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? Moray Council support any initiative which supports the principle of delivering safer home to school transport for school pupils. Moray Council has operated a fully seat belted policy on all home to school transport coaches since August 2002.

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? In Moray’s case, overall we consider what we have achieved since August 2002 has greatly benefitted the safety of young people in Moray travelling to and from school. Whilst the introduction of seat belted vehicles was the headline policy change, the following additional measures were also introduced in 2002 in Moray.

Removal of double deckers on dedicated Home to School Transport vehicles. Our experience highlighted those contracts with double deckers as the having the highest incidents of pupil misbehaviour. Even with escorts on board, misbehaviour upstairs was rarely tackled and escorts often remained downstairs. We have instead allowed contractors to supply high capacity single deckers instead and this has gone some way to tackle behavioural issues. We have also found that young people generally show more respect towards the supply of a coach type vehicle for their journey than they do on double deckers which are often perceived (and often are) end of life vehicles retained purely for contract work.

Installation of CCTV on vehicles with 17 passengers seats and above. This has proved very beneficial and generally more effective than an escort on mainstream home to school transport. Issues can be identified and information passed to schools to deal with.

Pupil Parent School Transport Charter. All transport applications in Moray require the parent or guardian to sign our Parent – Pupil School Transport charter which forms part of the transport application form. This makes it clear what the authority expects from young people on home to school transport and where the responsibilities lie between parent and pupil and school. It also confirms the authority’s process for exclusion from school transport if behaviour becomes an issue and attempts at resolution fail.

3. Is there anything else that you feel should be included in the Bill? The Bill is itself relatively simple, seeking to close the gaps where some local authorities still do not provide either fully or partially seat belted vehicles on school contracts. That is perfectly laudable and makes for an even playing field across Scotland. Where the legislation will founder is in the application in and enforcement of the principal tenet of the bill. Seatbelts are not seen as cool or necessary by many young people, particularly when they move up to secondary school and face new peer pressures.
Moray’s experience is generally that primary pupils comply through a mix of parental concern and involvement at the roadside, and school involvement when boarding on the way home. Drivers engage as well although there is an inevitable concern that a driver assisting in fastening a seatbelt may be vulnerable to accusations of other sorts through the necessity of invading body space if assistance is needed. That is generally tempered where regular drivers get to know their pupils and often parents well.

Secondary youngsters are often less keen to comply although this does vary depending on a variety of factors. Schools and coach operators need to maintain dialogue where refusal to wear seat belts by a minority and general horseplay through the bus lead to greater numbers not wearing belts. Parents, school and operators need to be aware, and be vigilant, in the knowledge that not wearing a seatbelt and remaining seated for the journey duration will both breach legislation and council policy. There also has be a realistic understanding that a bus/coach driver’s primary role is to fully concentrate on driving once the vehicle is mobile and as such, they cannot be responsible for every single transgression whilst on the move. It is however perfectly reasonable to expect a driver to check for the wearing of seatbelts before a vehicle leaves school grounds.

With this in mind, I’d recommend some consideration be given to educating pupils, parents, drivers, operators and school management teams on their involvement in the process. They all have a role to play and without their awareness and complicity, the legislation will lack enforcement. It would be useful if information packs and educational materials be designed to support the Bill and be made freely available to all local authorities. Hard hitting resource material along the lines of the excellent 1second1life campaign (http://www.1second1life.co.uk/) hosted by the North East School Transport Safety Group could be expanded to cover all of Scotland’s secondary schools with a gentler more educational/fun learning approach for primary schools.

4. Will the Bill and its provisions have a particular impact on equalities groups? I see no particular issue with equalities in terms of providing seatbelts on dedicated home to school transport vehicles.

Moray Council
March 2017