

West Sussex County Council – Written Questions

Officer replies to questions submitted under Standing Order 2.40 as part of the preparation for the County Council meeting on 1 April

1. Written question from **Cllr Sharp** for reply by **Assistant Director (Highways, Transport and Planning)**

Question

- (a) How many West Sussex schools have up-to-date Travel Plans and regularly send in travel data on travel mode?
- (b) Has there been any evaluation into the impact of incorporating the Safer Routes to School team within Local Transport Improvement Programme and the associated reduction in dedicated staff supporting schools?
- (c) Have we monitored schools, parents, young people or officers to investigate their views?
- (d) Have we evaluated the impact on the delivery of up-to-date Travel Plans and collection of travel data?
- (e) How could this work be done in a more effective and supported way?
- (f) Given that Parish 106/CIL schemes are sometimes tied in with effective engagement with schools, what impediments are there to reinstating a more adequately resourced service?

Answer

- (a) School Travel Plans (STPs) are primarily a tool for schools rather than Highways and Transport (H&T). There is no statutory requirement on either the school or H&T to produce a STP. As a result, the County Council does not know how many schools have up-to-date Travel Plans because they do not advise their status. Schools do not routinely send in travel data.

The provision of dedicated staff resources to support school travel planning and provide behavioural change education/training issues for schools ceased around 10 years ago. These roles were combined with the Local Transport Improvement Programme (LTIP) Team and their primary function changed from School Travel Advisor to LTIP Project Support Officer. There is a limited resource to support Road Safety Education Training and Publicity programmes. Consequently, officers do not work directly with schools to ensure their travel plans are up-to-date, but where officers are considering a particular traffic management problem associated with a school, they will ask for their travel plan. This should include mode of travel survey results, records of near misses and suggestions for measures that help to encourage active travel; improve safety; offer health and/or environmental benefits. Schools are also encouraged to publish their travel plan on their school website.

Sustainable accessibility to schools and improvements that address safety and active travel now forms part of the County Council's approach within LTIP and focuses on capital improvements. The School Keep Clear (SKC) Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) programme saw the majority of markings backed by enforceable restrictions which gives school communities the ability to seek enforcement support for inconsiderate and illegal parking behaviours. The County Council encourages schools to maintain and self-manage a Travel Plan to capture evidence and data that can help officers, when approached by the school, to identify potential improvements to address issues around safety; sustainable travel accessibility; reducing congestion; and improving access and management of the highway network.

- (b) No, albeit the LTIP and Road Safety teams do retain expertise to address school gate-related issues when they are prioritised. H&T seeks to prioritise capital improvements where the outcomes best meet the corporate strategic objectives. The LTIP team considers each scheme on its own merits against WSCC priorities, value for money, feasibility etc. This process helps officers to come to a decision. Each improvement is scored against set criteria and this allows the County Council to compare the merits of different schemes against each other. Every year a programme of the highest scoring schemes is recommended to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport for delivery for a given level of resources and funding.

The County Council has in the region of £3.7m p.a. to deliver all improvement works across West Sussex. There are many schemes and the demand for such work far outstrips both resourcing and funding. The result is that delivery is prioritised via the LTIP, a member-approved process. LTIP schemes are made up of the following scheme types:

- Cycling
- Walking
- Passenger transport
- Safety (road casualty reduction)
- Schools access
- General access/junction improvements
- Countryside access (Public Rights of Way/Bridleway) and countryside management – including footway bridges/structures
- Traffic Management

The County Council also funds community-led schemes and pedestrian crossings etc. from this one funding source. Very often developer contributions are added to increase the total amount available. However, these can only be used for those schemes/types of work which help to mitigate for the development in line with the agreement.

- (c) Not formally. As described above, there are no longer dedicated staff resources to support school travel planning or traditional behavioural change education/training issues for schools (Safe Routes To School 'soft' measures). Anecdotally, in the years before Covid-19, the level of concern from schools/parents in respect of school gate issues remained fairly static without significant concerns raised about reduced support levels. In the last six months there does seem to be a little more concern raised by schools and local communities about the school gate. This may be due to more parents choosing

to drive following the pandemic. Schools are encouraged to raise concerns in relation to managing the highway network with their local Area Highway Manager in the first instance.

- (d) No, for reasons described above.
- (e) The County Council is using Department for Transport Capability Fund to employ Living Streets to work directly with 20 schools over the next year on supporting sustainable/active home to school travel. This will cost in the region of £80,000 per year. Should this funding continue with successful bids into the Active Travel Fund, the County Council could consider an expansion of this programme and/or additional staff to work more directly with schools.

Beyond that and in the absence of a dedicated officer resource to oversee this work, schools are urged to review, maintain and manage their travel plans to help evidence requests for capital infrastructure improvements that better manage the journey to and from school. Gathering regular mode of travel data from pupils and school staff is an important process to inform LTIP priorities. In addition, schools can consider establishing a road safety plan and introduce engagement initiatives that encourage active travel for their children and families.

- (f) Section 106 and CIL (Community Infrastructure Levy) funds are not necessarily tied in with school engagement, the objective of these funds is to make them available to County Council highways/public rights of way and infrastructure teams to deliver improvements based on County Council strategic goals and published priorities. Therefore using such funding to reinstate specific School Travel Advisor resource would likely not be appropriate use of funding. Current strategic priorities focus on active travel and safety initiatives.