



St. Helens Council

Environment and Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny Review of Safer Routes to School



St. Helens Council

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FOREWORD BY THE CHAIRMAN

This Report sets out the findings of a scrutiny exercise that examined Safer Routes to School in St Helens, which was undertaken by Environment and Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The review was undertaken between September 2008 and July 2009. This report outlines the background and scope of the review and the methodology employed to undertake this scrutiny exercise.

The report then presents the findings of the review and seeks to make recommendations that enhance and improve the safety of children and young people whilst travelling to and from school.

Councillor John Beirne

Chairman

Environment and Safer Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

September 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Committee wishes to pass on its thanks to everyone who has taken part in this review. The Committee appreciate the open and constructive approach of those who have completed questionnaires and willingly offered information and evidence as part of this scrutiny review. In particular the Committee would like to thank St Helens Council's Road Safety and Travel Awareness Team, for their time, assistance and contribution with this review.

1. Background

- 1.1 Road safety outside schools is understandably an emotive issue and one which affects many people in St Helens, either as pupils, parents, teachers, school governors, or as residents living in the vicinity of one of the boroughs 74 schools.
- 1.2 School travel is also a key element of some of the Council's, and national government's, aims such as reducing the number of pupils travelling to school by car, reducing childhood obesity through raising activity levels, and reducing the number of cars on the road to reduce CO2 emissions and benefit the environment.
- 1.3 The Department for Transport's (DfT) Tomorrow's Roads – Safer for Everyone, the national road safety strategy published in 2000, set a target to reduce by 50 per cent the numbers of children aged 0-15 killed and seriously injured in road accidents in Britain, by 2010, compared with the average for 1994-98.
- 1.4 The DfT's new national road safety strategy which was published for consultation in April 2009 entitled "A Safer Way: Making Britain's Roads the Safest in the World" set targets for the period 2010-20. In relation to improving road safety for children and young people, the draft strategy proposed to reduce the total of road deaths and serious injuries involving this age group by 50 percent based on 2004-2008 average.
- 1.5 There are wider initiatives to improve the health and safety of children that are linked to the aim of reducing child road accident casualties. These include the Every Child Matters initiative, the Healthy Schools programme, the Travel to School Initiative (TTSI) and Sure Start. Every Child Matters, the nationally strategy for radically improving services for children and young people which every Local Authority must implement, has "Stay Safe" as one of its five outcomes. School Travel Plans relate to all 5 outcomes.
- 1.6 An average of 46.7% (School Census Data, January 2008) children in St Helens travel to school by car, either alone or with children from the same household. This is the most convenient choice for many families where parents may travel on to work after dropping children off at school. There may also be parental concerns about children's safety if walking or cycling to school. However, we know that many schools face problems with congestion at the start and end of the school day. This can cause problems for people living near schools. More cars around the school site can also increase the risk of accidents to children as they leave school.

2. Rationale, Aims and Scope of the Review

- 2.1 The Environment and Safer Communities Overview & Scrutiny Committee raised concerns around road safety outside schools, mainly concerns related to issues of congestion, speed and inappropriate parking around local schools. In September 2008 the Committee agreed that it would undertake this scrutiny review within its work programme for the remainder of the year.
- 2.2 The Committee decided to carry out a review of Safer Routes to Schools in St Helens as it was felt it was an issue which affected many people – primarily children and young people and those who accompany them to school, but also other residents of the borough who faced increased congestion during school term times and may experience problems with inconsiderate parking if they live near a school site.
- 2.3 There are many reasons to encourage children to walk and cycle to school, or to travel by bus or car sharing. This could reduce congestion on roads around schools

and in turn make the roads safer for those walking or cycling as there are fewer cars trying to park near the school at the start and end of the school day. There would be benefits to the environment of reducing vehicle use, and walking and cycling to school provide an opportunity for children to get some exercise every day amid national increases in childhood obesity. It could also help to develop independent, or semi-independent travel, skills in children for later life. In addition, it helps children to develop valuable road safety skills.

- 2.4 The review commenced in September 2008 and work was undertaken by the Committee for the remainder of the year.

The following aims of the review were agreed: -

- To consider the impact and effectiveness of the Safer Routes to School Scheme.
- To consider the benefits of the scheme both to individual schools involved and to the wider community and environment.
- To look at the DCSF guidance regarding the establishment of School Travel Plans in all schools.
- To consider if and how this will be achieved any barriers which exist to prevent achievement of this goal.

- 2.5 The Committee determined that they would achieve this through the following approach:

- Gaining an understanding of the School Travel Plan Project and Safer Routes to School scheme.
- Assessing the effectiveness and impact of Safer Routes to School in the borough.
- Assessing the progress against DCSF guidance that every school in England should be engaged in the School Travel Plan process by March 2010.
- Consider the views and suggestions of a range of interested individuals and groups.
- Review appropriate documentation and Government guidance.

3. Methodology

- 3.1 The Committee gathered evidence for the review in a number of ways including:-

- Receiving background information from St.Helens Council's Senior Road Safety Officer.
- Writing to a sample of schools in the Borough to uncover their views and experiences relating to travel to school and road safety.
- Looking at legislation, guidance and Council policies.
- Visiting the following schools, to observe issues in relation to road safety outside schools, view measures put in place by schools to address issues, and consult with Head Teachers about School Travel Plans.
 - Legh Vale Primary School
 - Rainhill High School
 - Sutton Sports College
 - Haydock High School
- Meeting with St.Helens Council's School Travel Plan Advisor who provided Members with up-to-date information relating to the implementation of School Travel Plans.
- Looking at travel to school data for St Helens.

- Receiving information from Merseysides 'Bike It' Officer about 'Bike It' schemes in some of the boroughs schools.

4. Findings and Recommendations

- 4.1 The Committee contacted a number of schools to ask for their views on road safety and sustainable travel. Comments from pupils and parents were received from two schools and site visits and meetings with Head Teachers were undertaken with a further four schools.
- 4.2 Comments received from pupils and parent/carers confirmed the information which the Committee had received about road safety and travelling to school. Parents and Carers of primary school pupils who transported to school by car acknowledged that road safety and congestion around their school could be improved and although they would like to walk children to school, work commitments prevented this alongside concerns for the safety of children.
- 4.3 Pupils in Year 9 were also asked for their views as this age group, rather than be dependent on adults to accompany them to schools, were more likely to travel to school independently. When asked what would encourage them to walk or cycle to school, the overwhelming response was "nicer weather" followed by comments about the proximity they lived to school. Some commented that they would like to walk but it was simply too great a distance to be feasible.
- 4.4 Although each school had individual issues and problems relating to road safety, site visits to the four schools revealed some common concerns. The number of cars around school entrances at start and finish times was a potential danger to children as they walked into school, one school had erected road safety signage which it felt were useful in reminding drivers around the school about the safety of children Appendix 1.
- 4.5 Parking restrictions around the school were not always adhered to nor enforced, which in turn led to complaints from people living in neighbouring houses.

School Travel Plans

- 4.6 The Committee were informed by the School Travel Plan Advisor that School Travel Plans emerged from the Safer Routes to School Initiative launched by the Government in 1998 and form a significant element of Road Safety around schools. School Travel Plans aim to encourage schools to identify and solve problems associated with the school journey (especially those related to safety). The plans are produced by the schools themselves and do not have to include physical measures to improve routes but instead are a 'way of living and learning'.
- 4.7 Schools which adopt a School Travel Plan that passes the Department for Children Schools and Families (DSCF) quality assessment receive funding for capital work on the school site that was identified in the School Travel Plan e.g. bike racks or parent waiting shelters. Nursery and primary schools receive £3750, plus £5 per pupil. Secondary schools, special schools and pupil referral units receive £5000, plus £5 per pupil. 2010 is the last year that this capital grant will be available as the DCSF expects all schools to be engaged in the School Travel Plan programme by 2010.
- 4.8 Members of the Committee were informed that schools have until March 2010 to access Capital Grant funding, after which it would not be available as the DCSF

assumes that all schools would have adopted Travel Plans by this time. Members felt that it was important that remaining schools within the Borough who had yet to adopt a Travel Plan were reminded of this fact and encouraged, with support from the School Travel Plan Advisor, to adopt a School Travel Plan before the deadline to access funding.

Recommendation 1: That all HeadTeachers and Chairs of Governors of schools who have not adopted a Travel Plan be reminded of the Capital Grant available to them and the deadline for accessing it.

4.9 School Travel Plans contain;-

A brief description of the location, size and type of school.

A brief description of the travel/transport problems faced by the school.

The results of a survey to identify;

How children currently travel to and from school

How they would like to travel to and from school

Clearly defined targets and objectives

Details of any proposed measures

A detailed timetable for implementation

Clearly defined responsibilities

Evidence that all interested parties have been consulted

Proposals for monitoring and review

4.10 An example of an agreed School Travel Plan from a primary school in St Helens is attached at Appendix 2. Targets of the plan include increasing the proportion of pupils walking/cycling to school and to reduce the number of cars being used.

4.11 Members of the Committee were encouraged to see that 67 percent of schools in St Helens have an adopted School Travel Plan in place. However, it is important that these are implemented and reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain up to date and a useful tool for the school rather than a one-off exercise to access initial funding. While it was crucial that someone within the school itself leads on the School Travel Plan, it could be difficult for the individual tasked with this role to maintain momentum and drive forward all the actions within the plan, as well fulfilling the duties of their post within the school.

4.12 There is only one dedicated post for School Travel Plans in the Road Safety and Travel Awareness Team, which is currently funded until March 2010. With the government setting a target for all schools to be engaged in the School Travel Plan programme by 2010, the primary focus of this post had been on ensuring that all schools have adopted a plan. However, when visiting schools which hadn't adopted a School Travel Plan, it became apparent that schools needed more support in implementing the plans. The lasting impact of School Travel Plans on changing methods of school travel would be greater if schools received more support, not just with the initial implementation of the School Travel Plan, but to assist with the continued monitoring and review of the plans. The capacity for the Road Safety and Travel Awareness Team to provide this additional support is limited, which in turn limits the effectiveness of School Travel Plans on making a real and lasting change to school travel habits.

Recommendation 2: That provisions should be made to support schools to maintain and review school travel plans after March 2010.

- 4.13 Only 24 out of the 73 schools in the borough do not currently have an adopted School Travel Plan. Some of these had proven difficult to engage in the School Travel Plan process, of the schools visited without an adopted School Travel Plan, it became apparent that the schools did not seem aware of the support they could receive to implement a plan and the benefits which plans could bring to the school. The Committee feel that it is important that all schools consider their current travel modes and potential ways to improve.
- 4.14 For schools without adopted School Travel Plans, there may be a need to provide more tailored encouragement to show some of the benefits that the school could receive. Schools should be assured of the support that they would receive from the Council to implement their plans, and also that the School Travel Plan was intended to consider and address their individual school travel needs, and they would not be expected to develop sustainable travel more than they could achieve.

Recommendation 3: That the Road Safety and Travel Awareness Team should continue to encourage those few schools without an adopted 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 and Travel Awareness Team as needed.

- 4.15 The Committee recognised that writing a Travel Plan is not always a voluntary exercise. It may be difficult for schools to find time to complete the plan given other equally pressing priorities. In secondary schools the process of developing a Travel Plan could be extremely labour intensive and requires dedication to ensure that students are brought into the travel planning process and the wider school community are consulted upon travel issues. Lack of teacher time was viewed as a key obstacle towards the production of School Travel Plans. There are also likely to be some schools who had less capacity to adopt a Travel Plan despite a willingness to do so.
- 4.16 Members were informed that Lancashire County Council currently offer School Travel Plan Development Grants in response to the difficulty that their Road Safety and Travel Awareness Team encountered when trying to make appointments/engage with schools. The small development grant was available to all schools and aimed to help get them started on the School Travel Plan process. Primary schools were awarded £500 and secondary schools £1000. The first half of the grant was paid on application with the balance paid on receipt of the School Travel Plan. The Team did not have to wait until submission to DCSF but instead pay the balance when the School Travel Plan met the robust internal process at any time during the year. This way, the team encouraged early submissions which helped to make work more manageable.
- 4.17 When asked, schools within Lancashire said that it made a considerable difference and made the process more manageable, for example, it's easier to ask a busy teacher to take on extra duties if supply cover could be made available or a cash enhancement offered. Similarly, a Governor or parent appreciates the sum, even though some were happy to pay it back into the school as a donation. The Committee felt that the approach described above would encourage more schools to engage with and adopt School Travel Plans.

Recommendation 4: That the Authority consider establishing suitable School Travel Development Grants in order to support and reinvigorate the School Travel Plan process.

Cycle and Child Pedestrian Training

- 4.18 The Committee received a presentation from Merseyside's Sustrans Bike It Officer for St Helens and Knowsley about the cycling schemes delivered to some schools in St Helens. The Bike It scheme was a practical project that delivered a behavioural educational programme that aimed to raise awareness, develop skills and encourage children to take action in their own lives and increase the number of school journeys undertaken by bicycle. The scheme was delivered by the Bike It Officer who delivered practical sessions assisted by the school and consists of four phases which cover; awareness, empowerment, action and sustaining. It was highly desirable that children cycle to school, for their health, independence and to reduce car use. However, it was crucial that children have adequate cycle training first to ensure that they can travel safely.
- 4.19 During the site visits to local schools, Members uncovered that the provision of Child Pedestrian Training had been limited. Provision within schools was 'patchy', with some schools funding training out of their own resources, and others not accessing the training that they were entitled to. The Committee noted that there seemed to be an expectation that Child Pedestrian Training would be delivered and funded by the Council, despite the Road Safety and Travel Awareness Team having limited resources to do so. The Committee acknowledged that it would be unlikely that the Council alone could fund Child Pedestrian Training for all schools and work would be required to identify how it could be funded, yet, the Committee would like to see this training provided at all schools.

Recommendation 5: That the Council should work to identify funding to make Child Pedestrian Training more accessible to all schools.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 Members of the Committee were encouraged to see that 67% of schools in St Helens have an adopted School Travel Plan in place. However, it is important that these are implemented and reviewed regularly to ensure that they remain up-to-date and a useful tool for the school. Members saw evidence of some very positive work aimed at increasing the safety of children and young people whilst travelling to and from school and commended the work undertaken by the Road Safety and Travel Awareness Team and individual schools within the Borough. By addressing the issues relating to the adoption of School Travel Plans, support for schools to maintain and review Travel Plans, and, the provision of child pedestrian training within schools, will improve the School Travel Plan process and the safety and well-being of children and young people on their school journey.

6. Action Plan

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Rec. No.	Recommendation	Responsible Officer	Agreed Action and Date of Implementation
1	That all Head Teachers and Chairs of Governors of schools who have not adopted a Travel Plan be reminded of the Capital Grant available to them and the deadline for accessing it.		
2	That provisions should be made to support schools to maintain and review school travel plans after March 2010.		
3	That the Road Safety and Travel Awareness Team should continue to encourage those few schools without an adopted 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 and Travel Awareness Team as needed.		
4	That the Authority consider establishing suitable School Travel Development Grants in order to support and reinvigorate the School Travel Plan process.		
5	That the Authority should work to identify funding to make Child Pedestrian Training more accessible to all schools.		

APPENDIX 1

Road Safety Signs Displayed at Legh Vale Primary School

