

# Cheshire East Council

## Cabinet Report

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	22 August 2017
<b>Report of:</b>	Frank Jordan, Executive Director of Place
<b>Subject/Title:</b>	Safer Routes to Primary Schools
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>	Cllr David Brown, Highways and Infrastructure

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### 1. Report Summary

- 1.1. 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 the impacts of parking around our primary schools has been highlighted as an issue by some residents and communities owing to the pressure it places on the local highway infrastructure.
- 1.2. The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee set up a Task and Finish Group ("the 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.
- 1.3. The Group's findings and recommendations were presented to Cabinet on 11 July 2017 and it is intended that Cabinet will respond to the Group's findings at its October meeting.
- 1.4. Whilst Cabinet is yet to respond formally to the Group's report, it is noted that the Group highlighted the need to have proactive policies and a programme of work to address both the root causes of congestion and parking around primary schools as well as action to manage its direct impacts.
- 1.5. In terms of any proposed policy changes in response to the Group's findings, it is recommended that this is undertaken as part of the refresh of the Council's Local Transport Plan. This will ensure that the Council has a coherent programme of activity that will all contribute to reducing the impacts of school travel.
- 1.6. In terms of potential work programmes, whilst the findings of the Group are still under consideration, it is recognised that the Group recommended

consideration of introducing off highway parking and drop-off areas within schools.

- 1.7. This type of measure could have both positive and negative impacts, which need to be properly evaluated to inform the approach to policy development in this area.
- 1.8. However, Cabinet are asked to note that discussions and work has been undertaken with the Berkeley Academy ("the Academy") to deliver such a project.
- 1.9. Cabinet are also asked to note that in the climate of a policy vacuum on such initiatives whilst the work progressed, an undertaking has been given to the Academy that the Council will make a £70,000 contribution to the scheme. That undertaking must be honoured.
- 1.10. The purpose of this report is to seek Cabinet agreement to delegate to the Executive Director of Place the authority to make that grant funding award subject to conditions that are designed to maximise the benefits of that scheme on the formation of policy in this area.
- 1.11. This report also outlines an approach to the formation of policy which would enable similarly innovative and bespoke proposals to come forward to address congestion issues at other primary schools.

## **2. Recommendation**

That Cabinet:

- 2.1. Notes the outline approach in respect of Safer Parking for Communities around Schools in advance of its full response to the Scrutiny Committee's Task and Finish Group recommendations.
- 2.2. Notes that discussions and work has been undertaken with the Berkeley Academy and that an undertaking has been given that the Council will make a £70,000 contribution for an off highway parking facility.
- 2.3. Authorises the Executive Director of Place to make an award of grant funding of up to £70,000 (to be funded by virement from the highways and linked access fund capital programme allocation) to the Berkeley Academy to be used for the purposes of piloting a safer drop off facility at the school in order to inform the development of Council policy in this area, upon such terms the Executive Director of Place considers prudent.
- 2.4. Authorises the Executive Director of Place in consultation with the Director of Legal Services and the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Policy and Legal Services to dispose of any requests received for reimbursement of additional expenses reasonably and properly incurred by the Academy which is considered the Council may be liable to reimburse flowing from action taken in connection with the undertaking given.

### **3. Reasons for Recommendation**

- 3.1 As part of the Group's work all Ward Members were sent a questionnaire to ascertain their views on parking problems around schools. 27 responses were received, of which 96% raised specific issues outside schools. The most common issues related to managing the impacts around schools.
- 3.2 The Group did propose the reintroduction of a Safer Routes to Primary School Programme and the preparation of a Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy. This work would involve a more active interface with schools with the aim of encouraging them to develop School Travel Plans and to promote sustainable travel options as an alternative to travelling to school by car.
- 3.3 The Council is currently in the process of refreshing its Local Transport Plan. The Plan should address travel to school and ensure that the policy incorporates an integrated approach to walking and cycling that also reflects the needs of journeys to schools. The refresh would also provide the platform to engage with the schools. As such it is proposed that a consultation takes place to invite primary schools to submit proposals to the Council that would improve sustainable travel and reduce the school impact on its local community.
- 3.4 If the schools' work programmes are to be accelerated by the Council it is worth reflecting on experience from elsewhere which suggests that successful outcomes are more likely to be achieved where schools have an incentive in the form of the ability to bid against a grant funding allocation made available to implement proposals in a Travel Plan that might not otherwise be affordable. In this circumstance more schools get engaged in developing and running a Travel Plan. A supporting Investment Plan could be made available to bid against in order to deliver measures in and around schools that are identified in school Travel Plans as likely to deliver demonstrable changes that would encourage children and parents to adapt their travel behaviours to benefit the community.
- 3.5 To support this process, Cabinet could consider as part of its overall response to the Group's recommendations making an allocation from the 2017/18 and 2018/19 Local Transport Plan capital programme to support a Safer Routes to Primary School Investment Plan.
- 3.6 A set of criteria and guidelines would have to be developed to enable any proposals submitted by schools to be prioritised. Where proposals involve spend within a schools boundary it is recommended that Academy schools will be expected to make at least a 50% contribution to the cost of the works.
- 3.7 It is envisaged that such a consultation could involve the Council writing to all the primary schools in the Borough informing them of the introduction of such a programme. In this letter it is proposed that schools are invited to develop or update their School Travel Plans and submit an expression of

interest which outlines proposals that they believe address the significant impacts travel to school has on their neighbouring community, in particular measures that promote travel by sustainable modes of transport.

- 3.8 The criteria which will be used to assess these proposals would be attached to a letter to the schools. These criteria will clearly set out what outcomes the funding is being directed towards and how bids will be prioritised into an annual programme.
- 3.9 The Task and Finish group recommended consideration of introducing off highway parking and drop-off areas within schools as an example of one such proposal. This type of measure could have both positive and negative impacts. They could relieve parking and congestion problems around a school but they could also encourage more children to be driven to school. Equally such a measure could be expensive to deliver if pursued at a number of schools each year and would significantly impact on other highway programmes. Further developing, implementing and managing such a facility would take considerable time and resource and as such place a significant burden on a school.
- 3.10 In certain circumstances where other measures have been implemented and on going resources still have to be spent on managing the impacts, such a measure may provide an alternative long term solution. Indeed at some newly built schools where drop off facilities have been implemented it is considered that the impacts of the school travel and parking have been contained.
- 3.11 As such a pilot project could be considered which can test the community benefits and disbenefits described above and inform whether this type of measure should be included as part of the Council's overall policy approach.
- 3.12 If the pilot concluded an overall beneficial outcome, it could be advised that this measure would only be supported from the programme when all other School Travel Plan options have been exhausted and that a set of implementation and management requirements have been satisfied and delivered by a school.
- 3.13 In relation to this initiative, the Council has held several meetings with The Berkeley Academy in Wistaston. The school has delivered measures in the past, particularly to encourage walking to school. Furthermore, the school has put in place the necessary consents to deliver this type of facility.
- 3.14 Given the policy vacuum and the work of the Task and Finish Group, in April 2016 an undertaking was given to the school for the Council to make a £70,000 contribution to the scheme. This contribution must be honoured but would be subject to the Academy providing at least 50% match funding to complete the works as proposed at paragraph 3.6 and other terms as the Executive Director of Place may consider prudent.

#### **4. Other Options Considered**

- 4.1. Parking outside schools at drop-off and pick-up times is a recognised, long standing problem at many sites in the Borough.
- 4.2. It is not just a safety issue but a problem of traffic congestion and nuisance to local residents. The issue is complex and varies by location and school. Over many years attempts by local authorities to tackle the issues have been implemented, with varying degrees of success.
- 4.3. The Department for Education (DfE) funded a school travel planning programme which ended in 2011. As at March 2010, all primary, secondary and special schools in Cheshire East had a completed travel plan. However, since the DfE funding ceased, there have been limited resources to sustain this development
- 4.4. The Council's current proactive initiatives being delivered are therefore predominantly focussed on managing the impacts of traffic outside schools and include:
  - Development and implementation of parking restriction schemes
  - Advisory 20mph zones outside all schools in Cheshire East
  - Road Safety education which is delivered annually to all schools in Cheshire East
  - Parking Enforcement Officer visits to all schools in Cheshire East
  - Keep Clear markings are refreshed and enforced at all schools
  - Provision of guidance on the website to assist schools in developing travel plans and safer routes to primary schools projects
- 4.5. Potential further initiatives to tackle the parking issues recommended in the Scrutiny Task and Finish group report include:
  - Support for discussions with schools around the provision of safer school parking or drop-off zone
  - Re-introduction of the Safer Routes to Primary Schools programme
  - Preparation of a Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy\*
  - Amendments to the school road safety education programme provided by Cheshire Fire and Rescue Service\*
  - Introduction of walking to schools with heroes campaign
  - Increased parking enforcement\*

*\* Already being delivered*

- 4.6. Cabinet is yet to respond to the Group's recommendations. It could decide to note the recommendations of the Task and Finish group and carry on with its current response to managing the impacts of school travel on the local communities. If this approach were adopted this would not require the development of any policies such as the reintroduction of a safer routes to primary school programme or seeking to develop safer school parking and drop off facilities in discussion with our local schools.
- 4.7. However, given both the scale of the problems being reported by local ward councillors at some schools and the links to other Corporate policy areas, such as health and well being, it is considered that, on balance, Cabinet should consider adopting a broader approach to addressing school travel through the Local Transport Plan refresh.
- 4.8. Cabinet could await the outcome of policy development in this area before piloting any projects in schools, however in light of the undertakings given to and work undertaken by the Academy, in conjunction with the anticipated benefits on informing policy development in this area, it is recommended that the proposed grant award be made and that pilot scheme progressed in parallel with wider policy formation.

## **5 Background/Chronology**

- 5.1 Set out in the body of the report.

## **6 Wards Affected and Local Ward Members**

- 6.1 All wards and ward members are potentially affected by the proposal.

## **7 Implications of Recommendation**

### **7.1 Policy Implications**

- 7.1.1 This report is recommending the development of a policy approach to articulate the actions which the Council could utilise to achieve a reduction in the number of children driven to school, supported by the implementation of a pilot scheme. This supports the Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP) to ensure a sustainable future by increasing the use of sustainable modes of transport, as well as the Council's Cycling Strategy which seeks to enable more people to cycle safer, more often and with confidence for everyday and leisure journeys.

### **7.2 Legal Implications**

- 7.2.1 The proposal to make a contribution to the Berkeley Academy scheme amounts to the award of a grant because whilst there are considered to be community benefits arising from the same, it is nevertheless a

funding contribution to a wider scheme to be undertaken by the Academy on its private land.

7.2.2 As a grant funding contribution in excess of £50,000 rule E.25 of the Council's Finance and Contract Procedure Rules require the decision to be taken (or expressly delegated) by full Cabinet.

7.2.3 It is understood that a claim has been intimated in respect of wasted costs of the Academy flowing from actions taken in connection with the undertaking given. Delegated authority to dispose of any such costs reasonably and properly incurred and payable should be sought for expedience.

7.2.4 The proposal itself would require a number of consents relating to the proposed use of the land which will be addressed in the ordinary course of events if the proposal proceeds.

### **7.3 Financial Implications**

7.3.1 The funding for this grant will come from a virement of part of the existing capital funding allocation for the Linked Highways and Access Fund.

### **7.4 Equality Implications**

7.4.1 Better managed school parking and promotion of more sustainable travel modes could benefit all children although it is recognised that children with particular needs may have to be accommodated separately. All proposals submitted by schools will be subject to an equality impact assessment before they are agreed.

### **7.5 Rural Community Implications**

7.5.1 Given the larger catchment areas associated with rural schools, these do create a tougher challenge in terms of encouraging modal shift towards walking and cycling.

### **7.6 Human Resources Implications**

7.6.1 None.

### **7.7 Public Health Implications**

7.7.1 The Public Health England 'Everybody Active, Every Day' strategy recognises that walking and cycling are good for our physical and mental health and the many ways the built and natural environment impacts on the choices people are able to make. It emphasises that by developing 'active environments' that promote walking and cycling, we can help to create active, healthier, and more liveable communities.

- 7.7.2 Walking to and from school helps children achieve the recommended government targets of physical activity. Physically active children are more alert, ready to learn, do better in tests and achieve better grades than children who are driven to school.

## **7.8 Implications for Children and Young People**

- 7.8.1 Modern lifestyles and concerns regarding children's safety and security have led to increased car use as a mode of traveling to school. Measures to increase walking and cycling as a mode of choice need to be evaluated, together with management measures to encourage greater use of sustainable travel modes. Incorporating physical activity into a child's daily routine is a good way to promote a healthy and more active lifestyle.

## **7.9 Other Implications**

- 7.9.1 None.

## **8 Risk Management**

- 8.1 Lack of a formal Policy approach could lead to increased pressure on existing services in managing the impacts of traffic outside schools.

## **9 Access to Information/Bibliography**

- 9.1 The Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish group report and covering Cabinet Report, July 2017.

## **10 Contact Information**

Contact details for this report are as follows:

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