

Briefing Note

School Streets Review

1. Background

- 1.1 In March 2022, it was agreed that the remaining action from the Councillor Call for Action at Whitehouse Primary School, consideration for a School Street scheme, would be monitored for a further 6 months. This would allow more local schemes to be implemented that could provide insight and help inform the way forward.

2. Findings

- 2.1 The number of School Street schemes continues to grow, with approximately 600 schemes now operating in England, with approximately 500 of these in London. Most of the schemes in London are enforced using camera enforcement.

Within the Northeast there are currently 5 School Street schemes. With 4 in North Tyneside and 1 in Northumberland. Darlington are currently investigating 2 potential School Street schemes and Newcastle have undertaken some trial School Street closures but have not progressed to permanent at present.

In addition to schemes in the North East, Devon County Council and Solihull Council School Street schemes were also reviewed.

From 31st May 2022 Local Authorities in England outside of London will be able to apply to the Secretary of State for new powers to enforce “moving traffic offences”. This includes ignoring a Traffic Regulation Order such as a School Street road closure. However, due to the Government currently consulting on transferring existing powers that Local Highway Authorities have, to the Mayoral Combined Authority it was felt prudent to await the outcome of this consultation before committing any resources to pursuing these additional enforcement powers.

- 2.2 North Tyneside School Street schemes are all ‘signed only’ and are enforced by the police with no physical closure. The schemes are linked to a safer route to school programme, where footway widening, and improved crossing opportunities were also introduced. The schemes which were developed quickly in response to the Covid pandemic are still in place, but there are issues with compliance. No resident permit system has been introduced on any of the schemes, due to administrative resources. Additional ‘parking buddies’ with the message be a smart parker have also been introduced at these schemes. These are similar to the ‘little people bollards’ that we have introduced in the Borough. A site visit observed very few vehicles travel through the closure, and these vehicles travelled at relatively low speeds. Parent parking was observed in the roads at the edge of the closure.
- 2.3 Darlington School Streets are still ongoing. The initial three sites chosen are no longer viable. Two further sites are currently in process of consultation with all the relevant partners. They have not agreed how the closures will be enforced at this stage.

- 2.4 Devon County Council has progressed 3 schemes that are enforced through physical closures. A consultation with parents, staff and residents was undertaken following 12 months, and 86% were in favour of making the School Street scheme permanent. Perceived benefits were, a sense of greater personal safety, more room for social distancing and less congestion. Parents reported feeling more confident allowing children to walk to school on their own, and residents indicated that congestion on surrounding streets has not materialised. The School Street Schemes have been very resource intensive, mainly for the schools, who need to staff the physical closures.
- 2.5 Solihull Council introduced 6 School Street schemes which are all 'signed only' and are enforced by the police with no physical closure in place. Permits are provided for exemptions to the closures and a part time advisory 20mph speed limit is also included during the time of the closure.

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 Any School Street requires the collaboration of several parties, including school staff, parents, and residents.
- 3.2 Most of the existing School Street schemes are in London and are camera enforced.
- 3.3 Local Authorities outside London enforce the School Street scheme either with a physical closure or through enforcement by the police.
- 3.4 Police enforced schemes are unlikely to provide the same sense of personal safety than schemes that provide a physical barrier. Since the presence of the Police at the School Street closure is likely to be the exception rather than a regular presence then this may lead to noncompliance.
- 3.5 Barrier controlled enforced School Street schemes are very resource intensive for the school, they must erect the closure and manage any exempt vehicles through the site. Lack of staff on any day could lead to an increase in the risk to road users due to pedestrians and vehicles occupying the same space.
- 3.6 Recent changes to legislation allow Local Authorities outside London to apply for powers to enforce "moving traffic offences", which would allow School Streets to be camera enforced. However, currently Stockton is not proposing to apply for these powers.

4. Options

- 4.1 Option 1 – A trial is carried out at one school using the physical closure method. The chosen school would need be fully supportive in recruiting sufficient volunteers to implement and manage the physical closure daily.
- 4.2 Option 2 – A trial is carried out at one school with a sign only closure. This is unlikely to get Police support and there are risks with pedestrians and vehicles sharing the same space.
- 4.3 Option 3 – Continue to monitor. This would allow the current consultation process on Mayoral Combined Authority powers to be completed and may result in Stockton applying for the additional enforcement powers to enforce School Streets using cameras.

5. Recommendation

- 5.1. Option 3 is recommended at this time.

6. Timescales

- 6.1 Currently unknown as it would require the Council to apply for powers in due course that could take some time and would then need to implement a scheme after that.