

CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT – CLLR PHILIP WHITEHEAD

HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SERVICE

OFFICER CONTACT: David Thomas 01225 713312 email: dave.thomas@wiltshire.gov.uk

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SPEED LIMITS OUTSIDE SCHOOLS IN WILTSHIRE

Purpose of Report

1. To set out the results of a review on the use of 20 mph restrictions outside of schools, including the use of non-formal options.

Relevance to the Council's Business Plan

2. The proposed TRO meets two priorities of the Council's Business Plan:
 - Outcome 2 – People in Wiltshire work together to solve problems locally and participate in decisions that affect them.
 - Outcome 6 – People are as protected from harm as possible and feel safe.

Background

3. In January 2004 the former Wiltshire County Council Cabinet ratified the policy agreed by the Regulatory Committee on 17 December 2003 for the introduction of speed restrictions outside Wiltshire schools as follows:
 - (1) *In the criteria based assessment for future Integrated Transport schemes in Wiltshire towns, a priority factor for traffic calming and consequential 20 mph zones would be areas that include a school with an effective and active School Travel Plan where there are roads that are likely to be used by significant numbers of children walking and cycling to and from school, and*
 - (2) *In rural areas all schools to have a 30 mph speed limit unless there are extenuating circumstances, the implementation of this to be considered in the 2004 Annual Speed Limit Review.*
4. This followed a thorough investigation by consultants commissioned by the County Council into the issues surrounding the installation of 20 mph zones outside schools. The purpose of the investigation was to provide robust evidence of the desirability or otherwise of installing such zones. Comparison was made with other authorities. It was concluded that considering the very large number of pedestrian movements into and out of schools each day in Wiltshire, child pedestrian casualties are an extremely rare event. There is no hard evidence to show such restrictions would make a contribution to safety since the majority of schools do not have a collision problem in the first place.
5. Resolution (1) above has been superseded by the Wiltshire Policy on 20 mph speed limits and zones introduced in 2013. Resolution (2) was complied with in 2004 and the majority of schools in Wiltshire subsequently have a 30 mph speed limit in place at their main entrance.
6. Given the time elapsed since 2004 and changes in national legislation relating to speed limits generally, it was considered that a review of the previous policy was appropriate.

Consultants Atkins and Council Officers have undertaken a review of practice in other locations across the country and contact has been made with a number of other local authorities adjoining Wiltshire to establish their current practises.

Main Considerations for the Council

Casualties

7. Wiltshire continues to have a very good child safety record. Each year a "child safety audit" is carried out when the details of all injury collisions involving children (under 16 years of age) are analysed. In 2014 there were 87 child casualties (1 fatal, 11 serious, 75 slight) on county roads. The highest numbers of child casualties are as car passengers (57%). One child pedestrian was injured outside a school (classified as slight) which represents 1% of all child casualties. The child KSI casualty rate of 117 per 100,000 head of child age population for county roads is much lower than the national figure of 177.
8. Considering the very large numbers of pedestrian movements into and out of schools each day across the county, child pedestrian casualties are an extremely rare event. Collision remedial measures are normally applied at those sites once it has been established that there is a continued issue and that the issue is likely to recur if action is not taken. Sites are not treated in anticipation of an incident happening as this would create an unsustainable burden on the authorities limited resources. It is important to accurately identify the collision contributory factors in order to apply the most appropriate remedial measures.

Types of Speed limit

9. Since 2004, the Department for Transport has published revised guidance on the setting of speed limits and in 2013 introduced the concept of variable and advisory limits. The guidance states:

"Traffic authorities have powers to introduce 20 mph speed limits that apply only at certain times of day. These variable limits may be particularly relevant where for example a school is located on a road that is not suitable for a full-time 20 mph zone or limit, for example a major through road. To indicate these limits, variable message signs are available (TSRGD, Regulation 58). To reduce costs and sign clutter, the Department will consider authorising the placing of a single variable message sign on the approaching traffic lane (rather than signs on both sides of the road) on a case by case basis.

The Secretary of State has provided a special authorisation for every English traffic authority to place an advisory part-time 20 mph limit sign, with flashing school warning lights. This can be a more cost-effective solution, where appropriate, and reduces the requirement for signing."
10. These variable and advisory limits are in addition to the more conventional 20 mph speed limits by order and 20 mph zones already available for use by traffic authorities.
11. In practise, the use of variable speed limits supported by the necessary Traffic Regulation Orders are not seen as a practical approach, as the control and setting of the variable message signs, the ongoing running costs and the processing of the associated traffic orders is anticipated to be cumbersome, expensive and resource intensive.
12. Advisory 20 mph speed limits, which operate when school Flashing Amber Lights show, are seen as a more cost-effective and flexible option. The signs only operate for a short time either side of the school start and finish times and they can be implemented at relatively low cost given that there is no need for a supporting Traffic Order. However,

the Department for Transport guidance sets out that the use of these signs may not be appropriate at every school. For instance, they cannot be positioned close to existing traffic signals or zebra crossings because of potential confusion to drivers.

Experience of other local authorities

13. A summary of findings with other local authorities is attached at **Appendix A**.
14. It is apparent that there is no uniformity within those authorities contacted on how they manage speed limits outside of schools. Some have invested widely in advisory 20 mph speed limits with a blanket role out across schools whilst others prefer to treat all cases on their individual merits. None of the Authorities contacted were able to provide conclusive or proven statistical evidence that overall vehicle speeds and casualty rates have reduced following the introduction of 20 mph restrictions, be they limits, zones, or advisory. This is in part to do with the generally low casualty numbers outside schools nationally.
15. The experience of Somerset County Council is worth noting as they initially introduced short lengths of full time permanent 20 mph limits but these were subsequently removed due to the high level of complaint received. Given this experience the use of short lengths of 20 mph limit is not considered appropriate and should not be considered further.

Comment / Discussion

16. Wiltshire Council, through its Road Safety Team, offers a comprehensive programme of road safety training for children of all ages. Full details of the training available can be found in the 'Road Casualties in Wiltshire and Swindon' report available on the Road Safety pages of the Wiltshire Council website. Historically, the view has been taken that providing children with road safety skills they can use throughout their lives and wherever they may be, is a better use of resource than only providing for activities directly outside the school gate. This is still considered to be the case and something that should continue to be encouraged by all schools.
17. As set out above, the use of area wide 20 mph restrictions (limits by order and / or zones) is already covered in the Wiltshire Policy on 20 mph speed limits and zones. This paper therefore needs to consider whether the use of advisory and variable 20 mph limits as standalone measures directly outside schools is desirable or not.
18. Whilst it has been proven statistically, both nationally and internationally, that 20 mph restrictions can lessen the risk to the public of being killed or seriously injured on the highway, this is only true if the actual driven speed of vehicles reduces to this level. Research undertaken as part of the authority's policy for 20 mph at all locations has shown that reductions to this level are extremely unlikely. It is fallacious to assume that 20 mph restrictions at schools are a blanket solution for all pedestrian concerns, and is unlikely to result in an efficient use of the authority's resources (see paragraph 28 below).
19. The use of advisory 20 mph limits is seen as preferable and a more cost-effective solution than using variable speed limits. This type of measure is also likely to be better received by motorists, who will recognise the need and purpose of the restriction during their times of operation, rather than permanent restrictions which can be considered draconian for large proportions of the day and year. Although there is no conclusive evidence to show that vehicle speeds are altered by the presence of advisory 20 mph limits there is a perception that drivers are more aware of the area through which they are passing and drive with more care.
20. All schools in Wiltshire are encouraged to have a School Travel Plan (STP). Having a STP enables the schools to identify the travel needs of pupils and enables them to bid to

the 'Taking Action on School Journeys' fund for measures both on the highway and within the school grounds that encourages both safe and sustainable travel choices. It is considered essential that the provision of 20 mph restrictions for school purposes be included as part of this process and that each application be treated on its own merits. A blanket approach to the use of advisory 20 mph restrictions outside schools is not recommended.

21. Whilst the criteria for permanent 20 mph restrictions requires existing average vehicle speeds to be in the order of 24 mph it is not considered necessary for this criteria to be used for advisory 20's.

Safeguarding Implications

22. There is no risk to the Council as a result of these proposals.

Public Health Implications

23. The resources available for collision reduction involving engineering measures are targeted at those locations with the worst collision problems. These locations are established from monitoring the Police collision database that records all reported collisions involving personal injury. There is a need to continue to use the available funds carefully in order to prevent further personal injury from occurring and by implication improve public health.

Corporate Procurement Implications

24. There are none with this proposal.

Environmental and Climate Change Considerations

25. There are none with this proposal.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

26. Successful 20 mph restrictions are seen as having positive equalities impacts, particularly for more vulnerable users of the highway such as the young, the elderly, and disabled. However, these same groups can be disadvantaged where physical traffic calming measures are used due to the discomfort experienced when driving over such features.

Risk Assessment

27. The resources available for casualty reduction are limited and therefore, to achieve maximum benefit, they should be used in the most effective way. Use of resources to address perceived problems would reduce the likelihood of the Council achieving the national casualty reduction aims.

Financial Implications

28. There are in excess of 250 schools in Wiltshire. Assuming a modest estimate of £5,000 per advisory 20 mph restriction, a budget of £1.25 million would be required if a blanket approach were adopted. In economic terms, the implementation of advisory 20 mph restrictions outside all schools to deal with 2% of child casualties, particularly when there is no evidence to show that such a course of action would reduce casualties, is an extremely poor investment.
29. The Taking Action on School Journeys budget comes as part of the Integrated Block Capital funds that the Council receives as a grant from the Department for Transport.

Legal Implications

30. None.

Options Considered

31. To:

- (i) Continue with the use of area wide limits and zones and not introduce school specific 20 mph restrictions.
- (ii) Introduce school specific advisory 20 mph restrictions through a blanket role out.
- (iii) Introduce school specific advisory 20 mph restrictions linked to a school travel plan.

Reason for Proposal

32. To ensure resources are available to maintain the current practice of undertaking pedestrian and cycle training, together with the other activities set out in the Road Safety Strategy it is considered vital that the limited funding available is used wisely. A blanket role out of advisory 20mph restrictions is therefore not considered to be economically viable. By linking advisory 20mph restrictions to an up to date travel plan and by bidding through the Taking Action on School Journeys fund it is considered more likely that this will identify the fullest possible range of appropriate safety measures.

Proposal

33. That the proposal to allow advisory 20 mph restrictions linked to a school travel plan be accepted.

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

None