

Cabinet – 24 October 2012

Travelling to School

Portfolio: Councillor Tom Ansell – Transport and Environment
Councillor Rachel Andrew - Children's Services

Service: Engineering & Transportation

Wards: All

Key decision: Yes

Forward plan: Yes

1. Summary

- 1.1 As part of the Education Act 1996 (as amended by the Children and Inspections Act 2006) a duty was placed on local authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to and from school. Within this there was a requirement for authorities to produce and publish a Sustainable Mode of Travel Strategy (SMoT). In response, Walsall Council developed its first Strategy during November 2008 and following a review the latest Strategy has been written covering the period April 2012–March 2015.
- 1.2 The draft SMoT Strategy encompasses national, regional and local policies, strategies and practices that promote sustainable travel. It is available at <http://www2.walsall.gov.uk/CMISWebPublic/Meeting.aspx?meetingID=1851>. The Strategy outlines the Council's approach to integrating existing work programmes to provide a comprehensive service that seeks to positively influence and affect parents', carers' and students' choices in the mode of transport that they use to travel to educational establishments.
- 1.3 Through combining Road Safety Engineering, Education and Sustainable Travel and linking directly with Children's Services and Public Health programmes, it has been recognised that this Strategy can deliver significant health, environmental and safety benefits to the local community while addressing strategic concerns.
- 1.4 The Strategy captures what has been achieved in recent years and the lessons learned in tackling these issues. Building on this experience the Active Sustainable Travel and Road Safety programme (AStars) has been developed as the principal approach to delivering the outcomes. AStars integrates a range of initiatives to promote and improve road safety and sustainable travel modes to reduce car use on journeys to and from school. The programme targets measures that school puts in place to encourage more children and families to walk, cycle and use public transport on the school journey.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That Cabinet adopts the Sustainable Mode of Travel Strategy and action plan to comply with the relevant duties placed on the authority.
- 2.2 That Cabinet adopts the vision contained in the Strategy *“To actively promote and encourage sustainable school travel choices amongst pupils, parents, staff and the wider community, by providing training and a safer environment where walking & cycling in Walsall are the norm and contribute towards a more active lifestyle.”*
- 2.3 That Cabinet supports the roll out of the revised AStars programme as the primary approach to achieve improvements in sustainable travel behaviour relating to educational establishments throughout the borough.
- 2.4 That Cabinet supports an approach where:
 - i) Schools and Engineering & Transportation Services formalise Terms of Engagement to register on the AStars programme;
 - ii) AStar schools receive priority when responding to requests for highway related services.

3. Report detail

- 3.1 National surveys for school travel show that there has been a trend towards greater car use and less walking over the last twenty years. Estimates have suggested that school related traffic now amounts for as much as 20% of all traffic at school travel peak times.
- 3.2 Walsall Council recognised the ever growing issue of car dependency for school travel and has, as a result, worked proactively since 2003 to combat this issue.
- 3.3 The production of the first Sustainable Mode of Travel Strategy in 2008 and the national Travel to School Initiative helped the authority put in place a number of programmes and plans to lead the way in offering more sustainable modes of travel for the journey to and from school. Detailed results can be found in Section 2 of the Strategy but the key trends were:
 - Car use across the borough has decreased from 31.2% (2006-2007) to 28.4% (2010-2011) which is higher than the national average of 25.9%;
 - Walking figures across the borough for all ages has increased from 50.1% (2006-2007) to 54% (2010-2011), a 4% increase (which is in excess of National Average increase of 1.8%); *(based on information obtained through the national school census)*
- 3.4 Despite the success, Walsall did not achieve the National Average for 2010-2011 in the following areas:
 - Car share, Walsall 2.7% - *National Average 3.0%*
 - Public Transport, Walsall 13.4% - *National Average 17.6%*
 - Cycling, Walsall 1.3% - *National Average 2%*
 - Cycling figures in secondary schools has increased across the borough from 1.8% (2006-2007) to 2.4% (2010-2011), below the National Average of 3.1%.

- 3.5 National school travel trends based on the 2010/2011 travel census highlights:
- Secondary aged pupils are 8 times more likely to use public transport than primary aged pupils;
 - 25% of primary aged pupils are more likely to walk to school than secondary aged pupils;
 - Primary aged pupils are twice as likely to be driven to school compared to secondary aged pupils;
- 3.6 In terms of childhood obesity the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP) confirmed that Reception and Year 6 obesity levels both remain above the national average. Around one third of all children in the UK are above a healthy weight (overweight or obese) and this is increasing year on year. This condition puts a child's health at risk as they are more likely, in later life, to develop serious health problems, including Type 2 diabetes and coronary heart disease. Key findings from the 2011 NCMP found the following:
- In Reception, over a fifth (22.6%) of the children measured were either overweight or obese; *(23.4% in Walsall)*
 - In year 6, one in three (33.4%) of the children measured were either overweight or obese; *(36.3% in Walsall)*
 - The percentage of obese children in Year 6 (19.0%) was more than double that of Reception year children (9.4%);
- 3.7 In Walsall during the last 10 years there has been a significant reduction in the number of casualties from road traffic collisions for school journeys and road users in general. It is important that this trend continues and the encouragement of sustainable travel, especially cycling, does not result in an increase in casualty levels.
- 3.8 Improving well being through physical activity and encouraging the use of sustainable transport (especially walking and cycling) are high on political and public health agendas, globally, nationally and locally. It is now commonly accepted that the activity of walking or cycling to school is a major factor in promoting good physical health and is supported by the Coalition Government's commitment to 'support sustainable travel initiatives, including the promotion of cycling and walking, and will encourage joint working between bus operators and local authorities'.
- 3.9 Although significant success that has been achieved locally in terms of increasing the level of Sustainable Travel for school based journeys, it is imperative that the work continues. By strengthening the links across Children's Services, Engineering & Transportation, Public Health and Leisure Services it is hoped to continue to roll out the AStars Active Travel programme across all schools in the borough to help achieve the following:
- Strengthening links with schools
 - Reduced levels of congestion which in turn relieves the pressure of time on parents;
 - The local area around the school becoming a visibly safer place for cyclists/walkers;
 - Reduced carbon emissions for individuals and the school;
 - Promote good relations between the school and the local community;

- Pupils are more alert than if they travel by car and have a greater aptitude for learning;
 - Reduction in fuel costs.
- 3.10 Sustainable school travel plays an important role and makes significant contributions towards advancing outcomes for children, young people and their families, not only via the development of this Strategy but by contributing to priorities of Walsall's Children and Young People's Plan.
- 3.11 The school run is an important issue to tackle as it has a direct impact on pollution and congestion, which in turn damages our environment, economy and health. It also links strongly to childhood obesity and the associated health complications that may affect a child in later life. The AStars project will be the focus of our engagement with each school and encompasses the range of sustainable travel and road safety initiatives supported by the school travel team.
- 3.12 The new Strategy, which will be deposited in each political group room, has been written based on the experience gained over the past decade and seeks to combine several work streams with the following vision:
- To actively promote and encourage sustainable school travel choices amongst pupils, parents, staff and the wider community, by providing training and a safer environment where walking & cycling in Walsall are the norm and contribute towards a more active lifestyle.*
- 3.13 The key element of the Strategy is the development of the Active Sustainable Travel & Road Safety Programme (AStars). AStars was initially developed in 2009 in partnership with Public Health targeting schools suffering from high levels of childhood obesity and low levels of walking & cycling in areas of high deprivation. Since its inception the project has been reviewed by the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel and was recognised as best practice to be rolled out across all schools in Walsall.
- 3.14 Through the work undertaken by the Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel a number of head teachers were approached to take part in the review. The Head Teacher of Short Heath Primary School supported the delivery of AStars as they had witnessed a real impact in the health of children and this was echoed by the Head Teacher of Delves Infants and Nursery School. This view was reflected in the final report presented to Cabinet in the report (Agenda 15a) dated 8 June 2011.
- 3.15 Over the life of the Strategy the AStars project will seek to engage all Primary and Secondary schools and combine sustainable travel and road safety education whilst encouraging community cohesion through the engagement and education of parents and the wider family. Continuing to work with existing and new partners, further initiatives will be developed to meet the requirements of participants primarily to address health and travel issues faced by them and their families along with school staff.
- 3.16 Regular network meetings involving school champions and sheriff meetings involving children representing each school form a key aspect in improving and creating new initiatives. This ensures that the programme remains relevant and

manageable in terms of delivery for all participating schools. It also presents the opportunity to share best practice and supports local ownership.

- 3.17 It is essential to the management of the AStars programme that controls are placed on all participants. Therefore, as part of the registration process to join the AStars programme, an agreement stipulating the expectations on all parties is communicated to and signed off by the responsible Council Officer, Head Teacher and Chair of Governors. To support this it is fundamental in encouraging schools to participate in the AStars programme that they receive preferential treatment in respect of the services that the council offers. For example, this includes prioritising requests for parking enforcement, road safety education and other wider services. Procedures will be developed to manage this and will be issued as part of the promotion of the programme.
- 3.18 A dedicated website is currently being developed, where resources and information will be shared directly with schools to improve communication. It will be the future focus of the project and will signpost potential users, including school staff and parents, to other programmes to support sustainable travel and road safety. Schools will be able to buy into the project at three different levels, each having increasing levels of requirements and benefits.
- 3.19 Further details of the specific initiatives offered as part of the AStars programme can be found in Section 6 of the Strategy and include:
- Walking initiatives, such as walking buses and park and stride
 - Cycling initiatives, such as bikeability training and cycle routes to school
 - Road safety education
 - Targeted parking enforcement

4. Council priorities

- 4.1 The Sustainable Mode of Travel Strategy forms a supporting strategy to the Children & Young People's Plan as it contributes to a variety of work programmes to improve children's health & well-being, especially with regard to childhood obesity. Through this approach it reflects the Marmot objective 'give every child the best start in life' in the Council's Corporate Plan and links to the Sustainable Community Strategy.
- 4.2 Underpinning these strategies and the work of the Walsall Children's partnership is the promotion of the safety and welfare of children and young people. This means implementing sound safeguarding practices and procedures as appropriate and always adhering to the Walsall Safeguarding Children's Board Child Protection Procedures.
- 4.3 From a regional perspective the Strategy relates directly to three key targets in the West Midlands Local Transport Plan 3 (2011-2026); Travel to School, Active Travel and Road Casualties and will also indirectly contribute to two other targets, CO₂ from Transport & Air Quality.
- 4.4 Walsall Transport Strategy (2010-2014) has a number of key areas that the Council has committed to with regard to the Strategy. For Transport & Health the aim is to build on existing partnership arrangements such as the AStars Active

Sustainable Travel and Road Safety programme and its expansion to all schools in the borough. Specific measures specified in the Strategy include pedestrian training in schools, Bikeability, the promotion of safer routes to schools and targeted parking enforcement.

5. Risk management

- 5.1 The Department for Transport, in conjunction with the Department for Education, monitors the publication of Sustainable Mode of Travel strategies as part of the ongoing assessment of local authorities' performance. Once approved, the Strategy will be published on the Council's website.
- 5.2 As recommended in Agenda 15a Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel, Cabinet report dated 8 June 2011, the roll out of the AStars programme will need to form part of a Walsall Healthy Schools Award standard. Failure to achieve this may lead to problems in uptake and roll out of the programme. Ongoing work within Children's Services will link with AStars to offset this risk.
- 5.3 Section 8 of the Strategy contains a detailed risk assessment identifying ownership and actions relating to the implementation of the Strategy.

6. Financial implications

- 6.1 In April 2011, the Department for Education announced funding of £38 million and £47 million for 2011-12 and 2012-13 to further support local authorities to help children from low-income families to attend schools further from home than the statutory walking distances and the statutory duty to promote sustainable school travel and produce a Sustainable Mode of Travel Strategy.
- 6.2 Funding to deliver this is through the Local Services Support Grant under section 31 of the Local Government Act 2003. Walsall's allocation of Extended Rights and General Duty to promote sustainable travel was:
- | | |
|-----------|---------|
| 2011/2012 | £30,504 |
| 2012/2013 | £37,846 |
- 6.3 From these funds Children's Services currently transfers £16,000 per annum to Engineering & Transportation to manage the responsibility of producing and implementing the Strategy to comply with the duty.
- 6.4 Arrangements to manage the statutory duty post March 2013 is under consideration. However, it is anticipated that funding will need to continue to ensure the ongoing implementation of the Strategy and the roll out of the AStars programme.

7. Legal implications

- 7.1 Members should be aware that this area of work covers the responsibility to manage and deliver a number of statutory duties as part of the Local Education Authority and Highway Authority functions.
- 7.2 There is a general duty placed on local authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to and from school as required by the Education Act 1996 (as amended by the Children and Inspections Act 2006).
- 7.3 The Children Act 2004 placed a duty on local authorities and their partners (including the police, health service providers and the youth justice system) to co-operate in promoting the wellbeing of children and young people and to make arrangements to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. In support of this, the Strategy has been developed as a supporting strategy to contribute towards the delivery of Walsall's Children's & Young People's Plan 2012-2015.
- 7.4 Section 39 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 confirms the powers of the Secretary of State and local authorities to provide road safety information, training and the preparation and implementation of appropriate road safety programmes.
- 7.5 The Transport Act 2000 Section 108 further consolidates these duties ensuring that a Local Authority must develop policies for the promotion and encouragement of safe, integrated, efficient and economic transport facilities and services to, from and within their area.

8. Property implications

There are no property implications contained in this report.

9. Staffing implications

- 9.1 In the delivery of the Strategy there is an emphasis to empower school based staff to implement the AStars programme minimising the number of direct dedicated staff required to manage the project.
- 9.2 Despite this there is a requirement for a small nucleus of staff located within the Road Safety & Sustainable Travel team to be retained to manage, provide support and further develop the AStars programme.

10. Equality implications

- 10.1 In developing a programme which complements other approaches to target and promote increased physical activity, related health issues can be positively addressed to challenge health inequalities across the borough.

- 10.2 Road Safety and Sustainable Travel programmes are delivered for the benefit of all sections of the community as road accidents are not discriminatory. In addition, positive action is also undertaken to assist specific sections of the community where an identifiable need can be quantified.
- 10.3 The development of Sustainable Mode of Travel Strategy specifically through the AStars programme will deliver benefits of all sections of the community through improving the local environment in terms of pollution, congestion and parking issues. Furthermore, the development of improved transport corridors through sustainable travel initiatives supports the integration of all sectors of the community while improving social inclusion and community cohesion.

11. Consultation

- 11.1 As part of the development of the Strategy, extensive internal consultation has been undertaken with comments received from the following areas: Children's Services, Serco, Planning, Regeneration, Engineering & Transportation, and Leisure Services.
- 11.2 NHS Walsall Public Health department has provided extensive comments on the content of the Strategy and continue to form a key partner in the ongoing development and roll out of the AStars programme.
- 11.3 Through the Walsall Road Safety Forum a number of partners have been consulted including West Midlands Police, West Midlands Fire Service, and Walsall College.

Background papers

Children & Young People's Plan April 2012 – March 2015

Draft Sustainable Mode of Travel Strategy April 2012 – March 2015

Agenda 15a Children's and Young People Scrutiny and Performance Panel Cabinet report 8 June 2011

Sustainable Mode of Travel Strategy April 2008 – March 2012

Author

John Charles

Team Leader Road Safety & Sustainable Travel

☎ 654674

✉ charlesj@walsall.gov.uk

Jamie Morris
Executive Director



12 October 2012

Councillor Ansell
Portfolio Holder



12 October 2012



Rose Collinson
Executive Director
15 October 2012



Councillor R Andrew
Portfolio Holder
15 October 2012