred to the Transportation Committee during the tender exercise for the current school transport contracts. This was to align the operation and budget management of these Home to School Transport contracts. There are now separate policies to cover the operational management of these services along with separate budgets.
- 2.4 The policy has been written to ensure it remains in line with current Scottish legislation, reflects the principles of Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) and promotes the Comhairle's commitment to equity, accessibility and inclusion for children and young people with additional support needs (ASNs).
- 2.5 The policy introduces a clear, equitable and transparent approach to the assessment of ASN transport eligibility across the Western Isles. It sets out criteria, defines responsibilities and incorporates a structured Assessment of Needs Matrix to support decision making for home to school transport provision.
- 2.6 The policy emphasises early planning, personalised assessment and a consistent approach that balances the needs of individual learners with safety, legal requirements and efficient use of resources. It strengthens accountability by setting out procedures for review, for appeals and for the provision of escorts and alternative transport options.



RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that the Comhairle approves the revised ASN Home to School Transport Policy (June 2025) for implementation from the start of the 2025/2026 academic session.

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Appendix:	Appendix A – Home to School Transport Policy June 2025 Appendix B – Home to School Transport Assessment of Needs Matrix Annex 1 – Home to School Transport Service Standards
Background Papers:	ASL Code of Practice 2017; Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC) Guidance; Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC); Education Scotland Act (1980); Education (Additional Support for Learning Act) (Scotland) 2004; Presumption of Mainstreaming (2019)

IMPLICATIONS

4.1 The following implications are applicable in terms of the Report.

Resource Implications	Implications/None
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- while the policy supports better management of existing resources, it may result in additional costs where support is deemed necessary through the matrix assessment.- The policy's emphasis on promoting independence and use of existing transport provision, where appropriate, is expected to support more efficient use of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's transport budget.- Mileage reimbursements may offer cost effective alternatives to bespoke transport arrangements.
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The revised policy ensures compliance with the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 and with the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004.- Use of the assessment of needs matrix allows Comhairle nan Eilean Siar to strengthen its legal defence in the case of challenges or appeals.
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The revised policy may require additional coordination from the ASN transport team. This will be met within existing staffing structures.
Assets and Property	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The policy does not create immediate new demands on Comhairle nan Eilean Siar owned assets. Comhairle nan Eilean Siar will continue to work with internal fleets and external providers to ensure appropriate vehicle availability and maintenance.
Strategic Implications	Implications/None
Risk	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The policy will mitigate the risk of appeals, complaints or legal challenges.- The policy's built-in reviews and proactive planning manage and reduce the risk of transport needs outpacing available resources.
Equalities/Child Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- The policy supports Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's duties under the Equality Act 2010.- The policy is also aligned with the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), particularly the child's right to education (Article 28) and non-discrimination (Article 2).



Corporate Strategy	<p><u>BP2 – 2.1. Attainment rates continuously improve.</u> The policy supports improved attainment - children and young people with additional support needs can access education through removing transport related barriers.</p> <p><u>BP2 – 2.1.2. Early intervention in place to keep our most vulnerable children safe.</u> The policy strengthens early intervention and identifies transport needs at the earliest stage.</p> <p><u>BP3 – 3.1.2. People receive the care and support they need to live healthy and independent lives.</u> The policy contributes to long term well-being and independence for children and young people with additional support needs by promoting access to education and supporting the development of independent travel skills.</p> <p><u>BP3 – 3.1.3. Planning and infrastructure meet the needs of our communities.</u> The policy contributes to a more inclusive infrastructure that reflects the unique geographical challenges of our communities.</p> <p><u>BP3 – 3.1.4. Our communities are safe, inclusive and resilient.</u> The policy promotes inclusion and contributes to building resilient communities where every learner is supported to thrive.</p> <p><u>BP3 – 3.15. Reduce inequality and poverty and promote social mobility.</u> The policy helps reduce inequality by removing transport as a barrier to education for children and young people with additional support needs, supporting social mobility through improved access to learning, participation and future opportunities.</p>
Environmental Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The policy encourages the use of existing school and public transport services wherever appropriate, helping to minimise the environmental footprint of additional or individual transport arrangements. - Comhairle nan Eilean Siar will continue to work with providers to ensure that routes are efficient and that vehicle use is optimised.
Consultation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The development of the ASN Transport Policy has been informed by consultation with key stakeholders including schools, ASN professionals, transport providers and members of the Education and Children's Services Department.

BACKGROUND

- 5.1 Comhairle nan Eilean Siar has a statutory responsibility under the Education Scotland Act (1980) to make suitable travel arrangements for pupils where necessary and, under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, to ensure that children and young people with additional support needs receive the support required to access education. Transport may be considered a form of additional support where the nature of a child or young person's needs prevents them from travelling to school independently or safely.
- 5.2 The Scottish Government's guidance on the Presumption of Mainstreaming (2019) and the GIRFEC (Getting it Right for Every Child) national practice model, help shape the Comhairle's commitment to inclusive education. As such, the provision of equitable and accessible school transport is key in supporting full participation in education for children and young people with ASNs.



- 5.3 To ensure consistency, fairness and legal compliance across the authority, an ASN Home to School Transport Policy has been developed. This includes the introduction of an Assessment of Needs Matrix evaluation tool which provides a structured, evidence led approach could deciding on transport support. The policy also lays out the roles and responsibilities of schools, parents/carers and the ASN transport team, while outlining the procedures for review, appeals and the use of escorts on ASN transport.
- 5.4 This policy has been designed in response to operational needs, feedback from educational establishments and feedback from families across the Western Isles. It aims to ensure equitable access to transport, while maintaining a focus on safe, cost-effective transport provision that is also sustainable.

DETAIL

- 6.1 The ASN Home to School Transport Policy will ensure that the Comhairle delivers equitable, consistent and legally correct support to children and young people with additional support needs. The policy acknowledges that while many learners can travel to school independently or via mainstream provision, others require tailored support to access their education. The policy introduces formal eligibility criteria, strengthens assessment practices and outlines operational responsibilities
- 6.2 A key element of the policy is the introduction of the Assessment of Needs Matrix evaluation tool, a scoring mechanism to ensure decisions are based on clearly evidenced need across six key areas. Each area is assessed using a standardised scale and the cumulative score determines the level and form of transport support that may be provided.
- 6.3 The policy outlines the respective responsibilities of parents/carers, school staff, transport operators and the ASN transport team. It clarifies expectations around punctuality, supervision at handover points, securing of medical equipment and belongings and the sharing of key documentation such as pupil passports or care plans. It also confirms that, at times, escorts may be allocated based on assessed risk, not by default, and only when necessary to ensure safe transport.
- 6.4 While the policy recognises that some learners will always require specialist provision, it also promotes inclusion by encouraging use of existing school transport where safe and appropriate. The inclusion of “travel training readiness” in the matrix enables the identification of pupils who may benefit from independent travel training, supporting long term goals of independence and social mobility. This aligns with the wider goals of GIRFEC and the Comhairle’s Corporate Strategy.
- 6.5 To support transparency and fairness, the policy establishes clear procedures for appeals and complaints. Parents/carers may appeal if transport is not granted or if they disagree with the method of provision. In addition, each case is subject to annual review, or review of a child's placement or needs change. This ensures that transport arrangements remain appropriate and responsive over time.
- 6.6 The policy sets out a varied model of provision, ranging from mileage reimbursement to parents, mainstream bus access, specialist transport and escorted specialist transport. The Comhairle retains flexibility in determining the safest, most suitable and most sustainable option for each young person. By using this structure, the policy also seeks to reduce reliance on high-cost solutions where lower intensity interventions may be sufficient.
- 6.7 The Western Isles has challenges due to geography, variable weather and limited transport infrastructure in certain areas. The policy acknowledges this by incorporating environmental factors into the assessment process and ensuring that transport planning remains responsive to local availability.



- 6.8 This policy directly supports delivery of national inclusion policy (including the ASL Review (2020), Presumption of Mainstreaming (2019) and the 2024 of UNCRC incorporation into Scottish law) and Comhairle nan Eilean Siar's local strategic priorities. It promotes a proactive, child centred approach to transport that links with GIRFEC principles and local improvement plans.

CONCLUSION

- 7.1 The ASN Home to School Transport Policy represents the Comhairle's ongoing commitment to inclusion and equity. It provides a structured, transparent and fair approach to assessing the transport needs of children and young people with additional support needs, ensuring that decisions are evidence based and consistent across the authority.
- 7.2 The use of the Assessment of Needs Matrix increases accountability, offering a method of balancing the rights and needs of individual learners with the responsible use of public resources. It also provides an opportunity to promote increased independence, inclusion and participation in line with the GIRFEC national practice model and the Comhairle's own strategic priorities.
- 7.3 The adoption and implementation of this policy will ensure that ASN transport decisions remain legally sound, are deliverable and are in line with the Comhairle's wider vision of inclusive education for all.

