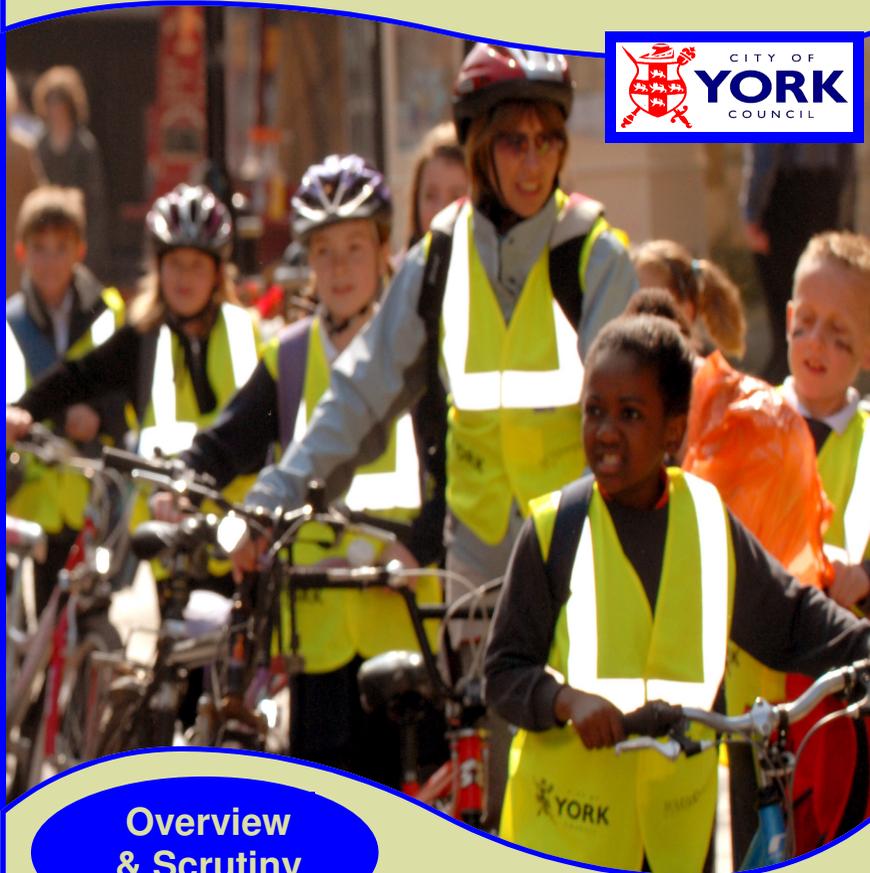


Review of School Travel Plans



Overview
& Scrutiny



December
2010

AD-HOC SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Scrutiny Management Committee established an Ad-hoc scrutiny committee to undertake this review. The members were:

- Councillor Ruth Potter (Chairperson)
- Councillor Jenny Brooks (Vice-Chair)
- Councillor Keith Aspden
- Councillor Andy D'Agorne
- Councillor Paul Firth
- Councillor Dave Merrett

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Committee would like to thank the following for their contribution to this review:

- Andrew Bradley, Principal Transport Planner
- Gillian Chefrad, School Travel Plan Coordinator
- Christine Packer, School Travel Plan Coordinator
- Jonathon Carr, Head of Development Management
- Elizabeth Levett, Head of Environmental Enforcement & Parking Services
- Howard Watson, Network Management
- Paul Osborne, Sustrans

Also, the Committee would like to thank the schools that participated in the review.

CHAIR'S FOREWARD

This report sets out the recommendations of the School Travel Plan Ad Hoc Scrutiny Committee. The Committee was tasked with identifying an integrated approach to travel plan development that recognised the relationships between active travel and health, sustainability and traffic congestion and community cohesion.



We were particularly concerned to understand the impact of school related journeys on air quality in the City and set the scrutiny in the context of climate change.

The recommendation follow from evidence received from experts and from visiting local schools to talk to those in the school responsible for implementing school travel planning and young people themselves.

I would like to thank everyone who contributed to the scrutiny and the committee members themselves for their focused work, the time they put in to visit schools and their carefully considered opinions. I hope that the recommendations can be accepted and that the ideas put forward will help to improve travel to school in the City.

Councillor Ruth Potter
Chairperson

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Ad-hoc Scrutiny Committee proposed the following recommendations:

- 1 Improve collaborative working across service areas and Directorates to allow for improved forward planning in Schools
- 2 Include in best practice guide for schools - 'encourage year 6 pupils to cycle/walk to secondary schools on induction days to build pupil/parent confidence, in time for starting at secondary school (linked to Recommendation 10)
- 3 Instruct officers to investigate sources of sustainable funding for initiatives and incentives for future financial years
- 4 Instruct officers to investigate the introduction of a 'one-off' cycle allowance for use in purchasing a bicycle and equipment and/or a loan scheme for bicycles and equipment, in place of free bus travel for those that want it and are eligible
- 5 Reprioritise the work of Civil Enforcement Officers to allow for an increase in the amount of time they can spend enforcing the parking restrictions outside schools
- 6 Instruct Communities & Neighbourhoods Parking Services to investigate and provide future report to the Executive on the use of a CCTV car and sharing the costs with other local authorities and/or public agencies
- 7 Revise council policy to ensure Development Control can only accept an STP in support of a school planning application if it adheres to the DfT minimum standards contained within the 'School Travel Plan Quality Assurance - Advice Note' issued by the DfT & DCSF in 2007. In cases where an STP does not meet those standards, instruct Development Control to make it a condition of planning consent, or successor documents.

- 8 Identify a clear strategy for resolving inter-directorate issues to ensure enforcement of conditions of planning consent relating to STPs
- 9 Include in best practice guide for school 'that a Travel Plan Champion be identified within the school' (Linked to Rec. 10)
- 10 Transport Planning Unit to develop and issue a best practice guide for York schools, to include:
 - a toolbox of measures for schools to pick and choose from when producing/revising their STP
 - promotion of the involvement of all relevant parties i.e. governors, parents, children and staff champions
 - Information on what has previously proved successful in York and what has not, to inform school's choices (in support of objective (i))
 - a school travel plan template
- 11 To support the work of the Transport Planning Unit, the following to be made available online via the forthcoming schools portal (referred to in paragraph 73 of the final report):
 - Best Practice Guide (see Rec. 10)
 - exemplar School Travel Plan
- 12 Identify framework for reviewing and monitoring STPs
- 13 Recognise the value of the work and transferable skills of STPCs through the forthcoming budget process to ensure the continuation of the post for the year 2011/12
- 14 Promote safe routes to school through schools and Best Practice Guide (see Rec. 10)
- 15 Provide access to information on safe routes to school (or links to external sites providing that information) via the new Education Portal
- 16 Increase publicity by emphasising within existing/future schemes the health benefits of walking and cycling

CORPORATE STRATEGY

The review relates to a number of themes within the council corporate Strategy I.e.

Healthy city—'we want to be a city where residents enjoy long, healthy and independent lives'

Sustainable City—'We aim to be clean and green, reducing our impact on the environment whilst enabling the city and its communities to grow and thrive'

OBJECTIVES

Aim

At the start of the review, the Ad-hoc Scrutiny Committee agreed the following aim and objectives for the review:

'To identify an integrated approach to travel plan development that recognises the relationships between active travel and health, sustainability (particularly air quality and climate change issues) and traffic congestion and community cohesion'

Objectives

- i. Understanding what works and what doesn't work in York, and best practice elsewhere.
- ii. Understanding the costs and challenges, in order to identify how the council, schools and their communities can do school travel planning better.
- iii. Identifying the best way to support schools with travel planning, either through the role of School Travel Plan Co-ordinators (subject to available funding being provided/identified), or providing support to schools through an alternative mechanism.
- iv. Identifying any key messages for wider travel planning in York.

METHODOLOGY

The review took place between September and December 2010.

The Ad-hoc Scrutiny Committee held a number of formal Meetings:

Meeting 1 - To consider the remit for the review and agree a workplan

Meeting 2 - To review the newest / most recent School Action Plans, and identify a number of schools to visit

Meeting 3 - To receive information on:

- successful initiatives and best practice both nationally and in York
- Funding & Resources
- Parking enforcement around schools
- Planning & Development Control Issues
- Role of School Travel Plan Coordinators

- Meet with consultees and external witnesses

Meeting 4 - To consider and agree the final report and recommendations.

They also carried out a number of school visits to meet with Head Teachers, Travel Plan Champions and pupils

The agendas, reports and minutes relating to the review can be viewed online at:

<http://democracy.york.gov.uk/ieListMeetings.aspx?CId=707&Year=2010>

BACKGROUND TO SCHOOL TRAVEL PLANS

Over the last 20 years the proportion of children being driven to school has been gradually increasing with commensurate impacts on congestion, pollution, health and impacts on the wider environment. It was against this back drop that in 2003 the government of the day stated that:

“We want local education and transport authorities to develop a joint strategic approach to school travel issues and to reduce car dependency for journeys to school in their area. School travel plans will be the key strategies for achieving this and we want authorities to work with schools or groups of schools to develop plans to meet local circumstances. Our objective is that all schools should have active travel plans before the end of the decade”

What is a School Travel Plan?

A School Travel Plan (STP) is a written document that outlines a series of practical steps for improving children’s safety on the journey to and from school, and for reducing car use while increasing active travel to school, particularly walking and cycling.

As part of the process for developing a travel plan a school should invite parents/carers, pupils and staff to contribute by completing a survey, in order to identify if there are any aspects of the journey where children (and adults) feel unsafe and/or uncomfortable which may present a barrier to walking or cycling.

The data gathered is considered in conjunction with mode of travel data and where possible, the resulting action plan should include activities which seek to address the concerns of those returning the completed surveys.

Without the support of the Head Teacher and staff, any travel plan is likely to be ineffective.

Why target the school run?

Nationally, some 20% of the peak time traffic comes from the school run. In York some 30% of primary school children are driven to school. This has obvious impacts on congestion, carbon emissions and air quality within the City as a whole and the safety of roads around school entrances. This has an impact on journey times within the City such as on bus route timetables. Where as, during school holidays, traffic volumes are noticeably lower.

At the same time as car use for school journeys has been increasing, obesity rates amongst the population, and notably amongst school children, have also been increasing. While there may not be direct links between the two, tackling the school run and encouraging children to travel actively to school rather than by car can help with improving the overall health of children and the families that travel with them on the school journey.

Cost of delivering School Travel Plans

Since 2004 the Government has financed the initiative to deliver STPs in all of the nation's schools, and a target was set for all Local Authorities (LAs) that 100% of schools should have an STP by March 2010. In York this money has funded one full time equivalent member of staff (usually as at present, two members of staff on a job-share basis).

For 2010/11, the area based grant was reduced by 25%. Government funding is set to continue until March 2011 but for 2011/12 the Council currently has no indication as to whether central government will continue to fund this area of work.

Following the Comprehensive Spending Review, it is anticipated that York's area based grant will be reduced but it will not be possible to ascertain the final position until the Local Government Settlement is received in early December 2010.

FINDINGS

This section sets out the review's findings.

INFLUENCING TRAVEL BEHAVIOUR IN YORK

Influencing travel behaviour is likely to remain high up the new government's agenda as it looks for low cost schemes and initiatives demonstrating value for money. In addition, all of the problems facing York's schools and communities i.e. congestion, parking, obesity, etc, still need to be addressed. For example, if the Council is committed to reducing its carbon emissions by 40% by 2020 (per the pledge made in its Carbon Action Plan), it is difficult to see how this will be achieved without the necessary partnerships with schools and businesses required to influence travel behaviour.

VALUE FOR MONEY

Feedback from the participating schools evidenced the benefits of taking part in the initiatives supported by the Transport Planning Unit. The overall cost of carrying out the initiatives carried out this financial year and detailed in the final report was £24,255, with £16,655 of that sum being provided by external sources such as Cycle City and £7,600 by the council, which included a one-off set up cost for the 'Walk with Wilf' event of £3,800. Members agreed that the benefits to the participating schools and children of funding those initiatives far outweighed the costs incurred by the council.

SAFETY OUTSIDE SCHOOLS

Parking restrictions are applicable to 38 schools in the local authority area. Many of the complaints relating to parking outside schools come from neighbours, but the majority come from parents and pupils worried about their personal safety as cyclists / pedestrians. Members agreed that the work of Civil Enforcement Officers could be reprioritised to allow for an increase in time spent enforcing those restrictions, thereby encouraging a shift in modes of transport away from the car.

ACHIEVING A MODAL SHIFT IN TRANSPORT TO SCHOOL

Members recognised that pressures on time are a key factor for parents in deciding whether to take their child to school by car as part of their journey to work.

They agreed that efforts should be focussed on achieving a modal shift in those parents who were travelling less than 2 miles for walking from home to work, and 5 miles for cycling.

Members recognised that bicycle ownership may be an important factor for families looking to change their mode of transport to school, and that when some children outgrew the bicycle they used at primary school they may not have access to an adult size bicycle.

The committee therefore suggested that consideration be given to the introduction of a 'one-off' cycle allowance for use in purchasing a bicycle and equipment and/or a loan scheme for bicycles and equipment, in place of free bus travel for those that want it and are eligible. In doing so, they recognised that this would not be a viable option for those currently receiving free transport to school via a dedicated contracted home to school bus. It would only be suitable for those in receipt of a bus pass.

There are currently 411 pupils in York in possession of a free bus pass at an annual cost to the council of around £151k. Moving these pupils to bicycles, would result in a saving to the council, whilst at the same time improving the health of those pupils.

The Committee recognised this option would need further investigation before a decision was taken on whether to implement such a scheme, and any scheme would need to include suitable cycle training for those pupils participating and access to information on safe routes to school in order to allay parents fears about their child's safety.

ROLE OF SCHOOL TRAVEL PLAN COORDINATOR

Members recognised that schools continue to need the level of support and encouragement currently being received from the School Travel Plan Coordinators to ensure their involvement in initiatives, and the continued implementation of their travel plans - particularly as not all schools currently have a Travel Plan Champion.

In recognising that the current area based grant used to fund the post will cease at the end of March 2011, and at a time when resources are become increasingly scarce, the Committee recognised that the future of the role may well be in question. However they also recognised the knowledge, skills and expertise of the post holders and the central need for retaining the post in order that schools continue to receive the encouragement and support to develop, review and progress their School Travel Plans.

Overall, the Committee recognised the lack of consistency in

QUALITY OF SCHOOL TRAVEL PLANS

York's School Travel Plans, and that regardless of how good a travel plan is when written, it's success can usually be attributed to the enthusiasm of a particular member of staff or a Governor, who is prepared to put in significant effort and work with a school travel adviser where appropriate to achieve results.

FORWARD PLANNING & COLLABORATIVE WORKING

Feedback from participating schools showed that given sufficient notice of forthcoming initiatives e.g. half a term before an initiative is to be run, schools would be able to build them into their curriculum planning, thereby encouraging more pupils to participate.

The committee recognised this would require the involvement of all the relevant CYC Services at an earlier stage than currently happens and for the associated decisions to be taken sooner e.g. seeking permission for road closures etc.

MONITORING REVIEW OUTCOMES

For each completed scrutiny review, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee produces a final report containing their proposed recommendations for the Executive's consideration.

In most cases, the Executive will approve all of the recommendations made and will instruct officers to proceed with the actions required in order to implement them.

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee is responsible for monitoring the progress of implementation and receives regular update reports from the Scrutiny Officer. Once they are confident that a recommendation has been fully implemented they will agree to sign it off.

In addition, each year Scrutiny Services produces an Annual Report which includes an assessment of the successful outcomes from each completed scrutiny review