

Cheshire East Council

Cabinet

Date of Meeting:	6 th February 2017
Report of:	Frank Jordan, Executive Director of Place Mark Palethorpe, Acting Executive Director of People
Subject/Title:	Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools (SMOTS) Strategy
Portfolio Holder:	Cllr Don Stockton, Environment Cllr Jos Saunders, Children and Families

1. Report Summary

- 1.1 Travel to schools within Cheshire East is an essential aspect of daily life. The Council is working to promote more physical activity, improve our environment and create safer and more vibrant communities. This approach is underpinned by the Council's corporate objectives and our commitment to improve quality of place. This report summarises progress on producing a new Sustainable Modes of Travel to School (SMOTS) strategy which will provide a framework to support schools when they are implementing their School Travel Plans.
- 1.2 The Council recognise that to achieve an increase in sustainable travel to school there needs to be coordinated action by a wide range of stakeholders. School communities are best placed to identify those particular measures which will enable more sustainable journeys to their location. Schools will be encouraged to update their School Travel Plans and implement appropriate measures. The Council and our delivery partners will, in turn, provide a range of advice and resources to schools undertaking to update and implement School Travel Plans.
- 1.3 During 2017, an evidence base relating to sustainable travel to schools has been compiled through conducting surveys to understand:
 - Current travel patterns to schools in the Borough
 - The views of parents regarding sustainable travel to school
 - The implementation of School Travel Plans by individual schools
- 1.4 A draft SMOTS strategy (see Appendix 1) has been prepared which identifies travel patterns and the barriers to uptake of sustainable travel for these journeys. The evidence base has aided identification of

opportunities to address a range of barriers, which can further increase the number of children using sustainable modes to travel to school.

- 1.5 A range of measures are already being implemented by the Council and partners to improve options for walking, cycling, public transport and travel by car. These include improving walking and cycling routes, training in road safety, Bikeability and personal safety, and travel information.
- 1.6 In addition to these existing measures, the draft SMOTS strategy sets out a range of new measures including:
- Funding the provision of the Modeshift STARS online system (approximately £1,000 per annum) to enable schools to efficiently update and implement School Travel Plans. Modeshift STARS has been established with funding from the Department for Transport to provide a national framework and supporting resources for use by schools.
 - Officer resource to promote and administer the Modeshift STARS system, in addition to providing more bespoke advice to schools in instances where the STARS system does not answer a specific query.
 - The SMOTS supports the previous recommendation approved by Cabinet on 10th October 2017 to 'allocate resources and funding from the 2018/19 Local Transport Plan (LTP) budget to support a Safer Routes to Schools programme and review this for subsequent years'. This would provide infrastructure to underpin implementation of recently updated School Travel Plans.
- 1.7 As part of the Council's updated LTP, a Safer Routes to School Programme will be developed to implement a range of capital measures to provide safer routes to school. Examples of the types of schemes in the vicinity of schools which could be funded are outlined below:
- Improvements to walking and cycling routes such as footpath or cycleway improvements;
 - New access points to schools sites which give more convenient and safer access for pedestrian and cyclists;
 - Improved or new safe crossing points on routes to schools;
 - Small scale traffic management schemes e.g. lining, signing and traffic calming;
 - Improvements to parking in the vicinity of schools to provide a safer highway environment.
- 1.8 Schools with up-to-date School Travel Plans which can evidence the need for local infrastructure measures will be invited to submit requests for capital funding through the LTP programme. An annual Safer Routes to

School Programme will comprise schemes which are requested by schools and are prioritised through the following two-stage appraisal process.

Stage One

Stage one of the assessment will screen scheme requests against the following criteria, which is consistent with the approach developed for the updated Local Transport Plan:

- Deliverability – are schemes deliverable in terms of timescales, taking account of planning, consents, 3rd party issues etc?
- Feasibility – are schemes feasible in terms of physical constraints and design?
- Value-for-money – will schemes deliver high levels of benefits relative to scheme costs?

Stage Two

Stage Two will assess how proposed schemes meet the following criteria:

Criteria	Description
Mode shift	The scheme must encourage and enable pupils to travel sustainably to and from school, leading to a reduced reliance on travel by car.
Safer routes	The scheme must improve safety on routes in the vicinity of schools.
Wider commitment to sustainable travel	Schemes should be an integral part of delivering the school's wider commitment to encouraging sustainable travel. Each school submitting an application should have a current School Travel Plan (reviewed and updated within the previous 12 month period). The quality of the School Travel Plan and the capacity of the school to implement proposed measures will be considered.
Strategic fit	The proposed scheme must fit with the wider transport policies adopted by the Council, including the 'Education Travel Policy' and the 'Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools' Strategy.

- 2.1 Subject to approval, the draft SMOTS strategy would go to consultation commencing in early 2018, in parallel with Local Transport Plan consultation. A proposed Feedback Form has been drafted as a basis for this consultation (Appendix 2). The outcomes of the consultation will inform the finalised SMOTS, which is expected to be reported to Cabinet in Summer 2018.

2. Recommendations

It is recommended that the Cabinet

- 1) Approves the draft Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools strategy (Appendix 1).
- 2) Notes the costs associated with implementation of the strategy will be outlined in detail when the final strategy is presented to Cabinet for approval.
- 3) Agrees that a borough-wide public consultation takes place seeking views on the draft SMOTS Strategy, with the decision on all final consultation materials being delegated to the Executive Director of Place in consultation with the Executive Director for People.
- 4) Notes that the outcomes of the consultation and any resultant changes to the draft Strategy will be reported to and approved by Cabinet in due course.

3. Reasons for Recommendation

- 3.1. Cheshire East is committed to encouraging more sustainable travel to and from schools. This supports healthier and more active lifestyles for school communities, whilst also reducing congestion on local roads around schools, with associated improvements in air quality, road safety and residential areas surrounding schools.
- 3.2. Under the Education and Inspections Act 1996, Cheshire East Council has a legal duty to:
 - Assess the travel and transport needs of children, and young people within the authority's area;
 - Audit the sustainable travel and transport infrastructure within the authority's area that may be used when travelling to and from, or between schools/institutions;
 - Develop a strategy to improve the sustainable travel and transport infrastructure within the authority so that the travel and transport needs of children and young people are best catered for;
 - Promote sustainable travel and transport modes on the journey to, from, and between schools and other institutions; and
 - Publish a Sustainable Modes of Travel to School strategy.
- 3.3. The production and implementation of this draft SMOTS will discharge the Council's legal duties in this respect.

4. Other Options Considered

- 4.1. As the SMOTS strategy is a statutory document, no options other than to develop the strategy were considered. The approach adopted is considered to be a proportionate means of fulfilling this requirement.
- 4.2. An alternative approach of supporting schools to update and implement School Travel Plans has been considered. This option consisted of not funding the Modeshift STARS online system and utilising more officer resource to support schools to update and implement School Travel Plans. This option was not pursued due to Modeshift STARS offering a cost effective option which provides a good level of service to schools.

5. Background

- 5.1. The 2010/11 School Census reveals that 21% of high school pupils are driven to school, with the figure for primary schools, which are principally in residential areas, being significantly higher at 45%. Since this Census a number of issues have been highlighted including the impacts of parking around schools owing to the pressure it places on communities, residents and the local highway infrastructure.
- 5.2. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up a Task and Finish Group to review Safer Parking for Communities around Schools in November 2015. The Group's remit was to review the approach to safer parking for communities and identify initiatives the Council could consider to improve the outcomes for local communities around schools.
- 5.3. The Group's findings and recommendations were presented to Cabinet on 11 July 2017. This SMOTS strategy provides a complementary framework for these recommendations whilst also discharging the Council's obligations under the Education and Inspections Act 1996 to publish a SMOTS strategy.
- 5.4. The current Local Transport Plan is in the process of being updated and this SMOTS strategy has been developed in parallel with the new Local Transport Plan 4 to ensure alignment across these strategies.

6. Wards Affected and Local Ward Members

- 6.1. All Wards in Cheshire East

7. Implications of Recommendation

7.1. Policy Implications

- 7.1.1. Producing the SMOTS will ensure that the Council discharges obligations under the Education and Inspections Act 1996 to publish and implement a SMOTS.

7.1.2. Development of the draft SMOTS has been undertaken to ensure there is a consistent policy-fit with all relevant adopted and emerging policies including the Compulsory School Age Education Travel Policy, Local Transport Plan 4 and car parking strategy.

7.2. Legal Implications

7.2.1. As noted in the report, the Council is required under section 508A of the Education and Inspections Act 1996 to produce and implement a SMOTS.

7.2.2. The report refers to the draft SMOTS strategy going out to consultation. There is no statutory duty to consult on proposals to change the way in which a local authority carries out its duties but there is an expectation enshrined in case law that any local authority making decisions affecting the public will do so fairly and in a way that cannot be said to be an abuse of power.

7.2.3. It is therefore important to test the fairness of the Council's approach by way of consultation on any changes which would have the effect of withdrawing existing benefits or advantages available to its residents. Such consultation should involve those directly affected by such changes together with the relevant representative groups. The responses to the consultation will need to be conscientiously taken into account when Cabinet makes any future decisions.

7.2.4. It should be noted that breach of a duty to consult would risk the Council being subjected to legal challenge by way of judicial review.

7.2.5. Any Consultation must be conducted with adherence to the following:

(a) the consultation must take place at a time when the proposals are still at a formative stage;

(b) the proposer must give sufficient reasons for any proposal to permit of intelligent consideration and response;

(c) adequate time must be given for consideration and response;

(d) the product of the consultation must be conscientiously taken into account in finalising the proposals.

7.3. Financial Implications

7.3.1. It is proposed that budget allocations are made as part of each annual Local Transport Plan delivery programme, with resources to support the implementation of the SMOTS.

7.3.2. Funding for the provision of the Modeshift STARS online system is estimated to require approximately £1,000 per annum, to assist schools in efficiently updating and implementing School Travel Plans. This will be funded from the Council's Strategic Infrastructure revenue budget.

7.4. Equality Implications

7.4.1. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been prepared (Appendix 3) to ensure that the needs and impacts on all residents are understood, especially individuals or groups at risk as a result of health, age, gender, race or lifestyle. The EqIA is an evolving document and will be updated following public consultation.

7.5. Rural Community Implications

7.5.1. 57% of the Cheshire East highway network is classed as rural, serving over half of our population. The quality and availability of the rural transport network is vital to the wellbeing and life chances of residents in these rural areas. Support will be offered to all schools across the Borough in both rural and urban locations.

7.5.2. Rural schools often present particular challenges associated with rural highway networks such as limited provision of footpaths. These issues will need to be assessed in School Travel Plans with measures proposed to improve routes where feasible.

7.5.3. The approach outlined above will be further strengthened by work conducted as part of developing a refreshed Local Transport Plan 4 which will include consideration of transport issues in rural areas throughout the Borough. This is aided by the place-based approach to the updated Local Transport Plan process, so that the emphasis afforded to rural issues can reflect the diverse nature of different parts of Cheshire East.

7.6. Human Resources Implications

7.6.1. None

7.7. Health and Wellbeing Implications

7.7.1. The SMOTS and Local Transport Plan considers the impact of transport on issues affecting public health, most notably Air Quality and the contribution that Active Travel – walking and cycling – can make to health and wellbeing.

7.7.2. Walking and cycling to and from school helps children achieve the recommended government targets of physical activity. Successful initiatives to increase activity rates for walking and cycling to school are expected to make a meaningful contribution to reducing childhood obesity and other health conditions.

7.8. Implications for Children and Young People

7.8.1 Specific transport issues relating to children and young people are incorporated into the updated SMOTS document. Increasing the number of children using sustainable modes of travel should result in a

reduction in vehicle emissions, an improvement to local air quality, and improved road safety.

The increase in children undertaking active travel on a daily basis will improve health and wellbeing, and could result in increased educational attainment.

7.9. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Implications

7.9.1. As noted above the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up a Task and Finish Group to review Safer Parking for Communities around Schools in November 2015. The Group's remit was to review the approach to safer parking for communities and identify initiatives the Council could consider to improve the outcomes for local communities around schools. The Group's findings and recommendations were presented to Cabinet in July 2017. The draft SMOTS provides a complementary framework for these recommendations.

7.9.2. A draft Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools strategy was reported to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 27th November 2017. The committee's comments on the approach have informed the version of the pre-consultation strategy which accompanies this report.

7.10. Other Implications (Please Specify)

7.10.1. None

8. Risk Management

8.1. Production of the draft SMOTS strategy is being governed by the Education Travel Project Board and the Local Transport Plan Project Board, with key issues and decisions taken in these forums. A risk register is maintained for the project detailing key risks and mitigation measures.

8.2. The subsequent Safer Routes to School Programme will report to the Strategic Infrastructure Programme Board, chaired by the Director of Infrastructure and Highways to ensure appropriate project governance and strategic direction.

9. Access to Information

9.1. The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer.

10. Contact Information

Contact details for this report are as follows:

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Appendices to the report:

- 1) Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools strategy (Draft for consultation)
- 2) Consultation Feedback Form
- 3) Equalities Impact Assessment