

## Transport, Environment & Climate Change Select Committee – 9 November 2023

### **Agenda Item 4 – Public Questions**

#### **Question One**

How are climate change and air quality impacts taken into account in the development and implementation of the Council's Home to School Transport Policy?

#### **Answer**

In the implementation of the Council's Home to School Transport Policy, the Council's school transport contracts require suppliers to upgrade towards cleaner vehicles. All vehicles being operated on Council contracted services must meet the following European exhaust emissions standards:

- **Passenger Vehicles** (taxis and minibuses up to and including 16 seats) to meet or exceed Euro 6 emission standards by 1st September 2023.
- **Heavy Duty Vehicles** (buses and coaches – 17 seats and over) to meet or exceed Euro 5 emission standards by 1st September 2023.

The school transport contractual emission requirements dovetail with the [Council's Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy](#), which states at section 4.12 (Emissions Policy)

“The council considers that every effort should be made to improve the efficiency of vehicles licensed to operate in its area by reducing the emissions of pollutants such as nitrous oxides, particulate matter and carbon dioxide. It is a duty for local authorities to bring down pollution levels, within their areas, to within acceptable limits in the shortest period of time possible. For Buckinghamshire Council licenced vehicles:

- Vehicles first registered since September 2015 must meet or exceed Euro 6 emission standards. From the date of the implementation of this policy, new licences will not be granted to vehicles that were first registered more than 5 years prior to the date that the application was made. All newly licensed vehicles will therefore meet Euro 6 standards.
- Vehicles first registered since January 2011 must meet or exceed Euro 5 emission standards. From the date of the implementation of this policy, licences will not be renewed in respect of any licensed vehicle that was first registered more than 10 years prior to the date of renewal. This applies to the renewal of licences only. All such vehicles will therefore meet Euro 5 standards.

This requirement does not apply to any existing licensed vehicles which are subject to “grandfather rights” in relation to the vehicle age policy.

In order to encourage a greater uptake of ultra-low emission (ULEV) and electric vehicles within the taxi trade, however, zero emissions vehicles will be licensed for a period of up to 15 years of age as opposed 24 to the standard period of up to 10 years of age referred to above. A ULEV is currently defined as having less than 75 grams of CO<sub>2</sub> per kilometre (g/km) from the tail pipe.”

It is the aim of the Council that all licensed vehicles will have ultra-low or zero emissions by 2030 and this policy will be kept under review with this target in mind. All vehicles are subject to and must pass the council's testing requirements before a licence is issued.

Further to the above, the Council's [Getting to School Strategy](#) fulfils our duty to produce a Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy as outlined in the Education Act 1996. This strategy sets out how we will promote the use of sustainable modes of travel to schools, colleges, and other education centres. Buckinghamshire School Travel Plans identify and address congestion, safety, health and environmental issues associated with car use on the school journey. Schools may organise campaigns and projects, run initiatives and events and promote activities to reduce single occupancy car use for the journey. The Strategy is currently being updated and will be published ahead of the start of the 2024-25 academic year.

### **Question Two**

As a Young Expert Citizen appointed by the Centre for Education and Youth, I have conducted research into the issues facing young people who use wheelchairs when using public transport travelling to school and college in Buckinghamshire. This area of study is close to me personally, having experienced issues with getting on and off the bus with my wheelchair when travelling to college in Buckinghamshire. The findings of my research found:

- There is a lack of training for bus drivers in how to assist passengers, given the wide variety of different types of wheelchairs, when getting on and off the bus for school and college. Currently bus drivers struggle to assist wheelchair users through lack of knowledge on how to operate different types of wheelchairs.
- There is no mechanism to warn bus drivers of a change to a regular users' wheelchairs and how this change requires a different approach to assisting the user getting on and off the bus.

My recommendations, based on these findings, are the requirement for more wheelchair training for bus drivers and a new mechanism for regular passengers travelling to school and college, who use wheelchairs, to notify bus drivers of a change to their wheelchair and how the new wheelchair operates. How can the council address the findings from my research?

### **Answer**

Most public transport bus services are commercially operated, but it is now the law that all buses are accessible. The Council doesn't have direct control over these commercial companies and each will have their own policies on the matter of assisting passengers with greater accessibility needs. The Council works with public transport operators who run under contract to us to ensure that the needs of passengers are met and the address any matters or issues that come up during the life of the contract.

As part of our forthcoming Enhanced Partnership, the Council is to commit to work to establish a standard of infrastructure that meets the requirements of all passengers and will also be working with public bus companies to establish a system of recognising passengers with hidden disabilities.

In relation to Council arranged school/college transport, under the Education Act 1996, the Council has a duty to make necessary travel arrangements free of charge to secure suitable home to school travel arrangements for eligible children. Eligibility includes age, distance to school, special educational needs, a disability (SEND) or mobility problems and safe walking routes.

The suitability of the transport arrangements made for young people with SEND who are eligible for travel assistance to school/college is in line with the individual's travel needs assessment, as undertaken by the Client Transport Team. Transport staff who work on Council-contracted home to school/college routes must complete safeguarding, disability awareness and induction training. Transport staff who work on contracts where wheelchair passengers travel must also complete specialist wheelchair training. Drivers and passenger assistants who work on wheelchair accessible vehicles wear specific Council identity badges. Over the last 12 months 268 transport crew members attended specialist wheelchair training courses delivered by the Client Transport Team.