

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 10 July 2018

Report Title: Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools (SMOTS) Strategy

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Don Stockton – Environment

Cllr Jos Saunders – Children and Families

Senior Officer: Frank Jordan, Executive Director of Place

Mark Palethorpe, Acting Executive Director of People

1. Report Summary

- 1.1. This report presents a finalised version of Cheshire East Council’s updated Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools (SMOTS) Strategy. The strategy (see Appendix B) sets out the framework for how the Council, in collaboration with key delivery partners, will support schools to enable and encourage sustainable travel to and from schools. Our strategy has been informed by consultation with parents, schools and key stakeholders with key revisions described in this report.
- 1.2. Travel to schools within Cheshire East is an essential part 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 improving both quality of place and educational outcomes.
- 1.3. The Council recognises 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 can be encouraged to update their School Travel Plans and implement appropriate measures through access to support, resources and funding opportunities. Within the framework established by the SMOTS Strategy, the Council will provide a range of advice and resources to schools undertaking to implement a School Travel Plan.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. That Cabinet approves the Sustainable Modes of Travel to Schools Strategy (SMOTS) as part of the Council's Education Travel policy framework.

3. Reasons for Recommendations

- 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:
 - 3.2.1. Assess the travel and transport needs of children, and young people within the authority's area;
 - 3.2.2. 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;
 - 3.2.3. 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;
 - 3.2.4. Promote sustainable travel and transport modes on the journey to, from, and between schools and other institutions; and
 - 3.2.5. Publish a Sustainable Modes of Travel to School strategy.
- 3.3. The production and implementation of this SMOTS Strategy 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 in preparing the strategy is considered to fulfil this requirement.
- 4.2. An alternative approach of supporting schools to update and implement School Travel Plans has been considered. This alternative option would not fund Modeshift STARS and instead utilise more officer resource to support schools. This alternative option was not pursued as Modeshift STARS offers a more cost-effective option, which provides a good level of service

to schools with access to national best practice benchmarks and accreditation.

5. Background

- 5.1. The 2010/11 School Census shows that 21% of high school pupils and 45% of primary school pupils are driven to school, despite a large number of schools being located in residential or urban areas. Since this Census, a number of issues have arisen including the negative impacts of parking around schools puts pressure on local communities, residents and the highway network.
- 5.2. 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 framework for these recommendations, whilst also discharging the Council's obligation under the *Education and Inspections Act 1996* to publish a SMOTS strategy.
- 5.4. During 2017, an evidence base was compiled to understand:
 - 5.4.1. Current travel patterns to school in the Borough;
 - 5.4.2. The views of parents/carers regarding sustainable travel to school; and
 - 5.4.3. The implementation of School Travel Plans by individual schools.
- 5.5. A draft SMOTS strategy was prepared which identified the barriers to uptake of sustainable travel for journeys to schools. A range of measures are already being implemented by the Council and delivery 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, personal safety initiatives and travel information.
- 5.6. Following Cabinet approval on 16th January 2018, the draft SMOTS strategy was put out to consultation during February and March 2018. Feedback from the consultation (see Section 8.2) has now been incorporated into the final Strategy.
- 5.7. In addition to these existing measures, the SMOTS strategy sets out a range of new measures including:

- 5.7.1. The provision of Modeshift STARS online system to enable schools to efficiently update and implement School Travel Plans. Modeshift STARS has been established with support from the Department for Transport to provide a national framework and supporting resources for use by schools. It is currently used by over 13,000 schools nationally.
 - 5.7.2. Officers will work to promote and administer the system, providing advice to schools to support their use of Modeshift STARS.
- 5.8. The SMOTS strategy supports the Cabinet resolution 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 will provide capital funding to implement measures identified by School Travel Plans. £150,000 has been allocated to the Safer Routes to School Programme from the LTP capital budget for 2018/19. The type of schemes which could be funded to support Travel Plans include:
 - 5.8.1. Improvements to walking and cycling routes such as footpath or cycleway improvements;
 - 5.8.2. New access points to schools sites which give more convenient and safer access for pedestrian and cyclists;
 - 5.8.3. Improved or new safe crossing points on routes to schools;
 - 5.8.4. Small scale traffic management schemes e.g. lining, signing and traffic calming;
 - 5.8.5. Improvements to parking in the vicinity of schools to provide a safer highway environment.
- 5.9. Schools with up-to-date Travel Plans which evidence the need for local measures can submit requests for capital funding through the LTP programme. An annual prioritised Safer Routes to School Programme comprising schemes requested by schools and assessed by Cheshire East officers will be prepared and updates for inclusion in the Local Transport Plan capital programme. The final SMOTS Strategy sets out how bids will be assessed and provides templates for the streamlined funding application process. It is anticipated that most schemes will be delivered through the Council's annual highways programme, especially where works to the highway are required. Should any proposals be best delivered through a grant awarded to a school, the grant will only be made under the Council's procedures for grant funding.

6. Implications of the Recommendations

6.1. Policy Implications

- 6.1.1 Producing the SMOTS will ensure that the Council discharges obligations under the *Education and Inspections Act 1996* to publish and implement a SMOTS.
- 6.1.2 Development of the 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 which are currently out for public consultation and will be reported back to Cabinet in the autumn.

6.2 Legal Implications

- 6.2.1 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 strategy.
- 6.2.2 As noted below in section 8, the responses to the consultation have been taken in to account and have influenced the final strategy.

6.3 Finance Implications

- 6.3.1 Budget allocations are made as part of each annual Local Transport Plan delivery programme, with resources to support the implementation of the SMOTS. £150,000 has been allocated from the LTP delivery programme for 2018/2019. The level of funding for the programme will be reviewed for future years, informed by the level of engagement from schools during 2018/19.
- 6.3.2 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.

6.4 Equality Implications

- 6.4.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been prepared 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 to reflect the impact of planned measures at specific schools prior to their implementation.

6.5 Human Resources Implications

6.5.1 None

6.6 Risk Management Implications

6.6.1 Production of the 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.

6.6.2 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. The progress of individual schemes will be monitored through this Board, which will consider the scale of the delivery programme in future years. In the initial year, it is anticipated that schemes will progress through a development stage to ensure that appropriate design work, consents and consultation activities are completed prior to implementation of capital works.

6.7 Rural Communities Implications

6.7.1 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.

6.7.2 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.

6.7.3 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.

6.8 Implications for Children & Young People

6.8.1 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.

6.8.2 The increase in children undertaking active travel on a daily basis will improve health and wellbeing.

6.9 Public Health Implications

6.9.1 The SMOTS and Local Transport Plan consider 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.

6.9.2 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 Ward Members Affected

7.1 All Wards in Cheshire East.

8 Consultation & Engagement

8.1 Consultation on the draft SMOTS Strategy was undertaken between 15th February and 29th March 2018. Schools, delivery partners, local walking and cycling groups, regional representatives of national active travel groups, town councils and members of the public were invited to provide feedback on the aims and content of the draft strategy. The draft document was published online and in hardcopy. Respondents were able to send comments using an online survey, or by email and letter.

8.2 The consultation was publicised on the Council's webpages, supported by social media messaging, use of the Schools Network and via direct emails to stakeholders.

8.3 289 responses to the consultation were received. More than half of respondents agreed that the Strategy was;

- good (61% respondents);
- clear (62% respondents);
- comprehensive (59% respondents); and
- ambitious (52% respondents).

There was less confidence that the proposed approach is deliverable (43% respondents). Nevertheless, there was strong support for provision of the new Modeshift STARS online system (69% respondents) and for a

continuation of current measures promoting sustainable travel choices (66% respondents).

8.4 In response to the consultation, the following key changes have been made to the draft SMOTS strategy:

- An Executive Summary has been added;
- The Action Plan has been updated providing links to the strategic outcomes;
- A new section has been added describing links between the Council's Cycling Strategy and the SMOTS Strategy; and
- Clarifications on how schools can apply to the Safer Routes Programme, confirming guidance notes and template application forms will be produced.

8.5 Appendix A provides a summary the consultation feedback and how this has influenced the final drafting of the strategy. A full summary of consultation feedback is available on the Cheshire East website at https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/council_and_democracy/council_information/consultations/consultation-results/consultations_results.aspx

9 Overview and Scrutiny

9.1 Children's & Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a update on the SMOTS Strategy at their meeting on 10th May 2018 which outlined outcomes from the consultation and any related amendments to the strategy. The Committee requested a further progress update on implementing Safer Routes to Schools later in the year.

10 Access to Information

10.1 The background papers relating to this report are held on file at *O:\East\LTP_East\SMOTS Strategy* and may be inspected by contacting the report writer.

11 Contact Information

11.1 Any questions relating to this report should be directed to the following officer:

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