

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD

4 MARCH 2014

**FINAL REPORT OF THE ECONOMIC
REGENERATION AND TRANSPORT
SCRUTINY PANEL -
20 MPH SPEED LIMITS**

PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1. To present the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel's findings, conclusions and recommendations following its investigation of the topic of 20 mph speed limits in Middlesbrough.
2. The scrutiny panel sought to examine this issue following the recent introduction of a 20mph speed limit in residential areas across the Borough.

FURTHER INFORMATION

3. This topic was investigated as a short topic over the course of one scrutiny panel meeting held on 30 January 2014. A further panel meeting was held on 20 February 2014 to consider a draft final report. A Scrutiny Support Officer from Legal and Democratic Services co-ordinated and arranged the submission of written and oral evidence and arranged witnesses for the investigation. Meetings administration, including preparation of agenda and minutes, was undertaken by a Governance Officer from Legal and Democratic Services.
4. A record of discussions at panel meetings, including agenda, minutes and reports, is available from the Council's Egender committee management system, which can be accessed via the Council's website at www.middlesbrough.gov.uk.
5. This report has been compiled on the basis of information submitted to the scrutiny panel by officers from the Council's Neighbourhoods and Communities Department.
6. The membership of the scrutiny panel was as follows:

Councillors P Sharrocks (Chair), Taylor (Vice-Chair), Arundale, Biswas, Brady, Khan, Lowes, Rehman and Williams.

THE SCRUTINY PANEL'S FINDINGS

7. The scrutiny panel's findings are set out below and relate to:

- Background information.
- The position in Middlesbrough.
- 20 mph speed limit appraisal.
- Speeding issues.
- Next steps.

Background Information

8. The overall speed limit framework, including the setting of national limits for different road types, and which exceptions to these general limits can be applied, is the responsibility of the government. The three national speed limits are:

- The national speed limit of 70mph on motorways and dual carriageways.
- The 30 mph speed limit on street-lit roads (sometimes referred to as Restricted Roads).

9. These national limits are not, however, appropriate for all roads. Local speed limits are determined by traffic authorities having regard to guidance issued by the Department for Transport. The speed limit regime enables traffic authorities to set local speed limits in situations where local needs and conditions suggest a speed limit which is different from the respective national speed limit. Guidance from the Government's Department for Transport indicates that speed limits should be evidence-led and self-explaining and seek to reinforce people's assessment of what is a safe speed to travel. They should encourage self-compliance and speed limits should be seen by drivers as the maximum rather than a target speed.

10. Experience in other parts of the UK and abroad has shown that the introduction of 20mph speed limits covering a wide area can lower vehicle speeds without the need for physical traffic calming measures. For example, results from cities including Portsmouth and Oxford have been encouraging, where vehicle speeds and casualties fell significantly after the introduction of city-wide 20mph speed limits on residential roads.

11. 20mph speed limits are designed to reduce speeds and casualties, without the need to install expensive physical traffic calming measures, which are often unpopular with motorists. The severity of injuries sustained as a result of road accidents can also be reduced when traffic travels more slowly. According to the Royal Society for the Prevention Accidents (RoSPA), a pedestrian struck at 20mph has a 97% chance of survival; this falls to 80% at 30mph and 50% at 35mph. In addition, stopping distance at 20 mph (40 feet) is about half that at 30 mph (75 feet), which further reduces the likelihood of collision and injury.

12. In addition to accident and casualty reduction, the benefits of 20mph speed limits have been highlighted nationally as:

- Providing safer road conditions that encourage and facilitate the take-up of active and sustainable transport modes, such as walking and cycling, with associated health and wellbeing benefits.
- Making it easier and safer for pedestrians to cross roads, particularly for children or the elderly.
- Reducing the amount of road noise generated in residential areas.
- Improving traffic flow - as it flows more smoothly through junctions at lower speeds.
- Potentially reducing airborne pollution.

The position in Middlesbrough

13. The scrutiny panel was informed that, over the last ten years, road traffic casualties have been gradually reduced across the whole of Teesside. In 2010, Middlesbrough Council met all three of its road safety targets and had the lowest number of injury accidents on record - with no fatal accidents and 33 people seriously injured, including three children. However, as there were still 359 casualties on the town's roads in that year, the authority's challenge was to maintain these low figures and achieve best value in the coming years of reduced finances. Accordingly, it was decided that the introduction of 20mph speed limits across residential areas, whilst maintaining free movement and unchanged speed limits on the main road network, would be a key element in achieving this objective.

14. The scrutiny panel heard that, in 2010, a number of residential areas in Middlesbrough already had a 20mph speed limit and were known as 20mph zones. Almost all of these 20mph zones, which are still in existence, have some form of physical traffic calming measures such as road humps.

15. In the light of the successful introduction of the lower speed limit elsewhere, a study was carried out to investigate the introduction of 20mph speed limits across all of Middlesbrough's residential areas. A phased implementation programme was developed - with phase one including 678 streets between March and June 2012. Phase two, which was undertaken between March and June 2013, covered a further 687 streets. The scheme involved gateway entry 20mph signs, road markings and further speed limit repeater signs. It was funded by the Department for Transport and was rolled out following consultation with the relevant Community Councils. The total cost of the scheme was £140k.

16. The intention was to change the mind set of drivers and other road users so that 20mph is seen as the maximum acceptable vehicle speed on residential roads.

17. The panel questioned the position regarding the use of traffic calming measures, such as chicanes and speed bumps, in residential areas in the light of introduction of the 20 mph speed limit. In response, the panel was advised that when road maintenance/resurfacing is undertaken as part of the Council's scheduled Highway Maintenance Programme, the opportunity is taken to review/remodel any existing traffic calming measures. As a result, a number of sections of road have had up to half of their traffic calming features removed.
18. Reference was also made to the position in respect of schools. Members were informed that although most schools in Middlesbrough are situated on roads with a 20mph speed limit, there is a small number where the speed limit is still 30mph. These are to be the subject of further examination.

20 mph Speed Limit Appraisal

19. Speeds and casualties have been monitored following introduction of the new speed limits. The number of collisions recorded during 14 months prior to the introduction of the first phase of 20mph speed limits across the borough was compared with the number recorded during the 14 months after.
20. The results of this exercise showed that the number of collisions recorded in the 20mph speed limit areas fell by 7%. However, as the number of collisions recorded across the whole Borough also fell by 7% it is difficult to yet assess whether the introduction of the first phase of 20mph speed limits has in itself had a positive effect.
21. Collisions per 10 km of road were also assessed to make a comparison of the overall safety of the roads inside and outside the 20mph speed limits. During the period July 2012 to August 2013, there were 28 collisions in 20mph speed limits, which equates to approximately 2 collisions per 10 km of road. In terms of the rest of the borough that was not covered by a 20mph speed limit from phase one, there were 285 collisions. This equates to about 6 collisions per 10 km of road and illustrates that there were far fewer collisions on roads per km within 20mph speed limits.
22. These figures indicate that collision numbers in the phase one 20mph speed limits dropped at the same rate as overall collisions in the borough. The figures also confirm that phase one's roads are amongst the safest in the town. As the number of collisions was initially so low, it is perhaps to be expected that there would not be a large reduction in overall collisions after the introduction of this phase. However, now that phase two is in place, the overall figures for the two phases will be likely to provide a more conclusive view of the effectiveness of 20mph speed limits in reducing collisions and casualties on the borough's roads.

Speeding issues

23. A widespread programme of speed surveys has been undertaken in the new 20mph areas. At least one road in each 20mph area for phase one was surveyed and compared to 'before' figures where possible. Complaint sites were also surveyed - i.e. those locations where residents had expressed concerns regarding high speeds.

24. In total for both phases, 47 separate locations were surveyed. Of these, 23 sites included both before and after data. Speeds fell at 21 out of the 23 locations, with 5.9mph being the maximum speed reduction. A typical pattern was speeds falling from the high 20s to the low 20s mph. Of the two sites where speeds rose, one was by 0.1mph and another by 0.3mph so there was little change in before and after speeds at these locations.
25. After further examination of the 47 roads surveyed, 16 concern sites have been identified, 11 from the first phase and five from the second. These are locations where speeds remain in the high 20s mph.
26. Additional monitoring was carried out at Trimdon Avenue in the first phase and Gunnergate Lane in the second. For Trimdon Avenue, a number of objections were received to the initial proposals. The issue has since been raised at the local Community Council where a vote was taken to retain the new limit. Monitoring showed that speeds have reduced, with the help of a speed-activated sign near the shops area. However, as speeds remain in the high 20s mph on other parts of the road, further speed-reduction measures are to be introduced.
27. The panel heard that it was always the Council's intention that in areas where speeding continued to be an issue after implementation of the new 20mph limits, the use of targeted interventions would be considered. On roads where traffic speeds remain in the high 20s mph, the following measures will be considered and introduced as required:
- Further monitoring, including speed surveys and accident investigation
 - Additional '20' repeater signs and / or road markings
 - Promotion of the community speedwatch initiative in that area
 - Use of mobile speed activated signs and further monitoring to assess any further speed reduction
28. If all of the above fail to achieve the required speed reduction, appropriate localised traffic calming measures will be considered, subject to public consultation and cost.
29. In the case of Gunnergate Lane, it was explained that this was not originally planned to be covered by a 20mph limit. However, a petition was received from the residents requesting that it be included. Speed-activated signs have now been modified along the route to suit the new limit and monitoring has shown that speeds have fallen by up to 5.9mph.
30. In terms of enforcement, the panel was informed that, in March 2013, the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) had informed the All Party Parliamentary Cycling Group (APPCG) that the police were not enforcing 20 mph limits. Indications were that enforcement would be left to local authorities. Following concerns that were raised by MPS in response to this, ACPO had clarified the position in a letter to the APPCG. ACPO's lead on roads policing had advised as follows:

31. "We can clearly state that it is incorrect to say that police officers are not enforcing 20mph speed limits. 20mph zones are predominantly introduced in residential areas where road safety has been raised as an issue by those who live locally. The approach of neighbourhood policing teams in every community is built around ensuring that local crime and disorder issues and concerns are identified, so that a police force delivers an appropriate policing response. This applies to enforcement of 20mph zones as to any other area of policing.
32. "Police and Crime Commissioners are now responsible for setting strategic policing priorities for each police force and in areas where 20mph zones are a local concern, may include enforcement within local policing plans. In most cases, 20 mph limits will follow Department for Transport (DfT) guidance and include road calming features such as speed bumps or traffic islands designed to slow traffic. Wherever possible, we agree with the ¹DfT that 20mph zones should be 'self-enforcing' through the use of such features.
33. "ACPO speed enforcement guidelines include thresholds for enforcement across all speed limits, intended to underpin a consistent policing approach. Within that framework local police forces will take a responsible and proportionate approach to enforcement of 20mph limits based on their assessment of risk to individuals, property and the seriousness of any breach. Where drivers are regularly and wilfully breaking the law we would expect that officers will enforce the limit and prosecute offenders."
34. In terms of the local position, the scrutiny panel panel heard that the Community Speedwatch initiative has been successfully used across Middlesbrough. This involves the Council supporting local residents in monitoring traffic speeds, with warning letters being sent to drivers travelling at 24mph or more in an area with a 20mph speed limit. In the case of three warning letters, a driver will receive a visit from the police.
35. In relation to enforcement, a scrutiny panel member advised that while the police had been happy to assist with a community speedwatch scheme in his ward, they had indicated that they would not take enforcement action/prosecute in respect of offenders. It was suggested that this position requires clarification in view of the above statement from ACPO.

Next steps

36. As indicated above, initial results show a reduction in accidents and speeds across the 20mph speed limit areas. While this is encouraging, the scrutiny panel was advised that further monitoring will be needed, for at least another year. This will allow the second phase results to be analysed and provide an additional year of results from the first phase.

¹ The DfT guidance states: Successful 20 mph zones and 20 mph speed limits are generally self-enforcing, i.e. the existing conditions of the road together with measures such as traffic calming or signing, publicity and information as part of the scheme, lead to a mean traffic speed compliant with the speed limit. To achieve compliance there should be no expectation on the police to provide additional enforcement beyond their routine activity, unless this has been explicitly agreed.

CONCLUSIONS

37. Having considered the submitted information, the Environment Scrutiny Panel reached the following conclusions:

1. Although road casualty rates have been continuously reduced across the whole of Teesside for the last 10 years, there are still over 300 casualties per year in Middlesbrough. Evidence to date indicates that the introduction of a 20 mph speed limit across residential areas of Middlesbrough has been of benefit and will contribute to reducing this figure further. Traffic speeds and road casualties have been reduced without the need for physical, more expensive, traffic calming measures. However, further monitoring will be needed to determine the longer term effectiveness of default 20 mph speed limits.
2. In addition to reducing road casualties, a 20 mph speed limit also has the potential to lead to a long term change in the behaviour of drivers, simplify the issue of speed limits and makes expectations clearer. The limit may also increase the perception of safety and makes residents feel more positive about their local area.
3. Nationally, concerns have been expressed about enforcement in respect of 20 mph limits, particularly the role of the police. The position was clarified, with the Association of Chief Police Officers indicating that the police will take action against offenders where appropriate, although police resources have been identified as a possible issue. However, the position needs to be clarified/confirmed in terms of the role of the police in Middlesbrough. To date, initiatives such as Community Speed Watch have been successfully used to monitor traffic speeds where 20 mph limits apply. Consideration will, however, need to be given to appropriate action in persistent problem areas.

RECOMMENDATIONS

38. Following the submitted evidence, and based on the conclusions above, the Economic Regeneration and Transport Scrutiny Panel's recommendations for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny board and the Executive are as follows:

1. That further, long-term, monitoring and evaluation is undertaken to measure the effectiveness of the introduction of 20 mph speed limits across residential areas of Middlesbrough.
2. That if, or where, persistent problems of speeding in 20 mph areas do occur, consideration should be given to the most appropriate means of addressing this - such as the use of mobile speed signs; additional 20mph repeater signs and/or road markings; the use of community speedwatch; further monitoring; requesting the involvement of the police for enforcement purposes; or introducing physical traffic calming measures.

3. That Cleveland's Police and Crime Commissioner is requested to clarify the position concerning the role and responsibility of the police in enforcement in respect of 20 mph speed limits.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

39. The Panel is grateful to the following officers, who presented evidence during the course of this investigation:

- D Gittins - Highways and Transportation Manager, Department of Neighbourhoods and Communities, Middlesbrough Council.
- S Rigg - Principal Engineer, Traffic - Department of Neighbourhoods and Communities, Middlesbrough Council.

BACKGROUND AND REFERENCE MATERIAL

40. The following sources were consulted or referred to in preparing this report:

- Report to and minutes of the Economic Regeneration and Transport meeting held on 30 January 2014.

COUNCILLOR PETER SHARROCKS

**CHAIR OF ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND
TRANSPORT SCRUTINY PANEL**

February 2014

Contact Officer:

Alan Crawford
Scrutiny Support Officer
Legal & Democratic Services
Tel 01642 729707
e-mail: alan_crawford@middlesbrough.gov.uk