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# Safer Schools Motion

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<b>Committee considering report:</b>	Executive
<b>Date of Committee:</b>	17 <sup>th</sup> December 2020
<b>Portfolio Member:</b>	Councillor Richard Somner
<b>Date Portfolio Member agreed report:</b>	3 <sup>rd</sup> December 2020
<b>Report Author:</b>	Neil Stacey
<b>Forward Plan Ref:</b>	EX3964

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## 1 Purpose of the Report

To respond to a Motion, proposing a range of safety and environmental improvements outside schools, which was presented to Council by Councillor Erik Pattenden in March 2020.

## 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The measures proposed in Councillor Pattenden's Motion may be appropriate in certain circumstances in some locations but should not be implemented as a single initiative;
- 2.2 The Council continues to implement road safety and environmental improvements outside schools on the basis of identified local needs as part of the annual capital programme;
- 2.3 The Council continues to invest in highway infrastructure that promotes and enables active travel, especially to schools, as part of the annual capital programme;
- 2.4 The Council continues to work with schools to deliver road safety initiatives to equip children with the skills and knowledge required to travel to school safely, especially on foot or by bicycle or scooter. The Council should also evaluate the extent to which schools are aware of and engaged with these services;
- 2.5 The Council continues to promote active travel to school, which by reducing reliance on car-based transport will lead to an improvement in local air quality and improve the health, fitness and mental wellbeing of children;
- 2.6 The Council continues to monitor air quality across the district and to engage with schools to promote initiatives to reduce vehicle idling.

### 3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary			
<b>Financial:</b>	None. Budgets are already in place for many of the suggested measures.			
<b>Human Resource:</b>	None.			
<b>Legal:</b>	None.			
<b>Risk Management:</b>	None.			
<b>Property:</b>	None.			
<b>Policy:</b>	None.			
	<b>Positive</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Negative</b>	<b>Commentary</b>
<b>Equalities Impact:</b>				
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		
<b>Environmental Impact:</b>		X		

<b>Health Impact:</b>		X		
<b>ICT Impact:</b>		X		
<b>Digital Services Impact:</b>		X		
<b>Council Strategy Priorities:</b>		X		
<b>Core Business:</b>		X		
<b>Data Impact:</b>		X		
<b>Consultation and Engagement:</b>	The issues outlined in this report have been discussed by the Transport Advisory Group.			

#### 4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The purpose of this report is to respond to a Motion suggesting various safety and environmental improvements outside schools, which was presented to Council by Councillor Erik Pattenden in March 2020.
- 4.2 The issues raised by the motion are the responsibility of several different teams across the Council. Consultants were commissioned to investigate the principles and practicalities of implementing the proposed measures by drawing on national guidelines and best practice, experience with other clients and by discussing the issues with the appropriate West Berkshire Council officers. The consultants’ report concluded that the Council already has several different initiatives in place to address road safety and environmental issues outside schools, that some of the measures were only appropriate in certain locations and in certain circumstances and that practical, legal and resource issues prevented some of the measures from being taken forward.
- 4.3 When discussed at the Transport Advisory Group (TAG) in October 2020, there was a mixed response to the consultants’ report among members, with some being of the opinion that the issues raised should be treated as a higher priority or with greater urgency.
- 4.4 The recommendations of this report are drawn from the consultants’ report (Appendix A) and in light of the comments made by TAG.

## 5 Supporting Information

### Introduction

5.1 This report provides information to enable the Executive to decide whether the Motion submitted by Councillor Pattenden at the Council meeting in March 2020 should be implemented.

### Background

5.2 At the meeting of Full Council in March 2020, Councillor Pattenden submitted the following motion, referred to as the “Safer Schools Motion”:

*“This Council notes that:*

- *Our residents, staff and children, are exposed to unnecessary levels of pollutants outside of schools at peak times in the morning and afternoon;*
- *Epidemiological studies show that symptoms of bronchitis in asthmatic children increase in association with long-term exposure to pollutants, as well as stunting lung growth;*
- *Only a handful of schools across the country are trialling “No Vehicle Idling zones” yet they bring many health benefits;*
- *Air pollution poses a serious threat to the health and development of young people: while many of the policy interventions to rectify this problem would have to come from central Government, this Council can do more and needs to be proactive on this issue;*
- *The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE) and Public Health England (PHE) produced new guidance in 2017 that recommended “no vehicle idling” areas in places where health-vulnerable people collect, such as outside schools, hospitals and care homes, and in areas where exposure to road-traffic-related air pollution is high;*
- *According to the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents, evidence shows that 20mph zones are an effective way of preventing injuries on the road;*
- *Research estimates the chance of fatality from being hit by a car driving at 20mph at 1.5% versus 8% at 30mph;*
- *There are 80 schools across the district, some of which are in 40 mph zones.*

*This Council resolves to:*

- *Review the work done on No-Vehicle-Idling nationally in other local authorities and work this into an action plan for No-Vehicle-Idling Zones across West Berkshire;*
- *Implement enforceable No-Vehicle-Idling Zones around all primary schools in the District by the end of 2021, with at least 4 pilots by Spring 2020;*
- *Use the experience of the pilot zones to determine whether these measures should be implemented via enforceable enhancements to existing Council policies, or via a new by-law;*
- *Work closely with schools that are part of the scheme to inform parents and carers of the No-Vehicle-Idling Zones;*

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- *Encourage local businesses to sponsor green walls on school buildings and tree planting near schools and the appropriate Executive Member include this in their action plan;*
- *Set up a task group to review the speed limit outside each school;*
- *Create a toolkit of potential actions for schools to take in order to make roads safer for children, as is most appropriate for that area, including requesting road-markings and additional lights from the Council;*
- *Offer all schools the option of signing up to a Safer School Zone which will include red road markings to prevent dangerous parking and additional visits from Traffic Enforcement Officers;*
- *Look at locations where appropriate additional changes could be made, such as making certain roads near schools one way.”*

5.3 The Motion was referred to TAG for further discussion, a summary of which is included in 5.6 below.

5.4 It is acknowledged that seven months elapsed between the presentation of the Motion and its consideration by TAG. This was because the issues raised cut across the work of a number of different teams and services within the Council, including Traffic Management and Road Safety, Transport Policy, Environmental Health and Public Health. The workload and priorities of each of these teams have been affected in recent months by the Covid-19 pandemic.

5.5 Given the above, it was not possible for Officers to compile a comprehensive report in response to the Motion and the decision was therefore taken to employ consultants WSP to assist. WSP were asked to investigate the principles and practicalities of implementing the requested measures by drawing on national guidelines and best practice, experience with other clients and by discussing the issues with the appropriate West Berkshire Council officers.

5.6 WSP's report, which is included as Appendix A to this report, was presented to the Transport Advisory Group (TAG) on 29<sup>th</sup> October 2020. During the resulting discussion the following points were made by members:

- (a) The report was rather defensive and there was a degree of complacency about the conclusions of the report.

Officer comment: The report was not intended to be defensive, but to identify with clarity the many positive initiatives that the Council already has in place or is planning for the future that address safety and environmental issues outside schools.

- (b) The environmental issues raised in the Motion are not being treated with sufficient urgency or priority, particularly with respect to local air quality and vehicle idling.

Officer comment: With the recent publication of the Council's Environmental Strategy there is a stronger focus on environmental issues than ever before. Specifically with respect to vehicle idling, advisory signs will shortly be placed at key locations where this is a problem. The Public Protection Partnership are running a competition for school children to produce artwork to raise awareness

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of the health and environmental impact of vehicle idling (<https://publicprotectionpartnership.org.uk/environmental-health/air-quality/clean-air-day-schools-competition/>). However, the enforcement of idling offences is a particularly difficult matter as noted in the WSP report.

- (c) The Council could do more to make schools aware of the services it provides in respect of road safety education and promotion of active travel.

Officer comment: The extent to which schools are aware of and engaged with these services could be evaluated. However, it must be noted that schools are responsible for producing and updating their School Travel Plans and the Council has finite resources to assist them in this process.

- (d) The removal of the School Travel Plan Officer post did not help with the encouragement of cycling.

Officer comment: School Travel Planning is a non-statutory activity and the associated post was deleted from the establishment in 2012 as a result of revenue funding reductions at the time. Although the promotion of active travel to school forms part of the Environment Strategy Delivery Plan, discussion will need to take place with Public Health and Education Officers to see how this can be taken forward if it remains unfunded.

- (e) Could more be done to encourage and promote car sharing for school journeys?

Officer Comment: This is something which could be the subject of further work if there was sufficient resource to support schools with their Travel Plans (see point (d) above). The local promotion of car sharing by individual schools is likely to be the most effective way forward with support from the Council in terms of how to match people up and the provision of guidelines around practicalities, safety and insurance.

- (f) It can be frustrating that bureaucracy prevents initiatives from being taken forward.

Officer comment: The Council has to work within national legislation, particularly with respect to the enforcement of parking and vehicle idling offences, and the proper procedures need to be followed.

- (g) Some issues with the wording of the report were pointed out and suggestions made as to how clarity could be improved.

Officer comment – These have been pointed out to WSP, who have revised the report accordingly.

## Proposals

- 5.7 The work undertaken by the Council's consultants concluded that the Council is already taking substantial action to address road safety and environmental issues outside schools, some of which overlap with the suggestions made in Councillor Pattenden's Motion. It is proposed that the Council continue with these various measures, which include:

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- (a) implementing road safety and environmental improvements outside schools on the basis of identified local needs as part of the annual capital programme, for example pedestrian crossing points, traffic calming, warning signs, safety railings and parking restrictions;
- (b) investing in highway infrastructure that promotes and enables active travel, especially to schools, as part of the annual capital programme, for example improved footways and cycleways and enhanced cycle parking facilities;
- (c) working with schools to deliver road safety initiatives to equip children with the skills and knowledge required to travel to school safely, especially on foot or by bicycle or scooter. However, the Council should also evaluate the extent to which schools are aware of and engaged with these services;
- (d) promoting active travel to school, which by reducing reliance on car-based transport, will lead to an improvement in local air quality and improve the health, fitness and mental wellbeing of children;
- (e) monitoring air quality across the district and engaging with schools to promote initiatives to reduce vehicle idling.

## 6 Other options considered

Each of the specific suggestions made in Councillor Pattenden's Motion were considered by the consultants and discussed with Council officers, with comments as to the feasibility of each being made in the report in Appendix A.

## 7 Conclusion

- 7.1 WSP have examined the measures suggested by the Safer Schools Motion and considered whether they are feasible, effective and value for money. They have also worked with officers to set out how the various teams within the Council currently address road safety and environmental issues near schools. The summary of their report states that:
- (a) Many of the actions proposed in the Motion are already in place in West Berkshire, albeit not necessarily in the exact form suggested. Some of the actions suggested have precedent, having been used elsewhere and the Council is aware of these options and able to consider whether they should be implemented in West Berkshire.
  - (b) Some of the measures suggested are not suitable for widespread or "blanket" implementation around West Berkshire but rather should be used in response to identified issues, with the most appropriate measure used to mitigate an identified air quality or road safety issue, depending on a wide range of factors such as the nature and source of the issue, and characteristics of the local environment.
  - (c) Some of the measures proposed would unfortunately have little tangible benefit, require staffing or financial resources beyond what is currently available, or offer low value and are therefore not recommended.

## 8 Appendices

### 8.1 Appendix A – Safer Schools Motion – Measures Study, WSP October 2020

#### Background Papers:

None

#### Subject to Call-In:

Yes:  No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council’s position
- Considered or reviewed by Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee or associated Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

**Wards affected:** all wards

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