Dear Parent/Carer

I am writing to inform you of challenges that Scottish Borders Council are facing with regards to the national driver shortage and the impact that this is having on the provision of home to school transport across the Borders.

Over the past 12 months, the transport industry has begun to feel the impact of national driver shortages. In recent months, we have experienced the loss of a number of local bus service journeys as operators have struggled to cover trips when there are drivers absent from work due to illness. In recent weeks, the Council has found it very challenging to cover school trips as there is very little resilience across the network at the moment.

The Council has been working with operators to prioritise school transport and to ensure that all school journeys continue to operate where possible. Despite this pupils have unfortunately experienced cancellations on several school contracts as operators have not had the drivers to cover. This is as a direct result of having no spare driving staff available to cover the runs when there are absences. Unfortunately the cancellations have tended to be at short notice giving very little time to look at alternatives or communicate the disruption to parents and carers.

The shortage of drivers is affecting almost all operators including Scottish Borders Council. The Council continues to engage with a number of stakeholders to identify ways in which we can resolve the shortage of drivers but we expect some challenging times ahead before we start to see some progress. We are currently short of around 60 drivers across the network.

In the short to medium term we are considering a number of options to minimise disruption such as:

- *Combining School Runs*
- *Cancelling local bus services at peak times to free up drivers*
- *Double running contracts*

The options above minimise the disruption to school transport by freeing up drivers however the downside to this is that in some cases it will increase the time some pupils will be on board school transport or will result in commuters being without bus services.

We will do our best to mitigate the impact and envisage that any changes will only be for a short period of time. We would also hope to give parents plenty of notice in advance of any changes, where possible.

Whilst our priority will be to continue to ensure that school transport operates, we will also prioritise safety related queries such as road safety assessments and new pupil requests however non-critical changes to transport arrangements will only be processed when the team has the capacity to do so.

We do appreciate the additional pressure that cancellation of school services puts on parents\carers and we will continue to do our best to mitigate against full cancellations however, given the circumstances, we thought it best to raise awareness of the current situation in advance of any future service disruption.

If anyone has any feedback or suggestions regarding school transport that we may not have considered, we would be keen to hear them. Please email the school directly, they will then pass this on for our attention.

Can you help?

If anyone is interested in a part time driving job, the council, like all operators at the moment, has an advert out for relief bus drivers for home to school contracts. If there are any parents\carers who have a D1 entitlement on their licence and would like to apply for a job as a school minibus driver we would welcome applications, we can offer training and flexible working for anyone who is interested and would work around an individual's availability.

For more information please visit https://www.myjobscotland.gov.uk/councils/scottish-borders-council/jobs/relief-driver-various-locations-297923 or email minibuses@scotborders.gov.uk

Local transport operators are also recruiting at the moment and details on available posts can be found by visiting their respective websites.

The council can also pay parents a mileage rate to become a parent operator either as a short term or long term arrangement. This would require parents to take their children either directly to school or to an agreed pick up point for a connection with a school contract. Again this could be a short or long term arrangement and further information can be obtained by contacting 0300 100 1800 and asking to speak to a member of the transport team.

Once again, thank you for your patience.

John Curry
Service Director
Infrastructure and Environment