

Sustainable School Travel Strategy 2008

Members noted that current school transport legislation had been framed in 1944, and provided a guarantee of home to school transport for only a small minority of pupils – those of compulsory school age attending their nearest suitable school where this was beyond ‘statutory walking distance’.

Evidence showed that a lack of transport and the cost of transport could both act as a barrier to choice. The result was that there was a real inequity in how far children were able to travel to school. More affluent children travelled on average nearly half a mile further than the poorest, with only 10% of children entitled to free school meals travelling 3 or more miles to school compared to 18% of children not entitled to free school meals. The government aimed to remove the lack of affordable transport as a barrier to choice.

It was explained that Section 6 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 placed a general duty on Local Authorities (LAs) to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport and to produce a Sustainable School Travel Strategy annually.

There were 4 main elements to the duty:-

- an assessment of the travel and transport needs of children, and young people within the LAs area;
- an audit of the sustainable travel and transport infrastructure within the authority that may be used when travelling to and from, or between schools/institutions;
- a strategy to develop the sustainable travel and transport infrastructure within the authority so that the travel and transport needs of children and young people are better catered for; and
- the promotion of sustainable travel and transport modes on the journey to, from, and between schools and other institutions.

The Act defined sustainable modes of travel as those that the Council considered may improve the physical well-being of those who used them, the environmental well-being of all or part of the Council’s area, or a combination of the two. For example, walking and cycling were likely to improve the health of those travelling on foot or by bicycle, and may well bring environmental benefits from reduced levels of congestion and pollution. Similarly, bus use or car sharing might be considered to bring environmental benefits in comparison to individuals travelling by car.

Members were provided with a copy of the Sustainable School Travel Strategy. The information within the Strategy document had been drawn from existing plans within Children Education and Social Care (CESC) and Development and Neighbourhood Services (DNS), the Local Transport Plan and policies already approved by Cabinet. Members were also provided with an Action Plan, which would be developed to include targets for the next 4 years.

The Council was required to publish the Sustainable School Travel Strategy, alongside other policies in respect of home to school transport and special needs transport so that they were available when parents applied for secondary school places for their children by August 2007 and each subsequent year.

Members noted that the Department for Children, Schools and Families had provided funding through the Standards Fund Grant No. 31/601 – General Duty to Promote Sustainable Travel. The Council had been awarded £14,667 to undertake this work in 2007/08 and the same amount would be provided each year up to and including 2011/12.

It was proposed to commission this work to the Road Safety Team within Development and Neighbourhood Services. The team already manage the School Travel Plan data and would enable the funding to be used effectively in order to drive the Action Plan forward.

Cabinet noted that it was suggested that the Strategy should be referred to Executive Scrutiny for consideration and possible inclusion in a Select Committee’s work programme.

Cabinet agreed the Strategy and supported its referral to Executive Scrutiny. Reference was made to School Travel Plans, which were mentioned in the Strategy and Cabinet suggested that as part of any future review the relevant Select Committee may wish to consider to what degree plans were implemented and how effective they were.

RESOLVED that

1. the Sustainable School Travel Strategy 2008, be approved.
2. refer the Strategy to Executive Scrutiny for consideration and possible inclusion in a Select Committee's work programme.'