

## Central Bedfordshire Council

### Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

12 January 2016

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#### **TITLE OF REPORT: Outcomes of the scrutiny enquiry of school's parking**

**Report of:** Cllr Ken Matthews, Chairman of the Enquiry

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#### **Purpose of this report**

1. To summarise the findings of the school's parking enquiry and to provide recommendations in order to facilitate future improvements.

#### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Committee is asked to consider and support the recommendations to be provided to the Executive resulting from the enquiry, as detailed in the body of the report, subject to any additional input as may be necessary.

#### **Background**

2. At their meeting on 01 July 2016 the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (SCOSC) requested a review of parking issues outside of schools in light of concerns raised by Members.
3. An enquiry was formed of Cllr K Matthews, C Gomm, A Graham, M Versallion and T Swain, who undertook to review the subject and report back to the SCOSC with their findings.
4. Throughout the enquiry evidence was received from officers in the Council's Highways, Development Management (DM), Schools Planning, Travel Planning and Parking Enforcement Teams. Evidence was also received from schools and parents.

5. The purpose of the enquiry was to determine the best possible solutions with regard to car parking and vehicular access at schools to ensure the free movement of traffic around schools, particularly in light of the implications of school expansion.
6. Members were keen to deliver a cost-neutral policy which set out in an open and transparent manner how the Council would plan for transport and access to schools when planning an extension to an existing school, or developing a new school.
7. Members acknowledged the need to address where possible the current challenges experienced at some schools.
8. Members noted the importance of ensuring that any recommendations should support the objectives detailed within the Council's 5 year plan and the need to consider the most appropriate solutions to invest in to tackle parking problems isolated to very short periods within the day.

### **National Context**

9. Central Government guidelines provide a framework to assist Local Authorities in shaping their policies with regards to school travel planning. In considering any possible changes to existing policies, the local authority should have regard to the Education Act 1996 which states:-

“Section 508A of the Act places a general duty on local authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport. The duty applies to children and young people of compulsory school age who travel to receive education or training in a local authority's area.

The Act defines sustainable modes of travel as those that the local authority considers may improve the physical well-being of those who use them, the environmental well-being of all or part of the local authority's area, or a combination of the two.”

10. Central Bedfordshire Council's current policies in relation to travel and parking around schools are in line with Central Government directives and research supports that many other Local Authorities have similar policies in place. Central Bedfordshire's Excess Weight Partnership Strategy has been developed to support the national ambition to turn things around and achieve a downward trend in levels of excess weight in children and adults by 2020. It states:-

“We will encourage the development of positive environments which actively promote a healthy weight. This involves transport, the built environment, early years settings, schools...an increase in the number of families walking and cycling to work/school... all local planning and policy decisions have a focus on preserving and

creating healthier environments which provide opportunities for physical activity...and an increase in the use of sustainable modes of travel including walking and cycling, both for leisure and commuting.”

11. The remainder of this report sets out the findings of this review in light of which recommendations that are aimed at improving existing performance.

## **Enquiry Findings and Recommendations**

### **School Travel Plans**

12. School's Travel Plans are the direct responsibility of schools and are actively encouraged and promoted by Council Officers. However, the evidence received from the School's Travel Plan Officer found that there is no longer a dedicated resource to carry out this function, instead it is absorbed as part of a wider workload. As a result some school travel plans are several years old, have not been updated nor actively promoted by the school.
13. Every year a classroom 'hands up' survey is carried out to determine how each child usually travels to school. Based on the return of the past 3 years data, figures of 20-37% were cited as 'core drivers' in any given area. Core drivers are the percentage of children who are usually driven to school on their own and not part of a car sharing scheme or any other method of car 'pooling', also termed 'single occupancy vehicle'. During the review Members were keen to understand measures taken to address and reduce these numbers, whether travel plans were effective due to their 'soft touch' nature and whether schools implemented and promoted them effectively. It was also noted that public transport in a variety of locations, particularly rural, did not match school timetables, yet were cited as appropriate means of travel within travel plans.
14. Working closely with schools had proved very effective in the past, with schools taking the initiative to minimize parking breaches outside of their premises.
  1. **RECOMMENDED** that officers work closely and proactively with schools, taking into account current resources and staffing levels to regularly promote school travel plans and existing health programmes that encourage active and sustainable travel for children within catchment.
  2. **RECOMMENDED** that every school be encouraged to produce an active and regularly updated travel plan, maintaining the relationship with Council officers when providing travel data.

### **Information sharing**

16. Members discussed the use of technology, social media, email and the inclusion of school's parking information on the Council and school websites, with the possibility of drafting communications to be shared with all Head Teachers as frequently as necessary. This would encourage regular contact with schools and the promotion of sustainable solutions that would reinforce the importance of safety and responsible parking in the vicinity of schools.
17. During the review Members were appraised of other local authority practices and solutions, one of which was an online leaflet, which members felt could be replicated by Central Bedfordshire Council. (See Appendix F)

- 3. RECOMMENDED the production of a school's parking leaflet similar to that of a neighbouring authority with distribution electronically where possible to schools, parents and via the Council's website and social media outlets.**
- 4. RECOMMENDED regular (termly) communication between Council Officers and Head Teachers, reinforcing the promotion of school travel plans and sustainable travel solutions.**

### **Minimising risk and prioritising safety**

18. The numbers of accidents, incidents and collisions around schools, in Central Bedfordshire are relatively low at 25 incidents out of a total of 18,765 pupils (see Appendices A and B). As a result the enquiry felt that the Council's current policy was effective in minimising risks and prioritising the safety of school children.
19. There is no current policy in place in Central Bedfordshire with regards to parking enforcement outside of schools but breaches are prioritized on a case by case basis. The future appointment of an additional enforcement officer would enable a focus specifically on this area.
20. ANPR vehicles can be used outside of schools but it had proved cost prohibitive to utilise them in isolation as the Council are bound by restrictions on their use. For example, the cost of camera maintenance per year is currently £9,820.00 with the cost recouped from Penalty Charge Notices (PCN's) issued to drivers directly outside of schools during 2014-15 at approximately £5,075 resulting in the Council running at a loss.
21. Data provided in relation to PCN's included the following:-
  - That 40 PCN's had been issued for school contraventions from April 2015 to March 2016.

- To date 21 PCN's had been issued for school contraventions from April 2016 to September 2016.
5. **RECOMMENDED** that the Council fully enforce inappropriate parking on yellow 'zig zags' which are placed along the entire frontage of all schools, ensuring they are always positioned to the maximum enforceable length.
  6. **RECOMMENDED** that where parking restrictions exist, current measures are robustly deployed and enforced, taking into account existing resources.
  7. **RECOMMENDED** that visible signage be displayed outside all schools where deemed necessary, prohibiting parking and waiting between the hours of approximately 8-9am and 3-4pm, acknowledging that individual schools may have differing opening times, taking into account the impact of any restrictions upon residents within the area and existing budget constraints.
  8. **RECOMMENDED** the introduction of 20mph zones outside of new schools and existing schools, assessing the most appropriate radius to place them in.

#### **Partnership working**

22. The evidence received from the Council's Highways, DM and Schools Planning departments demonstrated that although they did work closely together when determining school expansions, Members felt more could be done to strengthen partnership working and ensure planning conditions were applied where necessary.
23. Members acknowledged that each area had its own unique set of problems and that one solution would not fit all, with a need to consider whether existing Council policies went far enough in ensuring developers contributed to parking mitigations where necessary.
24. It is important to bear in mind that Council policy does not currently encourage or dictate that conditions should be applied to developments which allow for parking mitigations to be included within planning conditions. Members discussed whether policy could be amended to allow for this where appropriate, taking into account that this principle goes against the primary policy of promoting active and sustainable travel and that a built solution such as drop off zones may encourage parents to drive their children to school unnecessarily.
25. Having researched the evidence in relation to statutory government guidelines it became clear that there were no national or other local authority benchmarking policies which supported a 'built' solution, for

example drop off zones. However, Members were keen to ascertain whether the evidence gathered could mitigate a solution of providing more parking provision for parents.

26. An example was provided of a recent development within Cranfield whereby conditions were successfully applied using current policy and officers suggested that it was likely this process could be replicated in future where necessary, without the need to amend policy (see Appendix C).

**9. RECOMMENDED that planning conditions already within the Council's remit be applied when considering school expansions and new builds, without the need to amend current policy.**

27. The evidence identified some cases of good practice within other area schools, which could be promoted by the Council when reviewing current practices, particularly in relation to partnership working with schools and encouraging them to introduce or enhance measures to tackle parking problems outside of the school premises (see Appendix D).

**10. RECOMMENDED that lower and primary schools be encouraged to allocate a designated member of staff to manage collection and drop off of children at the start and end of the school day.**

**Design principles**

28. Based on known reported problems in relation to schools parking, evidence suggested that many of the problems were located directly to the front of school gates or on the road immediately outside of the school (see Appendix E and Table 1, Head Teacher, parent and resident survey results). In response Members considered whether a design principle could be introduced whereby new school builds precluded roads being built outside of the front of a school, with staff accessing a gated entrance to the rear of the site. It was agreed that safety and access to the school should be of paramount importance and that a design principle such as this may be difficult to implement, but that any design should include provision for school buses where necessary.

**11. RECOMMENDED that new schools and expansions include provision for school buses, access and turning wherever possible.**

## Head Teacher, Parent and Resident Engagement

29. To support the enquiry, Members discussed the importance of engaging with the local community to gain insight into the problems schools, parents and residents were experiencing. Four school areas were identified as having existing problems in relation to parking outside of schools and had been subject to or were in the process of applying for further expansion. Those schools were Arnold Academy in Barton-le-Clay, Cranfield Church of England Academy, Church End Lower School including the Forest End site in Marston Moretaine and the Potton Federation of schools, Lower and Middle.
30. Officers contacted the Head Teachers of each school and carried out a telephone survey, securing agreement that the school would in turn consult with parents. A bespoke survey was then forwarded to Head Teachers with a similar version for parents. The evidence demonstrated that community facilities such as village hall car parks were often not made available to schools. Were they to be made available it could aid a 'park and stride' or walking bus solution.
31. Residents living directly outside of the schools were contacted highlighting the problems experienced by those living within the vicinity of the school and the suggested solutions they would like to see introduced.

A summary table of the resident's survey results can be found below with the complete evidence from all 3 groups located in Appendix E (i-vii):-

**Table 1 – Resident survey results (Combined data)**

| Problem faced   | Percentage of residents who cited this as an issue |
|---|--|
| Blocked resident driveways at school drop off and pick up times | 70%  |
| Safety issues connected with parking                            | 62%  |
| Poor parking  | 49%  |
| Narrow roads or pathways outside of the school                  | 38%  |

32. Members carefully considered all the responses received from each of the three groups, weighing each problem and proposed solution against current Council policy, budget constraints and resources, acknowledging the impact of the problems faced by the public and the need to support improvement measures. Members were mindful of the fact that some

parents drive their children to school due to a lack of public transport in particular areas. There is also more choice as to where parents are able to send their children to school, with many attending out of catchment schools. Working parents also often travelled to work immediately after having dropped children to school.

33. In response to the survey results the School Planning Officer highlighted that any funds allocated to parking mitigations, although seemingly providing an immediate solution, would need to be sourced from the overall education budget which could impact the number of school places available. Planning Officers also detailed the difficulties in securing Section 106 and CIL contributions from developers to provide parking mitigations, due to the fact that the Council had a statutory duty to promote sustainable travel solutions in the first instance.

- 12. RECOMMENDED that schools promote a staggered start and finish time where a number of schools are in close proximity to one another in order to alleviate the pressure on parents needing to drop off children of differing ages to different schools.**
- 13. RECOMMENDED that schools promote walking buses where practical, further strengthening schemes to encourage walking, cycling, scooting and other means of sustainable travel.**
- 14. RECOMMENDED that middle and upper schools be encouraged to work with local transport providers to facilitate subsidised travel for out of catchment children, where practical.**
- 15. RECOMMENDED that schools work closely with catchment area children and parents to minimise as much as possible any unnecessary short distance car journeys, taking into account the time constraints faced by working parents.**
- 16. RECOMMENDED that schools be encouraged to work closely with the local community in order to maximise shared resources including utilising village hall car parks, local supermarkets, park and stride solutions and liaison with parish councils in order to support improvements and closer partnership working.**

#### **Reason/s for recommendations**

34. The evidence considered by this enquiry highlighted the need to review whether the Council's existing policies went far enough in mitigating parking issues in known problem areas. Due to concerns



raised by Members, residents, parents and schools it is important that the Council supports the community in relation to schools parking where possible. The recommendations detailed in this report will support improved conditions, consideration given to expanding and new schools with parking mitigations for the future. The majority of Members agreed that existing powers within current policies in relation to the application of planning conditions went far enough in allowing parking mitigations to be included where necessary, as long as they were consistently and robustly applied. It was therefore deemed unnecessary to recommend amending policy, instead strengthening current measures and ensuring a close working relationship between Council officers and schools in order to address the current issues faced and minimise their occurrence when building new schools or agreeing the expansion of existing schools.

### **Council Priorities**

35. The improvement of parking problems outside of schools directly addresses the Council's priority of Enhancing Central Bedfordshire and ensuring it is a 'Great Place'.

### **Corporate Implications**

### **Legal Implications**

36. The Highway Authority has a wide discretion as to the circumstances in which they can make Traffic Regulation orders. Whether any new Orders will be required to prevent vehicles waiting/parking will depend upon the individual site circumstances. Where parking takes place outside schools and controls may already exist then enforcement of those controls can be prioritised. A strengthening of the staff engaged could achieve this but will give rise to an additional cost.

The introduction of new areas where control can be enforced will require the making and publishing of Orders Under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 there is a requirement to consult and take into account objections. The procedures are prescribed by regulation. The publicity requirements and order making procedure will generate a cost but once confirmed the orders can be enforced. There will be some additional costs in respect of road marking and signage that explain the extent and nature of the restriction which could be imposed at specific times rather than throughout the day.

The possibility of varying the local speed limit for traffic in the vicinity of schools is also available to the Highway Authority. The Road traffic Regulation Act 1984 specifies that restricted roads, ones that have lamp posts spaced no more than 200 yards apart would normally be subject to a 30 mph speed limit. The status of the road can be varied

by the traffic authority and by the making a further regulation order a speed limit restriction can be varied. It will depend on local circumstances but these sites are likely to be located in the urban area and within an existing 30mph area.

The use of planning Conditions to limit local congestion or reduce parking must meet the tests of reasonableness, relate to the development, be appropriate and be enforceable. Conditions that seek to limit the use of the highway by particular users are illegal so they have to approach the issue by promoting change in behaviours and good practice for example advocating routing plans or promoting sharing of vehicles and the minimising of car use in connection with locating development at sustainable locations.

### **Financial Implications**

37. There are four recommendations that may incur additional costs: 3, 5, 7 and 8. Work on these needs to be carried out to assess the impact on budgets. The remaining recommendations use existing resources and will therefore not impact budgets.

### **Equalities Implications**

38. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation. Throughout the course of the enquiry, efforts have been made to ascertain and understand the complexities relating to the differing needs of parents / carers, children of different ages and local residents. A range of balanced and proportionate recommendations have been identified which will support the development of flexible and locally focused solutions.

### **Conclusion and next Steps**

39. The Committee are asked to review the recommendations detailed in the report and support that they be presented to the Executive and implemented.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A – Incident and accident statistics

Appendix B – All Saints Academy Accident Model

Appendix C – Example - Cranfield Planning conditions, application number CB/15/02292 Link:-

<http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/portal/searchresult.asp?appnumber=CB/15/02292>

Appendix D – Best practice examples – school drop off zones

Appendix E (i-vii) – Public surveys and results

Appendix F – School Gate Parking Leaflet

### **Background Papers**

A – Government Paper, Home to School Travel and Transport statutory Guidance <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-to-school-travel-and-transport-guidance>

B – National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) Guidelines on Walking and Cycling <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph41>

C – Government Paper – Active Travel Briefing for Local Authorities <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/active-travel-a-briefing-for-local-authorities>

D – Central Bedfordshire Council's Transport Strategy <http://www.centralbedfordshire.gov.uk/transport/strategy/overview.aspx>