RURAL ECONOMY AND CONNECTIVITY COMMITTEE
SUBMISSION FROM EAST AYRSHIRE COUNCIL
SEAT BELTS ON SCHOOL TRANSPORT (SCOTLAND) BILL

1. Are you in favour of the Bill and its provisions? Do you think the Bill achieves its aim of improving safety on school transport?

East Ayrshire Council is in favour of the Bill to introduce seatbelts in school transport and has already taken steps to improve the level of safety on its school transport by introducing a range of improvements including requiring seat belts on all school transport, which we believe has improved safety across the service.

2. 18 local authorities have already chosen to make it a requirement of their school bus contracts for seat belts to be fitted on dedicated school transport. Do you feel that this has been successful?

Part of the Council’s Transformation Strategy in 2012 was a review of school transport with the key objective of developing a more efficient service within a wider context of safe and sustainable journeys to school. In delivering changes to the service around more efficient logistical management of journeys, a reduction in entitlement, the addition of subsidised transport options and a review of traffic management at individual schools, parent and pupil feedback identified safety and quality of vehicles as an important concern.

As the current legislation sets a requirement around seat belts for smaller vehicles (Taxis and Minibuses) there appears to be a gap as larger buses do not need seatbelts which does not reflect the expectation of modern users. The legislation appears to reflect a requirement around service buses operating in urban routes at lower speeds and as many of the larger buses are transporting large numbers of children on rural or 50-60 mph routes the consequences of any accident are likely to be more significant.

Due to the improvements and financial savings identified in the review the Council took the decision in 2014 to reinvest in the quality of service and negotiated a position with the existing contractors to introduce a seatbelt for all children and the removal of double decker buses. The removal of double decker buses had a greater financial impact than the introduction of seat belts. Changes to future contracts will also include an upper age limit for larger buses and coaches, which again reflects what is already in place through the licencing requirement for taxi’s and mini buses.

The barriers identified to implementation included, the cost, whether children will use them, suitability of existing fleet, use of public/service buses, and existing contract conditions. As noted the cost and the existing contracts were negotiated and were part of wider approach in East Ayrshire. There was already a variability of fleet across contractors with some already meeting the standard and some not. The change provided a fairer standard and ensured a more competitive market based on quality. Some children may not use seat belts but some will, but they cannot use them if they are not there. As part of the implementation, the Council’s Road Safety
Team also provided further training activity and support to schools to encourage use of seat belts and contractors and schools continue to work together to promote this.

3. Is there anything else that you feel should be included in the Bill?
An upper age limit could also be considered to ensure the quality of the vehicles used for school transport, including both safety and environmental impact, are improved. East Ayrshire Council has implemented an upper age limit of 16 years on larger coaches, 12 years on mini buses and 8 years on taxis and small vehicles.

4. Will the Bill and its provisions have a particular impact on equalities groups?
No, there are 2 main groups of school transport entitlement, mainstream which is based on distance entitlement and Additional Support Needs (ASN) which is based on assessed needs. The change to the legislation on school transport would almost exclusively impact on mainstream as ASN transport is much more likely to be operated utilising taxis and minibuses which as noted already have legislation around seatbelts in these vehicles.

East Ayrshire Council
April 2017