

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET - 26th JANUARY 2009

RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY COMMISSION REPORT – SCHOOL TRAVEL

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

1.0 PURPOSE

To inform members of the response to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Commission for Children & Young People following their review of School Travel provision in the Borough.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

That the response to the Scrutiny Commission's recommendations, set out in Appendix 1, is approved

3.0 SUMMARY

This report summarises the response to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Commission for Environment and Regeneration. The responses are detailed in Appendix 1. The Commission's review has been thorough in its coverage and assisted by the involvement of a number of internal officers, elected members and external stakeholders including schools.

4.0 PREVIOUS MINUTES

None.

5.0 INFORMATION

School travel is a policy issue that attracts significant interest from schools parents and pupils trying to improve access to school sites to local residents concerned about school gate congestion. Promotion of safe and sustainable school travel is also an increasingly important policy area to address issues such as childhood obesity, reducing road casualties, reducing school gate congestion and supporting the sustainability and climate change agenda.

The Scrutiny Review of School Travel covered three areas: -

- Reviewing the Council's current Education Transport Policy.
- Increasing active and sustainable travel to school.
- The potential to implement a yellow school bus scheme in Telford & Wrekin

In undertaking the review the Scrutiny panel held meetings with Council officers, wrote to schools and colleges to seek views, met with two

schools, looked at travel to school data for Telford and other authorities, looked at good practice from other areas, reviewed a sample of school travel plans and looked at current and emerging legislation and Council policy.

The Scrutiny Review recognised that the provision of parking on or outside schools to levels often expected by parents is neither a practical nor a financially viable option. Addressing school travel issues is not only something that needs to be considered for existing school sites, but is equally important in the planning of new school buildings through the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme and the development and implementation of new education policies such as extended schools.

The completion of the Scrutiny Review has resulted in a total of nine recommendations being put forward to improve and support the positive work that is already being undertaken by the Environment and Regeneration and Children and Young People's Portfolios, and to address some gaps in service provision identified through the liaison with schools; the recommendations are included in Appendix 1 of this report.

6.0 EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The Education Transport Policy and work on school travel applies to all state schools in the Borough. The Borough has a legal responsibility to provide transport to and from schools at the start and end of the school day for pupils living in Telford and Wrekin who are in the care of the Council or who have a Statement of Special Educational Needs. The Council also has a responsibility to provide transport to school if the nearest school is further away than the statutory walking distance; the Council uses thresholds of 2 miles for Primary Schools and 3 miles for Secondary Schools. There is also provision to support children from low income families with access to school, the details of current policy provision are outlined in the main Scrutiny Report. The provision of support to low-income families extends to 16-19 year olds where not providing transport would mean that pupils would not be able to engage in education opportunities.

The Council also currently provides support to pupils travelling to faith schools in certain circumstances. The review recommends that this policy is reviewed following an Equalities Impact Assessment to ensure there is equitable treatment of pupils with regards to transport provision regardless of faith.

7.0 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

Addressing school gate congestion and supporting sustainable school travel has the potential to significantly support the wider sustainability and climate change agenda. The Council has made good progress in

reducing the proportion of children taken to school by car, but still has a high level of car use for school journeys compared to other local authorities. The Review recommends providing further support to schools in implementing school travel plans to promote sustainable travel; this is argued to be particularly important as lifestyles and future behaviour are often established during school years.

8.0 RISK MANAGEMENT

The review recognised the importance of ongoing communication between portfolios and joint ownership of addressing school travel issues between Council portfolios and schools. A number of recommendations have been made to reinforce the ongoing communication between portfolios. Further risks are based around a high dependency on grant funding for posts and very limited staff resources to support schools in implementing sustainable school travel initiatives. The review recommends providing further staff resources to work with schools, but acknowledges the financial impact this would have. It should be noted that at present if central government funding for school travel planning were to cease the Council would have no capacity to continue to provide support to schools.

9.0 LEGAL COMMENT

The Council has a statutory duty to make such travel arrangements free of charge, in the case of an eligible child, as are considered necessary to secure a child's attendance at the relevant educational establishment. There are a number of categories of eligible children identified in the Education Act 1996 (as amended) including those eligible on the grounds of religion or belief.

10.0 FINANCIAL COMMENT

Current School Travel Plan work is funded through specific central government grants which are available to March 2010. In addition cycle training is funded through a Bikeability Grant which has been confirmed until March 2009 – further grant funding will be available to support additional training places but additional revenue funding will be required to support cycle training beyond 2009. Initially, this will be achieved through PCT funding to support active travel in schools which is available to 2011. If no further grant funding is available continuation of cycle training will need to be considered as part of revenue budget setting process for 2011/12 onwards.

The funding for the new post within recommendation No 2. will come from the DCSF grant for the Sustainable Mode Of Travel Strategy which also forms part of the Area Based Grant, this has been confirmed until March 2012.

Should these grants end, or the Council change its priorities the Council would have to find the resources if it wished to continue to provide school travel plan support services.

Any changes to the Home to School Transport Policy may result in some financial implication for the Council and these will need to be considered as part of any future report to Cabinet on any specific proposed changes to this Policy.

The Transport Review that has currently started will ensure ongoing value for money for the provision of home to school transport.

11.0 WARD IMPLICATIONS

The report relates covers all schools in the borough, however, it is recognised that the impact of school travel on the local community is more acute in some wards.

12.0 LINKS WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

The implementation of the recommendations will contribute to the Children and Young People Priority Plan.

13.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Scrutiny Commission Report on School Travel – December 2008

Report prepared by Stuart Freeman, Business Manager: Network Management & Policy – Tel: (01952) 384601

Appendix 1

	Scrutiny Commission Recommendations	Response and Summary of Action Being Taken	Timescale	Officer responsible
1	<p>Communication between the two portfolios responsible for School Travel should continue, to ensure co-ordination of effort and maximising the expertise of officers within each portfolio.</p>	<p>Agreed</p> <p>Officer and member representatives from E&R and CYP, plus other stakeholders such as the Police now meet as part of the Congestion Outside Schools Group.</p> <p>The purpose of the group is to focus on strategic school travel issues that impact across portfolios. It is intended that the group should meet four times a year, and should undertake activities such as reviewing the success of particular school travel initiatives, updating the Sustainable Mode of Travel (SMOT) Strategy and considering future programmes of work such as the annual Safer Routes to School programme delivered as part of the Local Transport Plan.</p> <p>Regular monthly meetings are also held to discuss operational matters and financial monitoring in relation to school transport provision involving representatives from E&R, CYP and ACC, these meetings will continue</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>First meeting of 2009 to be held by Friday 20th February</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Mal Yale & Stuart Freeman</p> <p>Martyn Withnall</p>
2	<p>An additional post should be added to the Road Safety Team to help support schools to implement and review their School Travel Plans. Consideration should be given to</p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>The Council receives around £14k per year from the Department for Children, Schools and</p>	<p>Creation of post April 2009</p>	<p>Amanda Roberts</p>

	<p>funding this jointly from the Environment & Regeneration and Children & Young People budgets.</p>	<p>Families (DCSF) to support development and delivery of the Sustainable Mode of Travel (SMOT) Strategy that the Council has a statutory duty to prepare. The £14k forms part of the Area Based Grant and is available to 2012.</p> <p>It is proposed that, subject to financial approval, this funding should be used to support a post in the Road Safety Team to support the existing School Travel Plan Officer in the Road Safety Team. Given the level of funding available it is likely that the post will be a fixed term, part-time, term-time only contract. It is also noted that CYP will work with the Road Safety team ensure efficient communication and liaison with schools, through support from existing members of staff. Should other funding be available the scope of the new post may be increased further, the Council is currently liaising with the PCT over support to promote sustainable and healthy travel in schools which may provide further funding opportunities.</p>	<p>Ongoing support from CYP staff</p>	
<p>3</p>	<p>The Road Safety Team should continue to encourage those few schools without a School Travel Plan to create one, with assurances that they will be well supported to implement the plan with signposting and advice from the Road Safety Team as needed.</p>	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>Good progress has been made in getting schools to develop and implement a School Travel Plan. There are around ten sites that are acknowledged to be difficult to engage in relation to sustainable travel, these are: -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The five independent schools in the 	<p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Road Safety Team</p>

		<p>borough</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The four Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) • The Borough's Special School <p>Although these sites will be difficult to engage the Council will be proactive in offering support on sustainable travel, where appropriate.</p>		
4	The council should work with stakeholders who contribute towards healthy living to identify funding to make cycle training more sustainable. This could include schools, the Primary Care Trust and Parish and Town Councils.	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>The provision of cycle training that is financially sustainable is important. The demand for cycle training will be reviewed following the first year of provision. Options for funding ongoing training provision will be considered by September 2009, future funding should consider opportunities for joint working and funding with other stakeholders such as Parish Councils, the PCT and the Police.</p>	Sept 2009	Amanda Roberts and Stuart Freeman
5	School travel issues should be considered as part of the design of new build schools or changes to the buildings of existing schools, to ensure that the physical measures around the entrances of schools support their travel needs, including provision of bus lay-bys, safe paths and crossings etc.	<p>Agreed.</p> <p>All schools are required to develop a travel plan as part of any planning applications submitted. The current planning legislation is aimed at discouraging excess travel by car to the school gate, and the Council has limited flexibility to vary national planning policy. It is therefore important that schools take ownership of their travel plans and communicate regularly with parents and pupils about any transport issues. The Council should play a supporting role to schools in implementing road safety or sustainable travel measures as part of a travel</p>	Ongoing	

		plan.		
6a	The working group that has been set up to work with individual schools on their travel needs should report the outcomes of their work to scrutiny.	Agreed. The proposal to form a steering group to review prioritised need for individual schemes was initiated by the Lead & Asst C&YP cabinet members following discussion with the Chair of Scrutiny commission. The first meetings have taken place and have contributed to taking forward plans for Redhill School which were in the Safer Routes to School Programme for 2008.		
6b	The working group should consider inviting a representative from the Community Services portfolio to join the group.	Agreed. However, representation from Community Services may not be required at every meeting.	Ongoing	Mal Yale and Stuart Freeman
7	Officers from the Children & Young People and Environment & Regeneration portfolios should undertake more investigation into alternative models for a yellow bus scheme in Telford & Wrekin. This should include looking at using minibuses instead of large buses. A detailed report on the options available, including costs and potential usage, should be presented to scrutiny by the end of June 2009 to enable the Commission to make further recommendations to Cabinet.	Defer for further consideration. Two reports have already been taken to Scrutiny regarding yellow buses. The initial report highlighted limited potential use of the provision in the Newport area. It is recommended that any formal decision be deferred until an announcement is made on the potential opportunity for external funding, this decision is expected by April 2011. The ongoing provision of transport to schools will be considered as part of the wider transport services review that is currently being started. It is recommended that the appropriate results of the Transport Services Review be reported to	Jan – June 09	Helen Hill

		Scrutiny once the review is completed. The outcomes of the review will be widely communicated in due course.		
8	Feedback should be provided to scrutiny on the work that officers are undertaking to reduce the cost of taxis for school transport.	Agreed. There has been substantial work undertaken to procure taxi transport more effectively. Other value for money initiatives will be considered and reviewed as part of the review of transport services that is about to commence. The outcomes of the review will be widely communicated in due course.	Jan – June 09	Martyn Withnall
9	Transport provision for children attending faith schools at their parents' choice should be brought in line with provision given to other parents exercising their choice of school. Where the child lives outside the statutory distance from the school and it is the parents' choice that the child attends, the parents should be responsible for transport provision, unless they are a low income household.	Agreed. The Council should be equitable in how school transport is provided. Any change in policy will subject to an Equalities Impact Assessment and consultation before a final decision is taken.	April 2009	Kathy Swallow