

School Streets Working Group

Recommendation Report

Chair's Introduction

1.1 The Chair wishes to thank Members for their hard work and the collaborative environment they fostered throughout the review. The Working Group had proved an effective tool for scrutiny allowing a constructive and detailed review of what is an important policy area.

1.2 On behalf of all of the Members of the School Street Working Group, the Chair wishes to offer thanks to everybody who has attended and contributed to the Working Group's meetings. Special thanks are noted for David Keaney, of Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council, Andrew Smith, of the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council and the many Telford & Wrekin Officers for offering their expertise and experience to this review. Thanks are also offered to Tom Larkham, of Coleham Primary School, Shrewsbury, for bringing to the working group a school's perspective of implementation.

Review Background

2.1 At the Full Council meeting held on 26 November 2020, a motion relating to the investigation of the matter of School Streets was referred to Scrutiny. The Speaker ruled that the issue fell within the remit of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee (CYP).

2.2 The motion read:

'This Council notes:

- a) The 'School Streets' initiative aims to protect children from air pollution and road danger on the way to/from school, and a shift towards greener, more active forms of transport (which in turn reduces carbon emissions).
- b) This is achieved by closing streets next to schools to motor traffic at "school run" times. Children may get to school by walking, cycling, etc. Vehicles may park further away from school, and children and parents walk in. Exemptions exist for residents accessing properties.
- c) School Streets are growing fast: London has gone from 81 to 383 School Streets since April.
- d) In 2019, this council resolved to become carbon neutral by 2030.
- e) This council has announced a £2.6m investment into sustainable travel measures.
- f) Further information regarding School Streets can be found via this useful video of a successful scheme introduced in Hackney Council area - <https://youtu.be/dlyLZ3iT6jU>

This Council resolves to work collaboratively with councillors, schools, and local partners to:

- a) Swiftly identify schools in the Borough that could benefit from a 'School Streets' scheme.

- b) Following consultation, implement 'School Streets' at these schools as soon as possible, taking advantage of experimental traffic orders and statutory guidance over fast-tracked TROs.
- c) Look to improve cycling and walking infrastructure where necessary, so such schemes are safely and practically accessible.
- d) Introduce measures to promote walking and cycling in schools not suitable for 'School Streets'.

2.3 The CYP Committee received the referred motion at its meeting on 16 December 2020 and agreed to scrutinise the proposals. Due to the cross-committee nature of the issue, it was decided that scrutiny would be best served through a working group composed of Members of each committee.

2.4 Members were sought through a call for interest via the Scrutiny Assembly. A seven member Working Group was formed, comprising the Chair of CYP serving as Chair of the Working Group, five members drawn from the Scrutiny Assembly, and the proposer of the motion at Full Council.

School Streets Background

3.1 School Streets schemes are initiatives intended to encourage active travel for primary age children to and from school and to discourage vehicles idling by school entrances. While varying case by case, the schemes share a number of commonalities.

3.2 The schemes are implemented through the closure of the road at the main entrance to a school for between half an hour and an hour at the beginning and end of the school day.

3.3 Closures are managed in a variety of ways, with removable bollards or signage among the options implemented in existing schemes. Closures are usually part of a greater enforcement regime involving the local authority and/or the local police. In some London Boroughs, Automatic Number Plate Recognition is used to strengthen enforcement, although it is not possible for Council's outside of London to use this method due to the current legislation differences.

3.4 While closed to general traffic, the streets in question are accessible for emergency services, business delivery, local residents with the requisite pass, and those with accessibility issues.

Workshop 30 March 2021

4.1 At its first meeting, on 30 March 2021, the Working Group approved its proposed terms of reference and received briefing on the issue of School Streets. The briefing provided an overview of School Streets schemes and what they entailed. Prior to the meeting, members had received details relating to the location of all educational settings in the Borough, the number of students in each setting, and data from the Travel to School Survey 2020.

4.2 Following the briefing, members expressed an interest in investigating five specific areas relating to the scheme:

1. Enforcement and Legal Issues;
2. Traffic Displacement;
3. Existing Travel Options and Influencing Travel;
4. Parent and School Buy-In; and
5. Environmental Impacts.

4.3 The Working Group decided to divide the areas amongst themselves, with Members taking responsibility for research into one of the five areas to ensure all areas were covered by the reviewed.

4.4 Following the meeting, a research booklet detailing the implementation of school streets schemes in a number of areas, both outside of and in the United Kingdom was produced. The booklet set out policy details, implementation methods, and observations made by Local Authorities, as well as further details. In addition to the case studies, the document provided members with potential contacts to invite to later meetings of the Working Group and with a list of sources to begin researching.

Workshop 13 April 2021

5.1 On 13 April 2021, the Working Group met to receive a presentation from technical officers, specialising in Transport and Highway Network Management, from Telford & Wrekin Council. The presentation focussed on enforcement aspects of school streets, this was an area that Members had been especially eager to hear more on, it was deemed essential to the successful implementation of any scheme in the Borough.

5.2 The presentation informed the Working Group of the enforcement powers available to the Council and set out the difficulties around certain types of enforcement such as Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR). Due to the difficulties surrounding ANPR, both financial and legislative, it was suggested, and agreed by Members, that this particular method of enforcement not be considered.

5.3 Members heard that enforcement of school streets could be undertaken in cooperation with the Community Action Team and West Mercia Police. It was noted that the Authority did not have the resources to have a presence at every school on a daily basis to ensure enforcement.

5.4 Initial concerns from Officers surrounded larger scale enforcement due to a lack of powers and resources. West Mercia Police would likely be the responsible party, with the task of enforcement laying with their Neighbourhood Teams.

5.5 The Working Group also heard that traffic displacement could be an issue with parents and carers simply seeking alternative vehicular routes. Officers would need to look at the Travel to School Survey 2020 data and individual School Travel Plan to assess the appropriateness of the scheme for a given school.

5.6 Members and Officers noted the need for buy-in from West Mercia Police for the scheme to be successful. Members considered the information provided was very useful and it was positive for them to be informed of the practical necessities for ensuring any schemes are successfully enforced.

5.7 Following the presentation, Members shared their own research based on the research areas discussed at the 30 March 2021 meeting. The Group agreed that it would be important to identify alternative parking arrangements for any schools that did implement the scheme.

Workshop 27 April 2021

6.1 The Group met on 27 April 2021 for a presentation, and question and answer session, with David Keaney, Traffic Manager at Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council. Mr Keaney discussed what school streets schemes were and the experience of designing and implementing the initiative in Solihull.

6.2 In Phase One, Solihull had begun by seeking buy-in from the Council's Cabinet and the Police. The Borough had then sought interested schools to take part in an 18-month trial; three schools were selected from those that had expressed interest. The Council subsequently engaged with parents at, and residents in the vicinity of, the schools around the implementation of the scheme.

6.3 Phase Two consisted of further engagement with relevant stakeholders and the addition of three further schools to the scheme. A third phase had received approval for three more sites and would begin consultation in October 2021.

6.4 The Council had found that introducing the scheme at the start of the school year had yielded mixed results and that a later start, in the autumn, had proved to be more successful. The later start allowed parents to adapt and children to settle in to school.

6.5 Members heard that traffic displacement as a result of the scheme had been limited. Where there had been concern it was because of a lack of alternative parking but this had been mitigated at one of the schools using a nearby pub carpark as an alternative location.

6.6 Solihull use signage to signify the location of school streets, the signs can be closed up during school holidays so that road users can use the street as usual while the schools are closed. The signage is required as part of the traffic order that is in place with the restrictions only enforceable when the sign is in place, covering the sign invalidates the order.

6.7 To help with promotion and engagement, each School Streets sign had been designed by the children of the school where the sign was located. This was an opportunity to educate and discuss environmental aspects of the scheme.

6.8 In Solihull, children at the pilot schools largely lived within a 1-mile radius of the school. Members had noted that as children in Telford often lived outside of a 1-mile radius of school that there would need to be a holistic approach to the scheme that looked to educate children and parents on alternative transport, walking buses, and cycling.

6.9 Members queried the impact COVID-19 had had on the scheme's implementation and were informed that, while unsure of any long-term changes, school drop-offs had become easier with increased working flexibility.

6.10 Members considered that the provision of alternative parking sites for drop offs would be an essential criteria to ensure a smooth running of any schemes introduced in the Borough.

Workshop 19 May 2021

7.1 Members met again on 19 May 2021, receiving a presentation from Andrew Smith, Principal Engineer at the City of Bradford Metropolitan District Council. While the pilot scheme in Bradford had not begun at the time of the meeting, Members were keen to hear of any lessons that had been learned in the early stages of development while there was still the institutional knowledge of those early challenges.

7.2 Bradford were to run a pilot scheme of 10 schools, all primaries, spread across the district, with two schools in each of the five parliamentary constituencies. The 10 schools had been decided, from over 200 in the District, through a method of prioritisation. Considerations in terms of prioritisation included:

- Dismissing any schools with physical constraints – e.g. based on a major road.
- Air quality – looking to trial the scheme in the worst areas.
- Existing travel plans.

7.3 After selection, a working group, made up of the Council's Highways and Public Health Teams, was established to guide the process moving forward. Alongside this, the Council engaged in high-level engagement with school, political, and other key stakeholders, such as the emergency services.

7.4 There was a £70,000 budget to promote the scheme, with £5,000 per school site for any legal or other works, plus a small contingency fund.

7.5 In terms of implementation, the scheme would be signalled with signs at entry points to the school streets. Schools were being engaged around recruiting volunteers to put out cones and signs, traffic management training would be provided so that volunteers had the necessary accreditation. Ultimately, however, enforcement would be a matter for the police.

7.6 Sustainability was deemed key to long-term success with the Local Authority unable to sustain a long-term presence. Responsibility for maintaining the scheme in the future would be with the schools themselves.

7.7 As with other schemes, residents and businesses would be issued with paper permits in to display in their vehicles to make it clear who was allowed access during times of operation.

7.8 The success of the scheme would be monitored through three key areas:

- Traffic Surveying – Measuring the number of vehicles.
- Perception – Do people feel safer? Had they changed the way they travel?
- Air Quality – Had air quality improved? It was noted that this was difficult to measure over a short period.

Workshop 5 July 2021

8.1 On 5 July 2021, the Working Group met to receive Tom Larkham, Deputy Headteacher at Coleham Primary School, Shrewsbury, for a presentation and discussion of the school streets scheme as implemented at Coleham Primary.

8.2 Members heard that the schools trial was being run with an experimental traffic regulation order. The school was located on a through road between two main roads; due to the level of traffic on both roads and lack of traffic cutting through, it was thought to be an ideal location for a trial.

8.3 The portion of the street directly in front of the school was closed for forty minutes either side of the school day with movable cones used to block the road. The closure was enforced by a member of school staff stood at either end of the road; this allowed the cones to be moved to allow any permitted traffic to pass through.

8.4 While parents were not consulted on the plans, local businesses and residents were given notice of the changes before they entered into force. The school had managed to secure mitigations on parking having made arrangements with a local supermarket (five minutes' walk from the school) and a local authority car park (ten minutes' walk). In terms of the local authority car park, the school had arranged for parents to have free access for half an hour during each closure period with the use of a pass.

8.5 Members were informed that the response had been largely positive with both written and verbal responses noted. Anecdotally, the school had heard that the two main roads that framed the school's street were busier because of the School Streets closure.

8.6 The school believed its scheme had been a success, while noting that the specific school site lent itself well to closure, and stated an intention to make the arrangement permanent.

Workshop 23 September 2021

9.1 On 23 September 2021, the Working Group met to receive Inspector Michael Philips of West Mercia Police and Paul Fenn, Group Manager: Public Protection at Telford & Wrekin Council. The Group had invited the two parties for a discussion on possibilities and practicalities of enforcing a school streets scheme.

9.2 The Group were informed that the police were involved in a range of engagement activities around schools, educating and supporting families and schools themselves. They were aware of the issues at school gates and recognised that changes could be made to systems.

9.3 While the potential of a police presence could act as a deterrent it was noted that if there was not a clear or regular enough enforcement presence then people might ignore rules. There was a regular police presence, by rotation, around schools as a result of the police's engagement activities and as such, even if not actively enforcing, they could be in the area. This could deter attempts to circumvent the school streets rules. However, there could not be a permanent presence.

9.4 Inspector Philips noted that for any scheme to be successful it was imperative that the optimal schools be identified. An example of this was to find schools with streets that lent themselves to closure. The Group Manager: Public Protection reiterated this point and further stressed the importance of buy-in from the school, parents, and the local community.

9.5 The Group Manager: Public Protection stated that incentivising compliance could help in terms of take up. Measures such as ensuring alternative parking was available and encouraging walking bus schemes could increase the likelihood of a schemes success. If traffic were to be displaced into neighbouring streets, this would be problematic and likely to cause complaints from residents.

9.6 Engagement and encouragement, through alternative provision, were both discussed at length as important aspects in the creation of a successful school streets scheme.

Deliberations

10.1 Throughout their discussions, the Group noted the need for robust external engagement at all stages in the development and implementation of any School Streets scheme. This had been a theme throughout the presentations the Working Group had received, with Solihull looking to the schools themselves volunteer for the pilot scheme and in Bradford where schools were being engaged on implementation and volunteer recruitment and management.

10.2 Working with the local police was also deemed to be of the utmost importance. Members believed that enforcement could not be left to volunteers as it would be beyond their remit, the power to enforce would still lay with the appropriate authorities and as such, their involvement from an early stage would be necessary to ensure that they could support the scheme. The evidence provided by Bradford further reinforced these feelings.

10.3 In discussions with the Council's own Transport and Highways Officers, as well as with West Mercia Police, it had been clear to Members that engagement with the public would be necessary for a scheme to be successful. The necessary temporary traffic orders needed for a trial scheme would entail a public consultation period and as such, it would be in the best interests of the Council to engage residents before any scheme went live to get them on-board with the scheme

10.4 While volunteers should not be responsible for enforcing the scheme, Members expressed a belief in the necessity of volunteers for the scheme to run effectively. Although Coleham Primary's experience demonstrated that a dedicated school staff could ably run the scheme in the absence of a volunteer programme, we feel strongly that this project should be volunteer led. Schools will be encouraged to engage with the scheme volunteers.

10.5 Alongside engagement, planning was among the highest priorities in terms of ensuring that any trial scheme had the optimum starting point. This meant establishing a criteria to select schools from, examples being that they were not located on main roads or were not rural schools with that required parents to drive their children to and from school.

10.6 Members were also keen that for any school that was selected, alternative parking arrangements be investigated within walking distance of the schools. This had arisen from the presentation from Solihull where one pilot school had agreed the use of a local pub car park as a park-and-stride location. Coleham Primary had also informed the Group that it had taken advantage of local amenities (a supermarket and local authority run car park) to encourage

take up of the scheme by providing suitable parking solutions within a walkable distance. It was suggested, by Members, that local businesses in the vicinity of schools could be approached.

Recommendations

Therefore, the School Streets Working Group makes the following recommendation to Cabinet:

- **That an initial School Streets trial scheme be implemented in Telford & Wrekin.**
- **The trial scheme should consist of up to three primary schools from across the Borough.**
- **Street closures should only be in place during term time.**
- **Interested schools should be sought and identified through a period of engagement.**
- **Prior to selection of the pilot schools, Officers should, on the basis of our findings, determine a suitability criteria from which the pilot schools will be chosen.**
- **The results of the trial scheme should be brought to Scrutiny when deciding whether to implement the scheme permanently and/or to expand the scheme.**