

Regeneration & Transport Select Committee

A meeting of Regeneration & Transport Select Committee was held on Monday, 14th January, 2008.

Present: Cllr Maurice Perry (Chairman), Cllr Dick Cains, Cllr Kevin Faulks, Cllr John Fletcher, Cllr Paul Kirton, Cllr Mrs Liz Nesbitt, Cllr Fred Salt, Cllr Michael Smith

Officers: T. Beckwith, B. Johns (CESC), N. Ellison, B. Trewick (DNS), D. Ladd, G. Birtle, M. Jones (LD)

Also in attendance: No other person was in attendance.

Apologies: Cllr Mrs Eileen Craggs

RTS 44/07

Declarations of Interest

Cllr Maurice Perry declared a personal/non-prejudicial interest in item 4, Review of Sustainable School Travel Strategy, due to being the Chairman of the Education Support Panel.

RTS 45/07

Draft minutes of the meeting held on 3rd December 2008

Consideration was given to the content of the draft minutes of the meeting held 3rd December 2007.

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held on 3rd December 2007 be forwarded to Council for consideration.

RTS 46/07

Review of Sustainable School Travel Strategy:-

Members were presented with the Scope and Project Plan for the Review of Sustainable School Travel Strategy, and the main issues of the Review were noted.

Betty Johns, Assistant Education Officer - Pupils and Students, presented evidence with regards to the Sustainable School Travel Strategy. B. Johns stated that the Education and Inspections Act 2006 gave Local Authorities the responsibility to publish a sustainable travel and transport strategy which would be made available for parents when they were making decisions about secondary school for their children so that parents were aware of the options of travel for their children. Guidance had been published to describe the type of information which should be gathered to use to identify gaps in provision. Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council's Road Safety Team had already gathered a lot of the information needed for the strategy and travel information was collated for the Department for Children, Families and Schools (DCSF) through the schools census. The legislation required that the Strategy was published on an annual basis at the same time admissions information was published. One of the ideas put forward for the future was to purchase software which would be placed on our website and be interactive so that parents could use it. Betty Johns informed that SBC would be receiving funding to employ a part time member of staff to help with the audit. It was planned that this member of staff would be employed on the Road Safety team.

Parental choice was discussed and Betty Johns agreed that the Local Authority

(LA) did not provide any help with transport to these parents. However if schools had travel plans in place it may give parents options in how their child travelled to school, even if they did not choose the options SBC offered. She discussed the help and options available, which included support for those on low incomes, which was new for admissions this year and the opportunity for parents to purchase seats on school buses at a nominal cost, where there were spaces available.

Members requested information on the cost of transporting children to and from school and discussed how costs for school transport could be reduced. Betty Johns informed the meeting that since the amalgamation of transport services, which was managed by Elizabeth Bird, there had been a reduction in costs for certain services. Elizabeth Bird would be able to provide the Committee with a breakdown of costs for the operational services for Home to School Transport. It was understood that Elizabeth would be attend the Select Committee Meeting on 21st January 2008 and would take this information with her.

Neil Ellison, Group Leader - Road Safety, presented evidence regarding School Travel Plans.

The purpose of School Travel Plans was to reduce congestion, reduce pollution, increase safety, promote smarter choices of travel and promote regular exercise among young people. The LA targets were for all primary, secondary, and special schools to have a travel plan by 2010/11, however plans for new developments were not authorised and independent schools were not included. Neil Ellison informed that capital grants were given to a school from the DCSF when a plan was authorised. Primary schools received £3,750 plus £5 per pupil and secondary and specialist schools received £5000 plus £5 per pupil. Schools were not accountable for how they spent this funding. Individual schools held responsibility for the production and ownership of their travel plan; however it was the Local Authorities responsibility to meet the governments travel plan targets.

Neil Ellison noted how SBC organised School Travel Plans, informing that these were integrated with the Road Safety ETP. The data was collected electronically from the schools, and SBC offered match-funding on authorisation of a travel plan. SBC expected that when a travel plan was authorised, the school would take up the pedestrian and cyclist training and promotions that SBC offered. School Travel Plans were authorised on an annual basis in July, with all plans being submitted to Department of Children, Schools, and Families by March each year. School Travel Plans included information on the school, baseline surveys and other consultations that were undertaken for the plan, targets and action plans, and monitoring and review procedure. Typical actions that schools included in their plans were the provision of secure cyclist storage, pedestrian shelters, traffic calming measure, and vehicle activated signs etc. School Travel Plans also included actions regarding training and promotion, and N. Ellison informed that 700 pupils had undertaken SBC's pedestrian training, and 1470 had undertaken cyclist training already in 2007/8 – most as a consequence of Travel Plans. There were many considerations to make regarding School Travel Plans, and the standards required for authorisation were being raised each year. As a result of this many of the early School Travel Plans would not be authorised if resubmitted. SBC were not able to collect data on the effects of a schools travel plan, and had to rely on the annual census of schools. Due to the

method of data collection, the information from the annual census, which was published in January, was not reliable data.

Neil Ellison informed that in January 2008, there were 80 eligible schools for School Travel Plans, 40 of which had an authorised plan. There were 15 schools that had a travel plan in development stage, 12 of which were likely to be submitted in March 2008 for authorisation. In addition there were 4 schools that had a non-authorised travel plan. Neil Ellison explained that performance targets for Schools Travel Plans would be affected by closures and amalgamations of schools, where travel plans could not be transferred, and the building of new schools.

Members had the opportunity to discuss the evidence presented. Match funding was raised and Neil Ellison stated that this was offered from LTP once schools had proved the DCSF funding was to go towards a travel plan objective. Parking restrictions were also raised and it was noted that many school had parking restrictions, however there was difficulty in enforcing those restriction. Parking officers were visiting 5 schools per term to enforce parking restrictions. Members discussed the cultural issues that may arise when reviewing Sustainable School Travel.

CONCLUDED that the evidence received from Betty Johns and Neil Ellison be noted; and thanks be extended to both witnesses for their valuable contribution to the Select Committee's work.