



SNAP PARENT CARER FORUM

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Central Bedfordshire SEND Transport – Summer 2026

Issues raised by families, impact, and opportunities for improvement.

Why SNAP PCF has written this report.

SNAP PCF has received parent carer feedback about SEND and home-to-school transport during summer 2026. The issues cover much more than transport not arriving. They include communication, applications, placement information, safeguarding, changes to transport, post-16, and post-19 arrangements, charging, complaints and the way SEND Transport works for parent carers of children and young people with SEND.

For the purpose of this report, SNAP PCF has treated the accounts given to us by parent carers as accurate accounts of their experience. We are not asking parents to prove their experience before raising it. Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) has access to the operational records, case files, portal records, contracts, and decision-making information needed to verify individual cases and establish the scale of each issue.

This report sets out what families say is happening, why it matters, what SNAP PCF offered Central Bedfordshire Council in 2025, and what difference earlier work with SNAP PCF could potentially have made. We are not saying that every problem would have been prevented. What we are saying is that many of the risks were already identified and practical support was offered. An appendix of the individual/themed complaints can be found as an appendix at the end of this report.

What SNAP PCF raised in September 2025

SNAP PCF's SEND Transport Position Statement (September 2025) identified poor communication, confusion over processes, safeguarding concerns, and lack of joined

up working between SEND Transport and EHCP teams. It also raised transport provider changes, risk assessments, college transport, individual SEND needs, and complaints.

SNAP PCF then made specific recommendations: closer Transport/EHCP working, co-production through the 6Cs framework, improved communication, earlier tendering, a co-produced transition process, recognition of established transport relationships, review of post-16/bespoke request arrangements and protection for children and young people whose educational year group does not match their chronological age (SNAP PCF, Position Statement: Issues with Arrangements of SEND Transport, September 2025, pp. 7–8).

Transport not being ready for the start of term.

What parents are telling us: Parents report children and young people starting the academic year without confirmed transport, some missing education and some families still chasing arrangements after the term began.

Impact: Children and young people can miss education; parents may need to take time off work; families experience uncertainty at an already difficult transition point.

What SNAP offered/what could have helped: In 2025 SNAP PCF recommended earlier planning and better communication. SNAP PCF could have helped identify unresolved cases in August, before the first day of term, and provided a parent carer check on readiness.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- How many SEND pupils did not have transport in place on the first day? How many missed education? And for how long was this the case?
- How many routes were not operational on the first day and by the end of week one?

Late applications and the 530 late applications impacting on 530 children/young people with SEND.

What parents are telling us: Parents report being described as late applicants even where school placements, EHCP changes, or post-16 timetables were confirmed late.

Impact: Families cannot be blamed for a delay that they could not reasonably avoid. This can also hide where the system itself creates late applications.

What SNAP PCF offered/what could have helped: SNAP PCF's 2025 recommendation for closer working between the School Transport Team and the EHCP Team could have

helped identify children and young people whose transport could not be planned because placement information was late.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- Of the 530 late applications, how many were genuinely late and how many were caused by placement, EHCP, timetable or results information being unavailable?
- How many applications were subsequently approved?

SEND, EHCP, placement and communication not sufficiently joined up.

What parents are telling us: Parents report being caught between services, particularly where placements or timetables are confirmed late for their child or young person.

Impact: Responsibility becomes unclear and the family carries the consequence.

What SNAP PCF offered/what could have helped: SNAP PCF specifically recommended a formal relationship between the School Transport Team and the EHC Team so that transport decisions reflected the child's or young person's EHCP and individual needs. A joint process could have identified risks earlier and reduced complaints also enabling the EHC Team being able to resolve identified issues earlier.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- What is the beginning-to-end process from EHCP/placement confirmation to transport?
- Who owns the risk when a placement is confirmed too late?
- What internal escalation process applies when disagreements or delays arise between SEND and transport which then puts a child or young person's attendance at risk?

Portal and contact problems

What parents are telling us: Parents report tickets being closed, having to start again, repeating information, unanswered contacts and difficulty getting through by phone.

Impact: Families make repeated contacts because the original problem remains unresolved. This can then look like 'multiple contacts' rather than an unresolved service issue, and in turn cause further delays to the process.

What SNAP PCF offered/what could have helped: In 2022, when Central Bedfordshire Council worked more closely with SNAP PCF, we identify families without transport, contacted a manager, and bypassed the ticketing system. Parents reported improved communication and this also supported the work of the Transport team as issues were

identified earlier. A similar agreed escalation route could have reduced repeated contacts to the Transport Team and supported issues with communication.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- How many repeat contacts were caused by an earlier case being closed before the issue was resolved?
- What does CBC define as a resolved transport case?
- What urgent route exists for a child or young person without transport for the next school day?

Communication about transport arrangements and changes

What parents are telling us: Parents report not knowing who is transporting their child or young person, what vehicle will arrive, what is the expected pick-up time, who the driver/escort will be, or whether arrangements will have changed at short notice.

Impact: Unexpected changes can be particularly difficult for children and young people with SEND and can create anxiety, distress, and refusal to travel. This in turn can impact on their school attendance and wellbeing.

What SNAP PCF offered/what could have helped: SNAP PCF recommended improved communication and a co-produced transition process for provider, route, and chaperone changes. Working with SNAP PCF could have produced parent-tested communications.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- How much notice should parents receive when arrangements change?
- How many changes were made after the start of term?
- How many families were informed before the first affected journey?

Safeguarding and suitability of transport

What parents are telling us: Parents report their child or young person being sent to the wrong destination, uncertainty about drivers/escorts, concerns about transport and other arrangements they considered unsafe or unsuitable.

Impact: For a vulnerable child or young person, an incorrect vehicle, destination, or escort can become a safeguarding issue rather than simply a customer-service problem.

What SNAP PCF offered/what could have helped: SNAP PCF raised safeguarding, information sharing and risk assessment issues in 2025, including concerns about

medical information reaching operators and changes from taxis to fleet vehicles. A co-produced safeguarding/change checklist could have helped test the process against real family needs.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- How many transport related safeguarding concerns were recorded at the start of the Autumn school term 2026.
- How are EHCP/medical needs communicated to operators?
- What checks confirm the correct child or young person, vehicle, driver, escort, and destination before a journey?

Multiple vehicles / incorrect allocations

What parents are telling us: One parent reports three taxis arriving at the same address for a child who was not due to attend that week.

Impact: This creates unnecessary anxiety and may indicate weaknesses in allocation, cancellation, or operator communication.

What SNAP PCF offered/what could have helped: SNAP PCF's proposed parent carer involvement could have provided an early warning route for unusual allocation problems.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- Can CBC verify this case and explain what happened?
- What controls prevent duplicate or cancelled allocations from continuing?

Phase transfer/existing transport

What parents are telling us: A parent reports that an existing transport arrangement was affected when their child was treated as a phase-transfer pupil despite remaining at the same special school setting. The parent reports that the 16–19 policy was applied and a charge resulted.

Impact: The family experienced significant distress and uncertainty. It also raises a question about whether administrative information is being applied consistently with the child's actual placement and if their own transport policies are being consistently applied.

What SNAP PCF offered/what could have helped: SNAP PCF raised a related issue in 2025 about some children and young people being uncoupled from their chronological year group and recommended that transport decisions be guided by the EHCP and

actual educational circumstances. A joint School Transport/EHCP review could have identified this type of risk before implementation.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- Has any existing transport been cancelled or changed because of phase transfer where the child or young person remained at the same school and address?
- Which School Transport policy was applied in each case and why?
- Is CBC certain their 16-19 years and their 19–25-year policies are consistently being implemented and what is the mechanism to identify parents raising concerns about this to ensure a quick resolution?

SEND eligibility and walking-distance confusion

What parents are telling us: Parents report that some families continue to believe normal walking-distance rules apply to SEND transport.

Impact: Families may not apply, may apply under the wrong rules, or may challenge decisions without understanding the criteria.

What SNAP PCF offered/what could have helped: SNAP PCF's 2025 report emphasised clarity and case-by-case consideration. A parent-tested explanation of SEND eligibility could have reduced confusion.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- How does CBC check whether parents and schools understand SEND transport eligibility?
- How are SEND-specific reasons for decisions explained to families?

Individual SEND needs

What parents are telling us: Parents continue to question whether transport decisions sufficiently consider anxiety, sensory needs, medical needs, and ability to travel safely.

Impact: A technically available journey may still be unsuitable for a particular child or young person causing unnecessary stress and anxiety for families at an already difficult transition point as the child or young persons needs have either not been identified or are not being met.

What SNAP PCF offered/what could have helped: SNAP PCF recommended that transport decisions be connected to the EHCP and individual needs. Earlier co-production could have helped develop practical indicators for when an individual assessment is needed.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- Would CBC audit a sample of SEND transport decisions to demonstrate that individual needs were considered?
- What evidence is retained to show how individual needs informed the decision?

Post-16 transport and college timetables

What parents are telling us: Parents have reported difficulties where college courses, placements or timetables are confirmed close to the start of term, creating difficulties in arranging appropriate transport. Parents have also raised concerns about whether transport arrangements adequately reflect actual college timetables and individual circumstances.

Impact: Young people may experience uncertainty about how they will travel to and from college, including arrangements that do not fit their timetable. This can result in long waits, anxiety or difficulties accessing education.

What SNAP PCF offered /what could have helped: This was already identified as an area for review in 2025. SNAP PCF recommended reviewing post-16 transport arrangements and making the bespoke request process clearer. Earlier involvement could have allowed the arrangements to be tested against real college timetables and individual circumstances before the start of the academic year.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- How many post-16 learners had transport arrangements that did not match their college timetable at the start of the 2026/27 academic year?
- How many post-16 transport arrangements were confirmed after the learner's college timetable was known?
- How many bespoke transport requests were made, approved, rejected or remain outstanding?
- How does CBC assess transport arrangements for learners with part-time or unusual college timetables?

Post-16 charging and affordability.

What parents are telling us: Parents report difficulty paying annual or termly charges and wanting a monthly option.

Impact: Upfront costs can create a barrier to accessing education, particularly for families just above benefit thresholds.

What SNAP PCF offered/what could have helped: SNAP PCF could have helped Central Bedfordshire Council test the charging arrangements with families before implementation and identify affordability barriers.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- What payment options are available?
- How many families requested alternative payment arrangements?
- What affordability or hardship arrangements exist?

Part-time learners and pro-rata charging

What parents are telling us: Parents report paying the full transport charge where a learner only attends a setting one or two days a week.

Impact: Families may pay for a level of transport they do not use. For part-time SEND provision this can become a barrier to accessing education.

What SNAP PCF offered/what could have helped: SNAP PCF could have brought real post-16 timetables and family circumstances into a policy review and helped compare the practical impact of different charging models.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- Does CBC apply charges pro-rata for part-time attendance?
- If not, why not?
- How many part-time learners are paying the full charge?

Charges where Council-arranged transport is not delivered.

What parents are telling us: Parents report concerns about paying for transport during periods when Council-arranged transport did not operate.

Impact: Families can face paying for a service they say they did not receive.

What SNAP PCF offered / what could have helped: SNAP PCF could have helped identify this issue early and clarify the distinction between a refund because transport is no longer required and a remedy where a paid-for journey was not delivered.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- What refund, credit or other remedy applies where paid for transport is not delivered because of Council/operator failure?
- How many such requests were received and what were the outcomes?

Post-19 transport

What parents are telling us: Parents have raised concerns about whether the correct 19–25 SEND policy is being applied and whether individual need is accurately assessed.

Impact: Young people could be placed into the wrong process or charging framework which may delay or prevent them accessing their placement.

What SNAP PCF offered/what could have helped: SNAP PCF's 2025 work called for clarification of post-16/post-19 transport. A joint policy review could have reduced uncertainty and identified edge cases before the new academic year.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- How many 19–25 SEND cases received travel assistance?
- Which policy was applied to each case?
- How does CBC prevent 16–19 and 19–25 policies being confused?

Complaints and escalation

What parents are telling us: Parents report needing to make formal complaints or contact councillors, MPs, or senior officers to obtain a resolution.

Impact: Families spend significant time escalating matters that they expected the service to resolve directly. This impacts parents' trust and confidence in Central Bedfordshire Council and can cause unnecessary stress and worry for families.

What SNAP PCF offered/ what could have helped: SNAP PCF's 2025 report explicitly said this should not be necessary. A joint first-time-resolution process could have reduced the need for escalation.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- How many transport complaints were received?
- How many were closed once transport was arranged?
- How does CBC distinguish a service request from a complaint?
- Does resolving the transport issue also resolve the complaint about the failure?

Procurement, operators, and route planning

What parents are telling us: Parents continue to report uncertainty about routes, operators and arrangements close to or after the start of term.

Impact: Late commissioning can push the consequences onto children, young people and their families and leaves little time for transition.

What SNAP offered /what could have helped: SNAP PCF recommended tendering at least 12 weeks before the new academic year. SNAP PCF could have acted as a parent-carer readiness check alongside the procurement timetable.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- When did CBC know how many routes were required?
- When were routes tendered and awarded?
- When did operators receive pupil/route information?
- How many routes were not covered at the start of term? And why?

Parent voice and co-production

What parents are telling us: Parents report a lack of confidence that their experiences are shaping the transport service.

Impact: Without an effective parent feedback route, recurring problems continue to be discovered only after families experience them.

What SNAP PCF offered / what could have helped: SNAP PCF offered CBC a 6Cs co-production approach and asked Transport to work within the SNAP/CBC Partnership Agreement. Working together could have provided a standing route for testing proposed changes before implementation.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- Which of SNAP PCF's 2025 recommendations were implemented?
- How were parent carers involved in designing or testing those changes?
- What evidence shows that the changes improved outcomes?

Delay to paying milage claims

What parents are telling us: One parent has reported that mileage payments for June and July 2026 were not received until 25 August 2026. The combined payment was approximately £450. The parent reported that they had to meet these transport costs upfront while waiting for reimbursement. The parent also reported that CBC had previously upheld a complaint relating to mileage payments not being made.

Impact: Parents who provide transport themselves are carrying the cost of fuel as well as the wider costs of using and maintaining their vehicle. Delayed reimbursement can therefore create a significant cash-flow burden for families, particularly when fuel prices are increasing. Where a payment is several weeks late, the issue is not simply an

administrative delay: the family has already funded the transport that the Council expects them to provide.

This is a new issue raised with SNAP PCF during 2026. It was not identified as a mileage-payment issue in SNAP PCF's September 2025 Position Statement. The current parent report concerns delayed reimbursement of mileage claims, including a reported combined payment of approximately £450 for June and July 2026 which was not received until 25 August 2026. CBC should confirm the expected timetable for processing and paying monthly mileage claims, how many claims were paid outside that timetable during 2026, and what action has been taken following the previously upheld complaint. CBC should also explain what escalation route is available where a mileage payment is overdue.

Questions for Central Bedfordshire Council:

- What immediate escalation route is available to a parent when a mileage payment is overdue?
- What action was taken following the previously upheld complaint about mileage payments not being made?
- How many claims for June and July 2026 were outstanding after the normal payment date?
- What is the agreed timescale from receipt of a mileage claim to payment?
- How many parent-carer mileage claims were paid late during 2026, and what was the average delay?
- What is the expected timetable for processing and paying monthly mileage claims? How many claims were paid outside that timetable during 2026? What action has been taken following the previously upheld complaint?

A positive change: mileage payments

SNAP PCF also wants to recognise a positive change. CBC has increased the mileage rate paid to parents providing their own transport from 45p per mile to 55p per mile from September 2026 and communicated the change to families.

Parents raising there is a delay and they are still waiting for the updated monthly claim form. SNAP PCF considers this a positive and practical improvement once the updated claim forms have been sent to parent carers. It recognises more of the real cost of families providing transport themselves and gives parents clearer information about what they will receive. We encourage CBC to continue communicating positive changes as clearly as it communicates problems and policy requirements.

Question for Central Bedfordshire Council

- When will this updated claim form be issued?
- Will any payment delays by not having this updated form with new amounts applied be backdated?
- What processes need to improve to ensure timely payments?

What could have been different if Central Bedfordshire Council had worked with SNAPP PCF earlier?

SNAP PCF cannot say that working with us would have prevented every problem. Transport depends on procurement, operator capacity, school placements, EHCP decisions and information arriving at different times. However, SNAP PCF had already identified many of the risks and offered practical support.

An August readiness check could have identified children and young people still without confirmed transport before the first day of term.

A direct escalation route could have reduced repeated portal contacts and allowed unresolved cases to be identified earlier.

Parent testing of communications could have identified unclear wording around eligibility, changes, and applications.

A co-produced transition process could have identified children and young people for whom a provider, vehicle, route, or escort change needed additional planning.

Closer school transport and EHCP Team working could have reduced the risk of decisions being made without the child or young person's individual's circumstances being understood.

A joint review of post-16 transport could have tested real college timetables, part-time attendance, and bespoke requests.

A review of post-19 arrangements could have helped ensure the correct policy was being applied to the correct age group.

A parent-carer safeguarding review could have tested how information about children's or young people's needs, drivers, escorts, vehicles, and destinations is controlled.

A joint review of the previous year's recommendations could have identified which issues were still unresolved before the 2026/27 arrangements were finalised.

The opportunity now

SNAP PCF does not want the response to this summer's problems to be another review that produces recommendations which sit separately from the families who use the service. We would like Central Bedfordshire Council to use the current situation to establish a simple, practical co-produced improvement process for SEND transport.

The starting point should be the recommendations SNAP PCF made in September 2025 and a clear answer to four questions:

- What was implemented?
- What has improved?
- What has not improved or remains inconsistent?
- What will CBC now change, with parent carers involved in designing and testing the change?

Summary

There are positive signs, including the increase in the parent mileage rate from 45p to 55p per mile from September 2026 and the communication of that change. However, many of the concerns parent carers are reporting this summer are closely related to issues SNAP PCF identified in September 2025.

SNAP PCF's position is straightforward: families should not have to repeatedly escalate problems before the system responds. The 2025 report offered CBC practical support through co-production, earlier identification of risk, better communication, closer SEND school transport and EHCP Team working and improved transition arrangements. The current feedback suggests that there is still an opportunity to put those mechanisms in place.

SNAP PCF would welcome a response from senior management setting out what has changed since September 2025, what evidence demonstrates the impact of those changes, and where CBC is willing to work with SNAP PCF and parent carers to improve the service before the next academic year.

Appendix and Parent reported issues and questions collated by SNAP PCF

1. Transport was not arranged before the start of term.
 - Children and young people were due to return to school without confirmed transport.
 - Some individuals reportedly missed days or a week of education.

- Parents did not know whether transport would be available.
- 2. Transport was not arranged despite parents applying before the deadline.
 - Parents reported having submitted applications within the required timeframe but still having no confirmed arrangements.
- 3. Parents could not get clear information about their child or young person's transport.
 - Families did not know whether transport had been arranged.
 - Some did not know the vehicle, driver, escort, collection arrangements, or timetable.
- 4. Difficulty contacting the Transport Service
 - Parents reported difficulty getting through by telephone.
 - Some reported being kept on hold or calls being disconnected.
 - Parents therefore used alternative routes to obtain an answer.
- 5. Problems with the Transport Portal
 - Parents reported submitting portal requests without receiving a substantive response.
 - Some reported that tickets were closed before their issue was resolved.
 - Parents then had to submit another request.
- 6. Parents having to repeatedly explain the same circumstances.
 - When a ticket was closed, parents reported having to start again and provide their information again.
 - Some parents therefore made multiple contacts about the same unresolved issue.
- 7. Email contact was ineffective.
 - Parents reported receiving automated responses indicating that an email address was not monitored.
 - They were then directed towards the portal instead.
- 8. Promised callbacks did not happen.
 - At least one parent reported repeatedly being told that someone would call them back but receiving no callback.

9. Parents had to escalate outside the Transport Service
 - Some contacted councillors, MPs, senior Council officers, or the complaints process because they could not obtain a resolution through normal Transport channels.
10. Parents were being described as making "late applications" when they believed they could not apply earlier.
 - Parents argued that they could not apply until CBC confirmed the school placement.
 - This was particularly problematic for some post-16 learners awaiting GCSE results, course confirmation, or timetables.
11. Post-16 transport arrangements were confirmed too late.
 - Parents reported difficulties where courses, placements or timetables were confirmed close to the start of term.
12. Parents felt they were being blamed for delays.
 - The reported use of the "late application" figure was perceived by some parents as placing responsibility on families without considering why the application was late.
13. Confusion about SEND transport eligibility.
 - Parents reported that families were unclear about whether normal walking-distance rules applied to children and young people with SEND.
 - Some families believed SEND transport was determined by distance in the same way as ordinary school transport.
14. Concerns about how individual SEND needs were assessed.
 - Parents raised concerns about whether their child or young person's individual needs and ability to travel safely were being carefully considered.
15. Transport arrangements were changed without adequate notice.
 - Parents reported uncertainty or insufficient notice about changes to vehicles, drivers, escorts, routes, or collection arrangements.
16. Parents were not given sufficient information about drivers or escorts.
 - Some parents reported not knowing who would be transporting or accompanying their child or young person before the first journey.
17. Wrong destination/village
 - A parent reported a child being dropped off in the wrong village.

18. Concerns about children and young people being placed on public transport.
- A parent reportedly raised concerns about a vulnerable child being placed on public transport without parental agreement.
19. Unexpected or incorrect vehicles arriving
- Parents reported vehicles arriving when the child or young person was not expected to travel.
 - One particularly unusual report concerned three separate taxis arriving at the same address.
20. Multiple transport arrangements apparently being created for the same child.
- The three-taxi report raises a specific concern about duplication in allocation or communication.
21. Transport reportedly cancelled/affected during a phase-transfer year.
- One individual case raised with SNAP PCF concerns a child remaining at the same special-school setting but apparently being treated differently because of phase transfer.
 - The parent reported that the 16–19 policy was applied and charged for.
22. Post-16 transport charges were considered unaffordable.
- Parents raised concerns about having to make a large annual or termly payment.
 - Some working families reported difficulty finding the money upfront.
23. Parents wanted monthly payment options.
- Some parents reportedly asked to pay monthly rather than annually or termly and were unable to do so.
24. Concerns about charging part-time learners the full amount.
- Parents reported that learners attending one or two days per week could still be charged the full transport amount.
 - This was raised particularly in relation to SEND, Life Skills and other part-time provision.
25. Concerns about what happens when paid-for transport is not provided.
- Parent highlighted concerns that families were not receiving refunds for periods when Council-arranged transport did not operate.

26. Post-19 transport concerns

- Questions were raised about whether the correct 19–25 SEND transport arrangements were being applied.
- Parents raised concerns about individual assessment and whether the correct policy was being used.

27. Concern that 16–19 and post-19 transport policies may be confused.

- This particularly arises from the individual phase-transfer/post-19 case and needs case-level checking.

28. Complaints allegedly being downgraded or closed.

- Parents reported that complaints were treated as enquiries or closed after the immediate transport problem was resolved.

29. The underlying complaint not being investigated.

- A parent could eventually receive transport but still have an unresolved complaint about why transport was not provided in the first place.

30. Lack of confidence in the Transport Service

- Taken together, parents described having to repeatedly chase, escalate and seek information from different parts of the Council before obtaining answers.

31. Delays in mileage payments.

A parent reported that mileage payments for June and July 2026 were not received until 25 August 2026, with a combined payment of approximately £450. The parent reported having to fund the transport costs upfront, including fuel and the wider costs of using and maintaining their vehicle. The parent also reported that CBC had previously upheld a complaint relating to mileage payments not being made.