

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

18 July 2024

Final Report of the Speed Limit Assessment Task Group

Purpose of the report

1. To present the findings and recommendations of the Speed Limit Assessment Task Group for endorsement by the Select Committee and referral to the Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding for response.

Background

2. At the Environment Select Committee (ESC) on 11 January 2024 it was agreed to create a task group to look at Wiltshire Council's speed limit assessment process. This issue had previously been referred to the select committee by the Overview & Scrutiny Management Committee (OSMC) on [15 November 2023](#).
3. Traffic authorities, in this instance Wiltshire Council, can set local speed limits in situations where local needs and conditions suggest a speed limit which is lower than the national speed limit. To determine whether a change is appropriate an independent speed limit assessment is undertaken. Most assessments recommend some form of change either to the speed limit or through the implementation of other safety measures. However, concerns have been raised by members and local communities about how assessments interpret national guidance and the use and analysis of the evidence.
4. The aim of the task group was to produce a report with recommendations that help support a speed limit assessment system that has public confidence and is operated in a consistent and transparent manner.

Terms of reference

5. The following terms of reference for the task group were endorsed by the Environment Select Committee on 20 March 2024:
 - a) To support a review of the Speed Limit Assessment process.
 - b) To review the current processes.
 - c) To consider the following areas and to make recommendations on how:
 - Speed limit assessments can support a safe system approach i.e., safe vehicle, road use, speeds, roads, and post-crash response.
 - Speed limit assessments can help develop public confidence in road safety measures.

- Relevant evidence and guidance are used during a speed limit assessment.
- Local needs and conditions are examined during an assessment.
- Community views and feedback, including those of relevant local services e.g., police, are considered and how these are weighted and seen to be taken into account with other relevant criteria.
- Community impacts are considered.
- Lessons can be applied from the current pilot programmes.
- Final decisions are reported to local communities.

d) To make recommendations to the Environment Select Committee by 18 July 2024.

Membership

6. The task group comprised the following membership:

Cllr Helen Belcher OBE
 Cllr Johnny Kidney
 Cllr Jonathon Seed (Chairman)
 Cllr Martin Smith

Cllr Derek Walters
 Cllr Bridget Wayman

Methodology

7. The task group received evidence from the following witnesses:

Cllr Caroline Thomas (former Cabinet Member for Transport Street Scene & Flooding)
Cllr Nick Holder (Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene & Flooding)
Parvis Khansari (Corporate Director – Place)
Sam Howell (Director – Highways & Transport)
Dave Thomas (Head of Highways Asset Management & Commissioning)

Kevin Bishop (Group Engineer, AtkinsRéalis)
Emily Jones (Framework Manager, AtkinsRéalis)
Cllr Ross Henning (Chairman, Chippenham LHFIG)
Cllr Ruth Hopkinson (Chairman, Corsham LHFIG)
Cllr Ashley O’Neill (Chairman, Calne LHFIG)
Cllr Graham Wright (Chairman, Stonehenge LHFIG)
Liz Watts, Monkton Farleigh

8. Additional information was provided by:

Kirsty Rose, Principal Engineer Manager
Gareth Rogers, Traffic Engineering Manager

9. The task group met seven times, as demonstrated in the following table:

Date (2024)	Item	Details
1 March	Scoping meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agreed terms of reference • Background and context to assessments • Current process • Changes to assessments • Emerging issues
26 March	Department of Transport (DfT) guidance and speed limit assessments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes to DfT guidance (revised 17 March 2024) • Examples of speed assessment reports • List of speed limit reviews in the last 18 months
20 May	AtkinsRéalis/Senior Highways Officers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of independent external consultants • The technical assessment process
23 May	Local Highways & Footway Infrastructure Groups (LHFIG)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Experience of Local Highway & Footway Improvement Group (LHFIG) of speed assessments
11 June	Draft recommendations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Initial draft recommendations
20 June	Monkton Farleigh speed assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Challenging a speed assessment
1 July	Final report draft meeting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Approve the final report and recommendations

10. Alongside receiving evidence from the witnesses detailed above, the task group also considered other sources of evidence (see the 'Evidence' section of this report)

11. The task group's preliminary findings and recommendations have been shared with the Executive and witnesses.

Who sets speed limits?

12. The Department for Transport Circular, [Setting Local Speed Limits](#) (DfT March 2024), sets out guidance as a basis for assessments of local speed limits. Speed limits should be evidence-led and self-explaining and seek to reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel. Speed limits should be seen by drivers as the maximum rather than a target speed.

13. The overall speed limit framework, including the setting of national limits for different road types, is the responsibility of the government. The three national speed limits in England are:
 - the 30mph speed limit on roads with street lighting (sometimes referred to as restricted roads);
 - the national speed limit of 60mph on single carriageway roads;
 - the national speed limit of 70mph on dual carriageways and motorways.
14. These national limits are not, however, appropriate for all roads. Local traffic authorities can set local speed limits in situations where local needs and conditions suggest a speed limit that is different from the relevant national speed limit.
15. The right speed limits should be used in the right places.
16. Speed limits are only one element of speed management. Local speed limits are not set in isolation and are part of a package with other speed management measures including:
 - engineering and road geometry that respect the needs of all road users and raise the driver's awareness of their environment,
 - education,
 - driver information,
 - training and publicity.

What is the difference between a speed survey and a speed limit assessment?

17. Traffic surveys use equipment placed on carriageways which collects data 24 hours per day over a seven-day period on the speed and volumes of vehicles.
18. A speed limit assessment is an evidence-based review of a speed limit on a specific section of road to determine the appropriate maximum limit. It considers collision data, local evidence, the road environment, and an assessment of speed data.

What is the speed assessment process?

19. Speed limit assessments can be requested by members of the public via their town or parish council using a [Highways Improvement Request Form](#) on Wiltshire Council's website. Requests are then considered by the relevant [Local Highways & Footways Improvement Group](#) (LHFIG) in conjunction with Highways officers and then referred to one of Wiltshire's eighteen [Area Boards](#) for approval. Requests are prioritised.
20. Assessments can also be undertaken in response to new developments such as housing or commercial sites.
21. Part of the process is an independent speed assessment conducted by AtkinsRéalis, see below. The assessment includes a costing of any recommended actions.

22. The outcome of that assessment is discussed with Highways Officers. The final report is then shared with the LHFIG. Final approval for a speed limit change is given by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene & Flooding. Speed reductions require a [Traffic Regulation Order](#) (TRO); a process that can take several months to complete.
23. A speed assessment costs £3,100 (2024/25), with costs covered either by the LHFIG or the town or parish and sometimes a combination of both.

Evidence

24. The task group drew upon the following evidence when developing its conclusions and recommendations.

Speed limit guidance

25. In January 2013 the Department of Transport published a circular [Setting Local Speed Limits](#) (circular 01/2013) which assists local traffic authorities in setting local speed limits.
26. In March 2024 this guidance was revised to align with the Department for Transport's [Plan for Drivers](#) (October 2023). This updates some of the evidence used in the guidance but also emphasises the need to balance the benefits with the disadvantages of changing a speed limit.
27. The updated guidance helps ensure appropriate and consistent speed limits, which contribute to:
 - reducing the number of road deaths, as well as casualties overall;
 - tackling pedestrian and cyclist casualties in towns and cities;
 - improving the safety on rural roads; and
 - reducing variations in safety from area to area and road to road.
28. [Village speed limits](#) had separate guidance until the introduction of [Setting Local Speed Limits](#) in 2013. The council also has its own guidance on [20mph limits and zones](#).

Speed limit assessment summary data

29. The task group was provided with a list of 49 speed limit assessments undertaken or in progress between 2022/2024. Of the 36 completed, 25 led to some form of action being recommended to address issues identified; this was not always a speed reduction.

Speed limit assessment reports

30. Speed limit assessments are now reported using a standard template. The task group saw examples of completed reports relating to:
 - A420 Bumpers Farm, Chippenham to county boundary
 - B30389 Teffont

- B4039 Burton
- A30 Firsdown (see below)
- Orcheston
- East Chisenbury & Coombe
- Bradford on Avon, Ashley Road
- Bratton Road, West Ashton
- Manor Hill, Purton
- Upper Seagry
- Barrow Green/Hill Rise, Chippenham
- Bradford Road, Atworth
- Bratton Village

31. Reports can include the following sections:

- Introduction and background
- Data collection
- Site observations
- Journey time data
- Traffic speeds and volumes
- Collision data
- Local concerns
- Analysis
- Recommendations and costs.

32. The task group also reviewed the following assessments, which were undertaken before the introduction of the template (pre-2021):

- Great Durnford
- Monkton Farleigh
- B4040 Easton Grey
- Mere
- Water Eaton
- B3083 Berwick St James
- A345 Netheravon
- Horton Road, Devizes
- Frome Road, Southwick
- Park Lane, Corsham
- Leafy Lane, Box
- Lacock

33. Also considered was an example of how a speed assessment is initiated. This was an email to AtkinsRéalis with supporting information attached, in this specific case, a pedestrian safety report from the parish council.

34. Assessments contain a number of different pieces of information, see below.

Speed limit assessment – speed data

35. The task group saw two examples of spreadsheets used to analyse speed data during a speed assessment on the A30 at Firsdown and at Monkton Farleigh. The

spreadsheet is an adaptation of the DfT [Local Speed Limit Schemes: Appraisal Tool](#).

36. This calculates the:

- average annual daily traffic (AADT) i.e., the number of vehicles passing a given point.
- average section time calculator i.e., the average time a vehicle travels between two points.
- mean speed i.e., speed between the two given points as the total sum of values in the sample divided by the number of values in the sample.

Speed limit assessment – road environment

37. Many of the assessment reports refer to the road layout with reference to houses, bends, hills, depressions, and the type of road and whether it narrows or widens. This information is given significant weight particularly its perceived impact upon driver behaviour.

Speed limit assessment – other road user information

38. Assessment before the introduction of a standardised report often did not include any information except collision data, numbers of road vehicles and speed data with each given a three to four sentence assessment.

39. The DfT guidance *Setting Local Speed Limits* states the following, that:

'....different road users perceive risks and appropriate speeds differently, and drivers and riders of motor vehicles often do not have the same perception of the hazards of speed as do people on foot, on bicycles or on horseback. Fear of traffic can affect people's quality of life and the needs of vulnerable road users must be fully taken into account to encourage these modes of travel and improve their safety. Speed management strategies should seek to protect local community life.'
(DfT guidance *Setting Local Speed Limits* para 33)

40. Reports after the introduction of a report template are more comprehensive and often consider other road users, though not always. However, it is not clear how this information is gathered, what that information looks like or how it is analysed.

Speed limit assessment – collision data

41. Statistics for road traffic collisions capture a collision when at least one person is injured, and which is then reported to the police. Collision data is used to establish the number of collisions in the speed assessment area over a six-year period. The use of personal injury collisions is universal across the United Kingdom, not only in the assessment of speed limits but also in identifying schemes to improve highway safety. Damage only and 'unrecorded' incidents are not assessed.

42. The DfT guidance *Setting Local Speed Limits* states the following, that:

A study of types of crashes, their severity, causes and frequency, together with a survey of traffic speeds, should indicate whether an existing speed limit is appropriate for the type of road and mix of use by different groups of road users, including the presence or potential presence of vulnerable road users (including people walking, cycling or riding horses or on motorbikes), or whether it needs to be changed. Residents may also express their concerns or desire for a lower speed limit and these comments should be considered. ((DfT guidance Setting Local Speed Limits para 24)

43. The task group did not look at collision data in detail but concentrated upon what was collected and how and what it was used for.

A345 Netheravon speed trial

44. The task group saw evidence relating to a speed trial at Netheravon which followed an unsuccessful attempt to request a speed limit reduction. The trial involves using SIDs (Speed Indication Devices) which are temporary roadside vehicle activated signs which display speeds in real-time.
45. When placed along specific sections of the A345 some initial findings from the trial suggest it began to lower the speed of vehicles to around or below the target of 40mph.

Monkton Farleigh speed assessment

46. The task group heard evidence from Monkton Farleigh, where a speed assessment had been successfully challenged in 2020.
47. The discussion covered the collection and use of local information, engagement with AtkinsRéalis, Highways officers and the parish council. The Department for Transport guidance was discussed, specifically the interpretation of local information.
48. The assessment was challenged using the technical data i.e., collision data, average speeds, number of vehicles included in the report. The importance of seeing the raw data was stressed as this allowed a challenge focusing upon how robust this specific assessment process had been i.e., the sections identified, the distances between measured points, the counting of traffic flows.
49. Though not used at Monkton Farleigh the perceived limitations when assessing vehicle speed limits using the [Solomon curve](#) and the 85th percentile were discussed. The 85th percentile speed is the speed at or below which 85% of the drivers perceive it to be an appropriate speed for the environment.
50. Following this specific assessment and an internal review, changes were made to the wider process, notably the adoption of a new reporting template.

Conclusions

51. Speed limit assessments are important in creating a safe road environment. Local communities and all road users, not just car drivers, have strong opinions about the safety of the roads in their area. A balance must be struck between all those views, keeping people safe and the traffic flowing.
52. The task group suggests there are several steps to creating a process that is transparent and that can retain public confidence. These are:
 - Explain the policy and process.
 - Standardise the process.
 - Capture and use all the relevant evidence.
 - Publish the data with the recommendations.
 - Create a challenge process.
53. The guidance provided by the Department for Transport (DfT) is broadly framed and can be read in differing ways. It is left to local transport authorities as to how to apply it; how it is variously interpreted across the country is testament to that fact. Without a clear local policy statement from the council this can create the sense that speed limit assessments are applied inconsistently undermining confidence in the process. A policy statement should be developed and published. Speed limit assessment reports should also refer to the policy document and how the DfT guidance has been applied.
54. Local perception from the public and local elected members does not seem to be captured or reported in a systematic way. Understandably, technical speed information, such as traffic flows and average/mean speeds are given more weight than other information. How any balance between the hard data, collected on the roads, and the 'softer' local intelligence is achieved is not clear, but the DfT guidance states that both should be considered. The recent introduction of a standardised report structure has been an improvement in terms of consistency and clarity. However, not all reports seen by the task group include the section regarding '*Local concerns.*' This could leave the impression that they were not considered. This section should be mandatory for all reports, even where they report that no local concerns were received.
55. Local evidence is an element of a balanced process. However, there is currently no clear guidance as to what evidence is useful nor how it should be provided for the purposes of the assessment. The task group heard that where additional information was provided by the community, particularly photographs and surveys, then this could influence the outcome. A standardised process for obtaining local information should be developed to ensure that all admissible evidence is captured.
56. When hearing about the challenge to a speed assessment at Monkton Farleigh it was clear that access to all the technical data was crucial. This allowed residents to see how the data was analysed and how the recommendations were supported (or not) by the evidence. Some newer speed assessments reports state that '*the full survey data can be made available upon request.*' All survey data should be provided with each report in future.

57. Most speed assessments result in some form of action, though this is not always a speed reduction. However, there are potentially more cost-effective measures that could be investigated *before* a speed assessment is undertaken. The Netheravon trial, though still ongoing, seems to provide a template for more creative and effective approaches. Guidance about alternative options should be available to help underpin decisions made by LHFIGs.
58. A more transparent speed limit assessment process would lead to fewer assessments being questioned in future. There is currently no formal process for challenging a speed assessment report. This does not mean that assessments have not been successfully challenged in the past. What must be developed now is an open, consistent, and clear process for challenging an assessment outcome based upon the evidence.
59. The task group were concerned about a significant failure of the process and analysis in the Monkton Farleigh speed assessment conducted in 2020. More generally the use of the Solomon curve and the 85th percentile in assessing the impact of road speed has been called into question. The task group did not have time to look in depth at that issue but felt it needed to be mentioned in this report.
60. It was also not within the remit of the task group to look at the cost of speed limit assessments. It is an expensive process, particularly for parish councils. However, these recommendations will hopefully allow for clearer decision making and for assessments that demonstrate better value for money.
61. Changes have been made which have begun to improve the speed limit assessment process. The task group makes its recommendations in the light of those changes, to further improve the speed limit assessment system so that it holds public confidence and is operated in a consistent and transparent manner.

Proposal

62. To endorse the report of the Task Group and refer it to the Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene, and Flooding for response at the Committee's next meeting.

Recommendations

That the Cabinet Member for Highways, Street Scene & Flooding:

- 1. Develops a publicly available policy statement covering speed assessments, including:**
 - a) The purpose of speed assessments**
 - b) Alternatives to a full assessment**
 - c) How to initiate an assessment**
 - d) The criteria and guidance used to make an assessment**
 - e) The assessment process (data collection, analysis, feasibility, consultation, implementation, and monitoring)**
 - f) The decision-making procedure**

2. Provides guidance on the types of information to be submitted with a speed assessment request.
 3. Ensures that the 'Local concerns' section and an analysis of all DfT assessment criteria of the speed assessment report is always published with the final assessment reports and is completed fully.
 4. Provides the full traffic survey data with each speed assessment report.
 5. Issues guidance to LHFIGs regarding alternatives to undertaking a speed assessment.
 6. Creates an open, evidence-based appeals process for challenging speed assessment outcomes.
 7. Reports on progress with implementing the recommendations to the Environment Select Committee in January 2025.
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Appendices

None

Background documents

None