

Report to Communities, Highways and Environment Scrutiny Committee

18 November 2022

West Sussex Speed Limit Policy Review

Report by Assistant Director (Highways, Transport and Planning)

Electoral division(s): All

Summary

An Executive Task and Finish Group (TFG) on behalf of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport has discussed and considered a revision of the speed limit policy for West Sussex. The aim of the revision is to support recent changes made to the Highway Code, assist in the national drive for increased levels of active travel and to help to improve road safety for vulnerable road users. The proposed amendments are also in support of the West Sussex Transport Plan and West Sussex Road Safety Framework.

Focus for Scrutiny

Members are asked to:

1. consider the implications of the changes to the speed limit policy in particular as it relates to supporting vulnerable road users.
 2. provide feedback to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport and the Traffic Management and Road User Safety TFG.
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Proposal

1 Background and context

- 1.1 A key objective of the Council's Plan is to keep people safe from vulnerable situations. In support of this, the West Sussex Transport Plan (WSTP) vision includes provision for providing a safer, cleaner more accessible transport network through encouraging active travel and access to shared transport. The WSTP is supported by various strategies including the West Sussex Road Safety Framework. One of the actions in the WSTP is to review the speed limit policy in support of these ambitions.
- 1.2 Whilst the overriding responsibility for speed setting remains with drivers, managing average traffic speeds via speed limits are an action that the

Council can take to contribute to the overall approach to improve road safety and help to reduce Killed and Serious Injury (KSI) collisions.

- 1.3 Speed enforcement is carried out by Sussex Police via police officers working as part of the Sussex Safer Roads Partnership (SSRP) of which WSCC is a partner. Much of the enforcement is via fixed and mobile speed cameras at pre-approved sites. Many offenders are offered a nationally agreed and accredited training course as an alternative to a fine and points. Such courses are delivered by West Sussex County Council (WSCC) for the whole of Sussex. The County Council also contributes to wider traffic enforcement to improve safety for example parking control or enforcement of works on the highway.
- 1.4 The current West Sussex Speed Limit policy (Appendix 1) which supports the West Sussex Road Safety Framework was last formally reviewed and amended in 2010/11. To assist in the delivery of the WSTP, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport agreed to review both the Road Safety Framework and Speed Limit Policy. A Traffic Management and Road User Safety Executive Task and Finish Group (TFG) of five cross-party Members was convened and identified that the speed limit policy was the first element to review. The outcome of their deliberations has resulted in proposed revisions to the Speed Limit Policy.

2 Proposal details

- 2.1 The draft revised policy is attached as Appendix 2. This new approach remains based on the fundamental principles described in national guidance on setting local speed limits [Circular Roads 1/13](#) but intends to allow for greater flexibility. National guidance already allows for consideration of road user mix on speed limit setting. The revised policy expands on this principle via adoption of a functional hierarchy as a key determinant in place of the development frontage (i.e. the extent to which there are properties located at the side of the road) approach in the County Council's existing policy.
- 2.2 Functional hierarchy is defined as the way in which the route is used by a mix of motorised traffic and vulnerable road users (VRUs). VRUs are classified as pedestrians, cyclists, and equestrians. Using functional hierarchy as a means to determine a speed limit supports recent changes to the highway code which places a greater emphasis on vulnerable road users.
- 2.3 In addition, the revised policy relaxes the use of average speed measurements in the determination of new speed limits. For example, the maximum existing average traffic speed suitable for a 30mph speed limit before additional engineering measures are considered increases from 33mph to 35mph.
- 2.4 The County Council is one of a number of highway authorities that have either amended their approach to speed limit setting or are in the process of doing so. Discussions with both Surrey and Oxfordshire County Councils allows learning from their experience albeit it may be 3-5 years before any changes to KSIs are known. Both have adopted a pro-active implementation backed by additional funding and whilst all changes to the road environment promote various views, their experience is, on balance, positive. It should be noted that the County Council's approach differs on various elements, for

example the proposed delivery mechanism is through the existing Community Highway Scheme process and therefore requires no new funding or resource.

- 2.4 Existing traffic speeds will still be taken into consideration when assessing roads for a lower speed limit to guide whether additional speed reduction measures need to be installed. The maximum average speed traffic can travel at within each speed limit band has been revised to allow more speed limits to be installed without the need for additional measures, which can often be costly to install and maintain.
- 2.5 Poorly observed speed limits do not assist in improving matters for vulnerable road users. The policy therefore retains the need to consider additional measures in support of such users where compliance with a proposed limit is of concern. The revised policy includes guidance on the types of measures that might be installed.
- 2.6 The policy explains the typical speed limits that would be appropriate for the functional use of the route, providing for the use of lower speed limits where people live, where VRUs are more prevalent and where there is greater risk of collisions. In doing so it also provides opportunity to consider lower speed limits on rural routes where the need is identified either due to functional hierarchy or to address an identified road safety concern.
- 2.7 Speed limits will be assessed against these criteria as and when new requests are made and will not be applied retrospectively.
- 2.8 A summary of the revisions is shown in Appendix 3.

3 Other options considered (and reasons for not proposing)

- 3.1 There was an option to leave the current speed limit policy unchanged, but it is considered this no longer adequately assists in meeting aspirations of the WSTP or to deliver a Safe System approach to road safety.
- 3.2 The option to introduce a countywide review of all existing speed limits was considered but rejected as it would be extremely costly and likely to take many years to be completed.

4 Consultation, engagement and advice

- 4.1 The proposals have been discussed and agreed by the Executive TFG Members and discussed with the South Downs National Park Authority.
- 4.2 A meeting was also held between the Leader, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport, the Chief Constable and the Police and Crime Commissioner. It is understood that Sussex Police do not have additional capacity to enforce significant numbers of new and / or lower speed limits.
- 4.3 There is no statutory requirement to undertake public consultation; for specific speed limit proposals, a statutory public consultation is built into the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) process as is the case for all specific traffic management proposals. There was public consultation on the WSTP which included the plans for revising the speed limit policy and the change is

essentially a technical one affecting how the County Council manages a speed limit change.

5 Finance

- 5.1 There are no immediate financial implications associated with revising this policy. Each speed limit request will be dealt with via the Community Highway Scheme and Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) process, as is currently the case. This process allows for a fixed number of TROs each year which is funded via the Integrated Transport Block. Should there be additional significant pressure to reduce many speed limits in line with the new policy it may be necessary to review resources required to process the TROs.
- 5.2 Parish/town councils may wish to utilise funds, including S106/Community Infrastructure Levy, to make a contribution towards costs.
- 5.3 The effect of the proposal:

(a) How the cost represents good value

Current figures indicate the cost of a fatal collision is £2,120,669 and a serious collision is £246,109. These costs fall on a range of stakeholders including the emergency services, rather than directly on the County Council. Reducing the number and/or severity of road traffic collisions therefore also represents value for money to the wider community.

(b) Future savings/efficiencies being delivered

This proposal has no impact on future savings or efficiencies being delivered.

(c) Human Resources, IT and Assets Impact

This proposal has no impact on human resources, IT or assets

6 Risk implications and mitigations

Risk	Mitigating Action (in place or planned)
Increased requests for community led TROs to review speed limits	More resource and a programme to deliver community TROs may need to be considered.
Lack of enforcement resource	Sussex Police is the enforcement authority for speed limits and this is undertaken with support of the Sussex Safer Roads Partnership (of which WSCC is a Partner). SSRP contributes to the identification and delivery of enforcement opportunities. Speed reduction measures may need to be considered and provided as part of the implementation of individual speed limits.
Reputation of the County Council if Police advice not followed.	All new speed limit requests include statutory consultation with Sussex Police which will include the opportunity to discuss speed reduction measures as part of the proposals.

7 Policy alignment and compliance

- 7.1 Traffic travelling at lower speed limits may reduce pollution and encourage more active travel contributing to climate change and improved public health. There will also be benefits to vulnerable road users, particularly those with mobility problems where traffic speeds can be reduced.
- 7.2 Speed limits require the making of a Traffic Regulation Order, which is subject to separate governance and legal processes, including periods of public consultation. Every speed limit reduction would therefore be subject to its own evaluation against Council policy and overarching legal responsibilities.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Current West Sussex Speed Limit Policy

Appendix 2 – Draft West Sussex Speed Limit Policy

Appendix 3 – Comparison between existing and revised Policy

Background papers

None