

Appendix 2

Available Walking Routes to School Programme

- Meeting of Cabinet, Tuesday, 18th October, 2016 2.00 pm (Item 45.)

To give further consideration to this matter in the light of the recommendations of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the officer response to the recommendations.

Minutes:

Cabinet gave further consideration to this matter in the light of the recommendations of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the officer response to the recommendations.

On the 14th June 2016, Cabinet had considered a report in relation to a 'review of the available walking routes to school' and had resolved as follows:

"That Cabinet

1. notes the reclassification of routes that have been re-assessed as available walking routes to school and agrees that free school transport for those routes be withdrawn from April 2017; and
2. authorises the Executive Director for People to spend £150,000 from the Local Transport Plan budget allocation for 2016/17 to improve further walking routes to school to bring them up to required standard so that free school transport for those improved routes may be subsequently withdrawn."

Cabinet's decisions had subsequently been called in for review on the basis that:

- a) relevant information was not considered;
- b) viable alternatives had not been considered; and
- c) the decision taken by Cabinet could be open to challenge.

On the 19th July 2016, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the call-in of the Cabinet decision and made a series of recommendations to Cabinet as set out in the report.

The officer response to the Committee's recommendations and subsequent recommendations to Cabinet were set out in Appendix 3 to the report.

At the invitation of the Chairman, Councillor Rhoda Bailey, Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, addressed the meeting, paying tribute to everyone who had taken part in the process. She went through the Committee's recommendations as set out in the report and noted that some of these

had been accepted by the Cabinet. She urged Cabinet to ensure that any necessary improvements to the proposed walking routes were completed before the proposals were implemented.

The following councillors were invited to address Cabinet in relation to the proposals, having expressed the wish to do so: Councillors A Stott, S Corcoran, B Dooley, S Edgar, D Flude, L Jeuda, G Merry, A Moran, S Pochin, J Saunders and M Warren. Among the views expressed were that some working parents would find it difficult to accompany their children to school; some routes were unsafe for children to walk along alone and could attract opportunistic predators; the cost of transport would be prohibitive for large families; there had been a lack of consultation with schools and local ward members; the safety of children should take precedence over financial savings; and the weight of opposition across the political parties and the views of the cross party overview and scrutiny committee, local ward members and local MPs should not be ignored.

On the question of consultation with local ward members, the Portfolio Holder for Children and Families confirmed that meetings with local ward members for the areas affected had been offered.

At the conclusion of member speaking, the officers presented the report which focussed primarily on the recommendations of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The officers advised that the Emergency Services had confirmed that they would be able to access Middlewood Way if necessary; that children with long term health issues and families on low incomes had been taken into account by the Council's policy; and that the Council had a duty to apply its policies consistently and fairly across the Borough which would inevitably lead to the removal of school transport where a walking route was deemed to be available. Finally, the officers indicated that the process had provided for a nine month period before implementation to allow sufficient time for engagement with the affected schools and local communities. Cabinet members then asked the officers a number of questions to clarify certain aspects of the report.

At 4.00 pm the Chairman announced a 10 minute adjournment.

Following the adjournment, the Chairman summed up the debate by commenting that the Cabinet had acknowledged the concerns of local schools and residents and had considered carefully the advice and recommendations of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In doing so, the Cabinet had had regard to its responsibility to all the residents of the Borough in applying the Council's policy on Available Walking Routes to School in a consistent and equitable manner.

The Cabinet had welcomed the debate on the re-assessment of the five walking routes to school, had listened to the views of the schools and residents and had taken on board the suggestions and comments made as reflected in the revised

recommendations in the report. The Chairman thanked everyone concerned for their participation in and contribution to the debate.

The Portfolio Holder for Children and Families then moved the recommendations in the report with a number of additional amendments.

RESOLVED

That having reconsidered its decisions of 14th June 2016, and the minutes and recommendations of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 19th July 2016, Cabinet resolves as follows:

That the decisions taken by Cabinet on 14th June 2016 be confirmed subject to the following:

1. Middlewood Way be confirmed as an available walking route;
2. the implementation of changes to the availability of routes be postponed until September 2017;
3. the Executive Director - People be given delegated authority (in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Families) to discuss with relevant schools and academies, and arrange such transitional grant funding as the Executive Director considers appropriate, so that where practicable any child who currently receives free school transport will continue to receive subsidised transport until they either conclude their education at their current school or move to another school, and the Executive Director report back on progress;
4. the highway improvements recommended by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and identified as 'to be implemented' in Appendix A to the report, be approved and monitored by the relevant Portfolio Holders with a view to implementation by 2017;
5. for any future route assessments, where changes to the classification are being considered, local members to be invited to accompany officers on a route review;
6. the Executive Director - Place be requested to review the Council's Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy and bring a revised strategy to Cabinet for consideration and approval; and
7. Cabinet note the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee's disappointment at a perceived lack of consultation in relation to the proposals and log the ongoing engagements with overview and scrutiny on this policy as a whole, but in particular with regard to the routes before Cabinet today.

Supporting documents:

[\\files.congleton.gov.uk\shared\Cheshire East\Democratic Services\Cabinet\2016\Cabinet - 18 Oct 16\Available Walking Routes - report \(final\).docx](\\files.congleton.gov.uk\shared\Cheshire East\Democratic Services\Cabinet\2016\Cabinet - 18 Oct 16\Available Walking Routes - report (final).docx)

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