



**SAFER ROUTES TO SCHOOLS  
AND 20MPH INITIATIVES  
TASK AND FINISH GROUP  
FINAL REPORT**

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## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Executive Summary**

The Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee appointed a member Task and Finish Group to develop criteria for the allocation of £2.5 million of funding in the capital budget, over a three-year period for safer routes to schools and 20 mph school safety initiatives around schools. The objective was to agree criteria which provide for the fair allocation of this and any subsequent capital allocations in the future and the scope of the review is included in Appendix A.

Draft criteria for assessing the need for 20 mph initiatives have been developed and are included at Appendix B.

It is recommended that the criteria to be adopted for investing in safer routes to schools be the “guidelines for the identification of hazards and the assessment of risk of walked routes to school” included in Appendix C.

Subject to an 18 month review, the budget for the advisory flashing 20 mph signs will be limited to no more than £200,000 or 8% of any available budget, with the remainder of the budget to be spent on safer routes to schools, 20 mph limits and 20 mph initiatives, subject to need as assessed through application of the relevant criteria.

### **1.2 Members and Contributors**

The four members of the Task and Finish Group (TFG) were Councillors John Horner (Chair), Corinne Davies, Bill Gifford and Keith Lloyd.

Members invited specific contributions from the Lead Officer for Pupil and Student Services, the Senior Road Safety Engineer, Infrastructure Delivery Manager and the Group Manager, Transport & Highways.

The Task and Finish Group was supported throughout the review by officers from the County Council's Traffic and Road Safety Group and the Democratic Services Team. Members would like to express their gratitude to officers for their commitment and support.

### **1.3 Evidence**

In order to achieve an understanding of the review topic, the Task and Finish Group considered and secondary (already available) evidence and primary

(commissioned by the group) evidence from a range of sources. This included a pack of information from officers in the Traffic and Road Safety Group comprising:

- A guide to the cost of highway works in Warwickshire
- Department for Transport circular guidance on setting speed limits
- A report on guidance about setting 20mph speed limits, zones and signage
- RoSPA road safety information on 20mph speed limits
- A briefing sheet from the '20's Plenty' campaign encouraging community-wide 20mph speed limits
- School safety zone evaluation surveys completed by Lancashire and Swindon Councils
- Guidelines for the identification of hazards and the assessment of risk on walked routes to schools
- Department for Education and Skills guidance on home to school transport
- A report on experimental advisory 20mph school safety zones in Worcestershire.
- A breakdown of accident data outside Warwickshire schools
- Reported injury accidents for pupils travelling to / from school
- Cost information for taxi and bus services for dangerous routes
- A Pilot Review comprising six of the routes where free transport is currently provided on safety grounds

The primary evidence comprised:

- A question and answer session with officers from Traffic and Road Safety, in the Transport & Highways Department.
- Site visits by members accompanying a Traffic and Road Safety Officer to see how the assessment of the safety of travel routes to schools are undertaken.
- A round table discussion with the Lead Officer for Pupil and Student Services.
- A question and answer session with officers from Transport Operations.
- Written information about the use of contributions arising from new developments (Section 106 agreements)

#### **1.4 Dates and Timescales**

Stage 1: A meeting to agree the scoping document for this task and finish review – July 2014 (See Appendix A)

Stage 2: Consideration of the Secondary Evidence listed at 1.3 above and sources for primary evidence – July 2014

Stage 3: Two question and answer sessions with specialist officers – July and August 2014

Stage 4: Presentation of the Task and Finish Group final report to the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee – September 2014

Stage 5: Presentation of the Task and Finish Group to Cabinet

## 2.0 Overview

### 2.1 Background

At the meeting of the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) held on 12<sup>th</sup> March 2014 a question was submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Transport & Planning. This concerned the allocation of £2.5 million in the capital budget for safer routes to schools and 20 mph school safety initiatives. The Portfolio Holder, Councillor Peter Butlin, proposed a cross-party Task and Finish Group to consider and make recommendations on the use of the monies and to consider how to manage expectations around any resulting changes. It was agreed that members of this group would be drawn from the Communities OSC.

### 2.2 Objectives

The key aim from this work was to produce criteria, based on evidence for the capital investment in safer routes to schools and 20 miles per hour (mph) safety initiatives. The objective was to report to the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2014. It was determined that the scope of the review would include only safer routes to schools and 20 mph initiatives. Specifically excluded were general road safety and general utilisation of school transport, as well as revenue options.

A copy of the full scope for the review is attached in Appendix A.

## 3.0 Detailed Findings

### 3.1 Secondary Evidence

- Each secondary evidence document (see 1.3 above) was considered by the group and the following is a summary of the key findings.
- Guidance had been provided on the estimated cost of highway works. There is inconsistency in terms of the amounts contractors charge for similar works. Other factors affecting costs include the need for traffic management and higher maintenance costs, for example to replace anti-skid surfacing, which does not last as long as a traditional tarmacadam surface.

- The Department for Transport's guidance on the setting of local speed limits was considered. This is used by most local authorities, including Warwickshire County Council. A pragmatic approach is taken in the application of the guidance when setting speed limits and in the enforcement of them by the police. In the countryside, it is a challenge to strike a balance between providing sufficient signage without overwhelming the rural landscape.
- The group discussed the costs of advisory 20mph limits outside schools. Whilst such signs cannot be enforced, they provide a strong visual message. A pilot signage scheme is being installed at Burton Green near Kenilworth.
- Members reviewed RoSPA safety information on 20mph zones and speed limits, together with literature from the '20s Plenty' group. There is an ongoing debate whether 20mph limits should be focused on schools or extend to the surrounding area. Also, there is an argument that it is better to focus in the first instance on improving routes and associated signposting.
- School safety zone evaluation surveys have been completed by Lancashire and Swindon councils. In considering their reports, members concluded that the decrease in pupils walking to school is societal, with parents driving children to school, on their way to work. With regard to 20mph zones, it was felt that they should only be implemented in conjunction with traffic calming measures. Possible criteria on whether to introduce a 20mph limit could include the proportion of pupils who already walk to school.
- It was noted that parents have responsibility to ensure their children attend school. It is the responsibility of the local authority to provide safe routes to school. Many parents are unaware of the Council's responsibilities regarding the provision of safe routes. However case law indicates that carers are expected to escort primary children to school which means to be deemed unsafe a route should be unsafe for an unaccompanied teenager.
- Consideration was given to accident data. From this, members explored the definition of a serious accident, the link between deprivation and the frequency of accidents and other factors that may affect the numbers of accidents, such as the environment in which a school is located.

### 3.2 Primary Evidence

The TFG invited contributions and made enquiries of County Council officers from:

- Education Transport Pupil and Student Services, Learning and Achievement
- Transport & Highways - Traffic and Road Safety
- Transport & Highways - Transport Operations
- Economic Growth - Development Management (Highways)

#### 3.2.1. Education Transport

- Free school transport is provided for all children who live more than three miles (secondary pupils) and two miles (primary pupils) away from their school, or where the route to school is considered dangerous for pedestrians. Some 8,000 Warwickshire children currently receive free transport to their school, with approximately 1,800 of these receiving the service on safety grounds. The annual cost to the Council of these 1,800 places is £1.584 million. Within this total the cost of taxis is £197,583. (Note – these figures should be considered in the context of the complexity of home to school transport and the interrelationship of its various components. A reduction in the number of free transport places will not necessarily deliver a pro-rata saving in home to school transport budgets).
- The Authority only has to have regard to road safety, not personal security, when determining if routes to schools are safe. Route assessments take into account visibility and safety aspects, for example if there is no footway along part of the route, if pupils need to cross a busy road, or it is deemed dangerous to get to the pickup point for a bus or other service. Parental responsibility for safety was also discussed.
- Officers were asked to provide data for the 100 routes classed as unsafe. From these, six were selected from a variety of locations within Warwickshire.
- Provision of some free transport services is historic. Improvements may have been made previously, without the route being reassessed for safety and so the service continued. There was a consensus that all routes needed to be reassessed.
- A prioritised approach would be needed to improve the routes used by the highest numbers of children. The prioritisation should also take

account of issues for pupils in areas suffering deprivation and those where there were higher accident statistics.

- A new policy on route safety is currently being formulated by officers from the People Group. It is intended that the new policy will be more objective and consistent, being based around national safety guidance. Reassessment of routes as part of the new policy might reduce the number deemed unsafe. The draft policy would be subject to formal consultation. Members stated that consultation on the revised policy should be comprehensive if it varied from national guidelines.
- With regard to 20mph speed limits around schools, the removal of some bus services may increase the number of pupils travelling to and from school by car. This may increase congestion around schools at the start and end of the school day.
- Expenditure on 20mph speed limited zones will not necessarily improve safety, unless accompanied by traffic calming measures; nor will it achieve revenue savings.
- There is an inconsistency in that 20mph school safety zones and speed limits are based on accident data, whilst safer routes to schools and advisory limits are not. It is acknowledged that most children will have to walk the last few yards to the school gate whereas carers are unlikely to allow a child to walk down an unsafe route. It was for this reason that a maximum budget is recommended for advisory 20 mph signs as accident criteria is not required for this investment decision.

### **3.2.2 Pilot Route Assessments**

- Six route assessments using national criteria from the 100 dangerous routes have been undertaken recently and the TFG considered a report on these assessments. The report proved highly informative in that it provided examples of routes where on investigation it was found that they would:
  - No longer be deemed unsafe (1 instance).
  - Benefit from a reasonable commitment of capital expenditure to enhance the route thus making it safe (2 instances).
  - Be prohibitively expensive to upgrade to make safe (3 instances).
- Members were impressed by the methodology used in making the assessments and felt confident in extrapolating the findings to assist in its recommendations regarding criteria. A conclusion drawn from the report is that accident data needs to be handled with caution. The record (ie the number) of school related accidents in Warwickshire is good compared to other areas. However public perception can lead to



inaccurate conclusions being drawn. In addition it is easy to draw premature conclusions regarding the safety of school pupils next to roads and it is essential to understand the details of road accidents (time, location, speed etc.) before making any decisions.

- From the surveys it was noted that in some instances vegetation encroaches onto footways thus making them narrower for pedestrians. It was considered important that the Highway Authority ensures that verge and hedgerow cutting is undertaken to avoid this happening. It was considered important that local members and parish councils highlight areas needing such maintenance.
- Officers considered that any capital investment in safer routes to schools should pay for itself in three years or less. This was based on the ability to withdraw free travel once a route is deemed safe. The TFG considered that payback was a good method for prioritising capital expenditure.

### **3.2.3 Transport & Highways - Traffic and Road Safety**

- In order for members to appreciate the methodology employed, site visits took place, to enable members to see how route assessments are undertaken. These were valuable and showed the benefit of local knowledge. In the case of one route a slight revision via a permissive path, removed the necessity to use the unsafe section of this route where there was no footway.
- Assessing routes can lead to savings on subsidies or the potential to re-route a bus service, if it was no longer required to visit some villages, unless carers funded the cost of the trip. This is a complex situation and will require detailed modelling as some routes and associated subsidies will still be required due to the distance criteria.
- It is considered that secondary pupils pose the biggest road safety concerns. They are generally unaccompanied by parents, unlike primary school pupils. Secondary pupils may be distracted by electronic devices and/or their actions may increase the risk of accidents occurring.

### **3.2.4 Transport & Highways - Transport Operations**

Officers gave a brief outline of their roles and responded to questions / lines of enquiry. The following bullet points summarise the evidence. These are followed by the group's conclusions.

- Home to school transport is a complex operation involving officers from different parts of the organisation, bus operators, taxi operators,

schools, pupils and parents. It is very fluid in nature with changes being made to services on an annual basis (minor reviews) and every 7 years (major reviews that examine every aspect of school transport).

- On any school day a bus may pick up from several locations and drop off at a number of schools. It may undertake more than one run depending on timings and will carry pupils who are eligible for transport on the basis of distance, route safety and/or special needs.
- Bus and taxi operators are commercially motivated and as such will look to maximise the revenue they can secure from the routes they serve. Contracts are awarded following a tendering or auction process, but it is acknowledged that with little competition the cost of contracts can be high. Whilst this can act as an imperative to improve and make safe a route to school for pedestrians and cyclists it does not necessarily mean that a bus can be dispensed with as other pupils may be on that bus e.g. for reasons of distance.
- It is unclear how parents and carers may respond in instances where capital investment leads to safer routes. Some will choose to pay for their children to travel by bus, others will choose to drive their children and others to school (potentially leading to congestion around schools) and others will require their children to walk or cycle.
- Taxis are used in instances where bus provision is not economic. They are very expensive costing up to £80 a day per taxi and are considered a last resort. However, there are currently only 16 in use with an arithmetic average cost of £56.29 per day. Given the legislative requirements around transport provision it is difficult to identify an alternate approach. There is scope for local residents to obtain the required permits to convey pupils to school. This would involve securing a taxi licence, a CRB check and the services of an assistant in the case of primary school children. There is scope for local authorities to employ their own drivers, but given the overheads involved this may not make financial sense.

#### Conclusions Regarding Bus and Taxi Provision

- Home to school transport is complex, expensive and fluid. This means that any attempt to tie a particular route to school (in the context of making that route safer) to the details of any particular bus or taxi is very difficult.
- There may be scope for the Authority to explore ways in which alternatives to conventional commercially provided taxis could be provided but this opportunity falls outside of the remit of this review.

- It is likely that there will be occasions where capital expenditure will be deemed appropriate on a route to make it safer. Buses will continue to traverse that route with pupils who are eligible for transport on the basis of distance and so cost savings could only be achieved if carers paid for a seat on the bus.

### **3.2.5 Section 106 (Planning Agreement) Contributions**

- A report was provided about school expansions and the use of funding from Section 106 agreements to provide safe routes to schools, rather than just school extensions. From this report members concluded that there is little scope for exploiting Section 106 with regards safer routes to schools. However the TFG considered that it is important that when planning authorities are determining proposals for housing development they should work with developers to ensure that routes to and from school are as safe as possible.

## **3.3 Criteria**

On the basis of the secondary evidence, the TFG agreed that separate criteria would be required for the safer routes to schools and 20 mph initiatives aspects of this review. This then requires further decisions around the relative priority given to improvements to routes assessed as dangerous and to areas where 20mph initiatives were proposed.

### **3.3.1 Criteria for Expenditure on 20 mph Initiatives around Schools**

The TFG considered draft proposals and agreed the set of criteria included in Appendix B for prioritising expenditure for 20mph speed limits around schools.

### **3.3.2 Criteria for Expenditure on Safer Routes to Schools**

Having reviewed the results of the pilot study along with Road Safety GB and RoSPA guidelines the Task and Finish Group concluded that.

1. The best criteria for use in assessing a route are those agreed and published at a national level. These are included at Appendix C.
2. The 100 routes to school considered unsafe in Warwickshire should each be reviewed in accordance with the national criteria. If the pilot study is representative of the 100 routes it would be reasonable to expect substantial benefits.

### **3.3.3 Prioritising Expenditure between Safer Routes to Schools and 20mph Schemes**

In order to assist officers in managing the processes around safer routes to school and 20mph initiatives around schools, the TFG felt it was important to provide guidance on how expenditure should be divided. This came with the caveat that until the capital resource begins to be used it will be difficult to anticipate demand and for this reason a degree of flexibility will be required.

It is known that at September 2014 there are 100 routes to schools that are considered unsafe. There is also evidence of demand for the provision of some form of speed restriction around a number of schools. The TFG feels that the capital budget should be divided on the basis set out in its recommendations. However, the Group should be recalled in 18 months to review progress.

### **3.4 Managing Public Expectations**

The Task and Finish Group welcomes the addition of £2.5million to the capital budget. However it recognises that whilst this will result in improvements to safety, the upgrading of routes will result in pupils losing their entitlement to free bus or taxi travel. Members wish to be assured that this transition will be managed in such a way that all parties (pupils, parents, schools, transport providers) understand the rationale behind the changes and the implications for them. To this end it is suggested that appropriate officers should undertake the following actions:

- Schools accessed by the routes currently considered dangerous be notified of the current and future situation.
- Pupils and parents currently in receipt of free transport on the grounds of safety be notified early on that changes to their provision may be on the way.
- All members of the County Council be made aware of the opportunities being presented by the capital investment and of families possible concerns regarding transport provision.

## 4.0 Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group agrees, following the analysis of all options and the consideration of the evidence, the following recommendations.

### Recommendation 1

That the capital budget of £2.5 million be initially divided on the following basis.

- Advisory 20mph limits outside schools receive a maximum allocation of £200,000 or 8% of any funds available.
- £2,300,000 for expenditure on safer routes to school, 20mph zones and 20 mph speed limits.

### Recommendation 2

That in determining whether roads around a school should be subject to 20mph speed limits, zones or advisory limits the criteria as set out in Appendix B be advised.

### Recommendation 3

That in determining whether a route to school is safe or not the criteria set out in Appendix C of this report be used.

## 5.0 Financial and Legal Implications

Following the approval of the report by the Task and Finish Group, consultation took place with the Director, Head of Service, Finance, Legal and the Equalities Officer. The following comment has been received.

### 5.1 Legal

This appears to be a thorough, informed and reasoned consideration of a difficult and complex subject on which there is no one right answer. It is important to bear in mind that a finding that a route is unsafe for the purpose of the arrangements for providing school transport does not imply that the County Council is failing more generally in its duties as a highway and road traffic authority (which are very much tempered by what is reasonably practicable within finite resources and environmental constraints).

**Appendix A**

**Scoping Document**

<b>Review Topic</b>	<b>Allocation of Capital Funds for Safer Routes to Schools</b>
<b>Task and Finish Group Members</b>	Councillor Corrinne Davies Councillor Bill Gifford Councillor John Horner (Chair) Councillor Keith Lloyd
<b>Key Officers / Departments</b>	Philippa Young, Jo Edwards, Transport and Highways
<b>Lead Scrutiny Officer</b>	Paul Spencer, Democratic Services
<b>Relevant Portfolio Holder(s)</b>	Councillor Peter Butlin Councillor Les Caborn
<b>Type of Review</b>	Task and Finish
<b>Timescale</b>	The objective is to report to the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September 2014. This will be reassessed as the review progresses.
<b>Aims of Review</b> (Key issues and/or reason for doing the review)	To produce criteria for the capital investment in safer routes to schools and 20 miles per hour (mph) safety zones.
<b>Objectives of Review</b> (Specify exactly what the review should achieve)	Produce a report and recommendations for the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee, based on evidence.

<p><b>Scope of the Topic</b> (What is specifically to be included/excluded)</p>	<p><u>Include</u></p> <p>The following areas will be included in the scope of the review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Safer routes to schools</li> <li>• 20 mph safety zones.</li> </ul> <p><u>Excluded</u></p> <p>The following areas fall outside the scope of the review:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• General road safety</li> <li>• General utilisation of school transport</li> <li>• Revenue options</li> </ul>
<p><b>Relevant Corporate Objectives</b></p>	<p>Our communities and individuals are safe and protected from harm and are able to remain independent for longer.</p> <p>The health and wellbeing of all in Warwickshire is protected.</p> <p>Warwickshire's communities are supported by excellent communications and transport infrastructure.</p>
<p><b>How will the scrutiny achieve value for money for the Council / Council Tax payers?</b></p>	<p>Use of the criteria will ensure the right projects for safer routes to schools and 20 mph zones are provided in the right places.</p>
<p><b>What secondary / existing information will be needed?</b> (i.e. risk register, background information, performance indicators, complaints, existing reports, legislation, central government information and reports)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Home to school transport (data on the types of transport used, numbers of children and the routes taken)</li> <li>• Local and national evidence regarding the use of 20mph safety zones in other areas</li> <li>• The types of 20 mph zones that have been implemented elsewhere</li> <li>• Details of accident data for school routes</li> <li>• Established criteria (from bodies including Road Safety GB and RoSPA)</li> <li>• Route assessments (based on the six test routes already completed)</li> <li>• Department for Transport guidance on setting local speed limits (Circular guidance 1/13)</li> <li>• Cost of projects</li> <li>• Dangerous routes</li> </ul>



<b>What primary / new evidence is needed for the scrutiny?</b> (What information needs to be identified / is not already available?)	This will be reviewed after consideration of the secondary evidence.
<b>Site Visits?</b> (Purpose and location)	This will be reviewed after consideration of the secondary evidence.
<b>Who amongst or partners will be involved and how?</b> (consultation with relevant stakeholders, District / Borough reps)	<p>Officers within WCC –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Craig Pratt</li> <li>• Kevin McGovern</li> </ul> <p>Portfolio holders Shadow portfolio holders</p> <p>Officers from other local highway authorities</p>
<b>Who amongst the public will be involved and how?</b>	This will be reviewed after consideration of the secondary evidence, but may not be necessary.
<b>Indicators of Success –</b> (What factors would tell you what a good review should look like? What are the potential outcomes of the review e.g. service improvements, policy change, etc?)	<p>Acceptance of the Task and Finish Group's recommendations by the Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet.</p> <p>The criteria are accepted as a mechanism for prioritising schemes in the future.</p> <p>Officers are able to make allocations using the criteria, without sustained challenge to proposals.</p>



## Appendix B

### Proposed Criteria for 20mph Speed Limits Outside Schools

#### **Advisory 20mph Speed Limits (flashing 20mph signs at school start and finish times)**

- (i) A school must be visible to drivers
- (ii) There should be at least [50%] of the schools pupils already walking or cycling to school
- (iii) The existing mean speed should be 30mph or less at school start and finish times
- (iv) The road outside the school should be a through route

#### **20mph Speed Limits (a formal 20mph speed limit at all times with signs only)**

- (i) The school must be visible to drivers
- (ii) At least 3 injury accidents within a 3 year period involving children walking or cycling to or from school and/or where speed is a contributory factor
- (iii) Length of 20mph limited to close proximity of the school only
- (iv) The existing mean speed should be 24mph or less

#### **20mph Zones (a formal 20mph speed limit at all times, with associated traffic calming features)**

- (i) At least 6 injury accidents within a 3 year period involving children walking to or from school and/or where speed is a contributory factor
- (ii) At least 2 schools within the area
- (iii) The existing speed limit should be 30mph
- (iv) Traffic calming features will be physical measures i.e. humps/cushions
- (v) A system of street lighting will need to be present

## Appendix C

### Proposed Criteria Route Assessment

The full Local Authority Road Safety Officers' Association (LAROSA, 2000) guidelines are available on request and summarised below:

For a route to be classified as “acceptable” there needs to be both:

- A continuous adequate footway on roads which have high or medium traffic flow;
- or
- Step-offs on roads which have a light volume of traffic but have adequate sight lines to provide sufficient advance warning;
- or
- on roads with a very light traffic flow, no step-offs but sufficiently good sight lines to provide adequate advance warning.

AND

- if there is a need to cross roads there must be sufficient gaps in the traffic flow and sight lines to allow enough opportunities to cross safely, **or** one or more of the following **must** be provided:
  - Crossing facilities (zebra, pelican or puffin crossings)
  - Pedestrian phases at traffic signals (including necessary refuges)
  - School Crossing Patrols
  - Traffic calming (sufficient to enable safe road crossing)
  - Pedestrian refuges

### Scrutiny Action Plan

Recommendation		PfH Comments	Cabinet Comments	Target Date for Action	Lead Officer	OSC Update	Progress Notes
R1	That Cabinet adopts the proposed criteria for the expenditure of capital monies on improvement schemes for Safer Routes to Schools and 20mph zones						
R2	That in determining whether roads around a school should be subject to 20mph speed limits, zones or advisory limits the criteria as set out in Appendix B of the review report be advised.						
R3	That in determining whether a route to school is safe or not the criteria set out in Appendix C of the review report be used.						