

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel was held on Thursday 8 December 2022.

PRESENT: Councillors R Arundale (Chair), M Saunders (Vice-Chair), C Dodds, T Furness and Z Uddin (as substitute for Councillor Branson)

OFFICERS: G Field, R Horniman, S Lightwing and C Orr

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: were submitted on behalf of Councillors D Branson, A Hellaoui, B Hubbard and J Thompson

22/42 **WELCOME AND EVACUATION PROCEDURE**

The Chair welcomed all present to the meeting and read out the Building Evacuation Procedure.

22/43 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest received at this point in the meeting.

22/44 **MINUTES - ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY PANEL - 9 NOVEMBER 2022**

The minutes of the meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel held on 9 November 2022 were taken as read and approved as a correct record.

22/45 **SCHOOL TRANSPORT**

The Director of Environment and Community Services provided a presentation on School Transport. The Council's Home to School Transport Policy related to the Education Act 1996 and additional duties required by the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

National guidance (last issued in July 2014 by the Department for Education) set out the expectations of Local Authorities with regard to home to school transport arrangements for pupils. In particular, the guidance set out the circumstances in which the local authority had a duty to provide or arrange free school transport for children of compulsory school age.

Free home to school transport or assistance would be provided for the following eligible pupils who would be of compulsory school age during the current academic year:

a) A primary school age pupil attending their nearest suitable school and that school was over 2 miles from the home address, where the distance was determined by the Council and used the shortest walking distance along which a child, accompanied as necessary, might walk with reasonable safety.

b) A secondary school age pupil attending their nearest suitable school and that school was over 3 miles from the home address, where the distance was determined by the Council and used the shortest walking distance along which a child, accompanied as necessary, might walk with reasonable safety.

c) A secondary school age pupil from a low income family and attending:

- any one of their three nearest suitable schools and the school was between 2 and 6 miles away from their home address.

Or

- the nearest school preferred by their parents on the grounds of religion or belief and the school is between 2 and 15 miles away from their home address.

Transport requirements were considered as part of a full assessment of a child's special educational needs. If a child's needs were such that there were no associated transport requirements, then eligibility for free transport or assistance would be assessed against the Council's policy. If a child was unable to walk the statutory distance to their nearest appropriate school because of their special educational needs or disability, even if accompanied by a responsible adult, the Council would, subject to the statutory assessment/annual review process, provide travel assistance.

The number of children with complex or special educational needs was increasing year on year and some required medical support to travel with them.

Whilst it was acknowledged that some families had access to a mobility car but their child used school transport services, it was explained that often individual circumstances made this a complex issue. The Council was able to offer parents an allowance if they were able to transport their own child. Personal transport allowance was a sum of money calculated for each family to cover the cost of travel to and from school. A mileage allowance of 45 pence per mile could be awarded for the return journey to and from school at the beginning and end of the school day. Allowances were calculated on an individual basis and varied from family to family.

In the current academic year, due to the pressures in school transport, Middlesbrough Council wrote to all parents to advise them of this offer and approximately 62 families in Middlesbrough had taken it up. In some cases, where children qualified under this policy for assistance with transport, the Council would consider offering a personal transport allowance instead of direct transport provision, where this was in the best interests of the child and was the lowest cost option for the Council.

When a child was permanently excluded from a mainstream school and the Council was required to secure alternative provision for them, they would be entitled to free transport or assistance to an approved alternative provider, commissioned by the Council, in accordance with the policy for mainstream and special schools. It was expected that assistance would be on a temporary basis until such a time as the child was re-integrated into mainstream or special school and would be subject to review.

Other reasons for providing school transport included: temporary illness, parent(s) with disability or no safe walking route. Working closely with Education, the Council would, in the first instance, try to help children travel independently by providing travel training to use either public transport or school buses.

Children could travel on Council owned buses or minibuses or taxis from the private sector, with or without passenger assistants alongside. A mix of activity took place. A total of 1556 children were currently supported with transport by Middlesbrough Council and the cost of the service was £3.5 million per year.

Post-covid, the market place for transport had been much more challenging. There had been a reduction in the number of licensed taxis and bus companies. Significant numbers of drivers had left the industry during covid and found new employment elsewhere. The Council needed to move to a different model with more in-house provision and less reliance on the private sector. This would bring its own challenges, with the lead-in time for purchasing a new minibus currently around one year. Another issue this year had been increasing inflation and the impact on fuel prices. The Council had made an arrangement through Procurement to provide extra fuel payments as appropriate.

From January 2023, School Transport would be moving to the Children's Services Directorate. An incredible amount of work was taking place daily to ensure Middlesbrough children were able to get to school.

The Chair thanked the Director for his presentation.

AGREED that the information provided was received and noted.

LINTHORPE ROAD CYCLE LANE

The Infrastructure Programme Manager was in attendance and gave a presentation in relation to Phase 1 of the Linthorpe Road Cycleway.

Building more roads to support more cars was not financially viable or sustainable and therefore alternative ways for people to move around the network were needed. Approximately 10,000 vehicles travelled along Linthorpe Road every day. 1.6% of those vehicles were cycles and cyclists were more likely to be involved in accidents and suffer injuries than other vehicle users.

Middlesbrough Council had worked with the Tees Valley Combined Authority (TVCA) on various different strategies and policies including the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Programme (LCWIP). Based on TVCA modelling using WSP expertise the transport corridor between Middlesbrough town centre and Linthorpe village had been identified as one of the highest areas with propensity to cycle in the Tees Valley Region.

During the Covid-19 pandemic some of the parking bays on Linthorpe Road were closed to allow more space for social distancing. An option was put forward by the TVCA to construct a cycle lane. This proposal was progressed by Active Travel England and the Active Travel Fund and the road space was re-allocated in favour of pedestrians and sustainable travel. Government guidance on cycle infrastructure design: Local Transport Note 1/20 had been updated and provided advice on how to future proof roads and make them more sustainable and accessible for people to use.

In December 2020 to January 2021, Middlesbrough Council consulted on the implementation of cycle lanes on Linthorpe Road. Letters were sent to all premises directly affected and those in the surrounding area. Whilst the consultation was online, people could also write or phone to put forward their views. 71% of respondents were not in favour of the proposed scheme and some alterations were made which included some of the bus stops being retained and some disabled spaces being added. All respondents were informed of the proposed changes and no further comments were received. The final scheme received unanimous approval by Middlesbrough Council's Executive in March 2021 and funding from the TVCA was approved in April 2021.

Following a procurement exercise, Cleveland Land Services were employed to carry out the construction which was initially anticipated to take three months. However, due to the discovery of hard ground conditions and old tramlines, as well as increases in material costs and supply, the work took six months to complete.

An additional signalised crossing was installed and existing crossings upgraded. Surrounding public realm areas were also upgraded and existing surfaces remediated. New cycle parking was also installed.

The project was finished in September 2022 within the grant allocation.

A query was raised in relation to the traffic orcas and whether they should have been used. With regard to light segregation there were a number of different options and the Council had chosen the traffic orcas in the first instance and followed the available guidance. The Council had listened to the feedback received and had made alterations by replacing 50% of the orcas with poles. No more accidents had been reported since the poles had been installed.

It was confirmed that all emergency services had been involved in the project through the consultation and had not raised any concerns.

A camera had been installed to monitor the uptake which had shown a 36% increase since the cycle lane opened in September. It was highlighted that there were likely to be seasonal variations in the number of cyclists and the longer term trends would need to be assessed. Comparisons would also be made with other areas across the Tees Valley to gauge the success of the scheme.

Since implementation there had been approximately 30 pedestrian trips reported, and around 5000 pedestrians per day used the area. There did not appear to be any pattern in relation to these accidents although many had happened adjacent to the signalised crossing points.

Approval for Phase 2 of the scheme had been given by Executive and was anticipated to commence in 2023/2024. Phase 2 would be fully funded by a grant from TVCA. Lessons had been learned from Phase 1 in terms of the materials and construction and hard ground areas known in advance of commencing works following a Ground Penetration Radar (GPR) survey. More crossing points would be added with high friction surfacing.

A Member commented that many households now owned two or three cars and cars were become very expensive to run. In addition the lead in time for buying a new car was now about 12 months. People were starting to look at different modes of transport and the new cycle lane was an excellent start.

The Chair thanked the Officer for his presentation.

AGREED that the information presented was received and noted.

22/47 **TEESSIDE CREMATORIUM - FEEDBACK FROM SITE VISIT**

Councillor Thompson had provided a report giving feedback in relation to a site visit to Teesside Crematorium in September 2022.

AGREED that the report would be circulated to all Members of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel.

22/48 **DATE OF NEXT MEETING - 18 JANUARY 2023**

The time and date of the next meeting of the Economic Development, Environment and Infrastructure Scrutiny Panel was confirmed as Wednesday 18 January 2023 at 10.30 am.

22/49 **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD UPDATE**

The Chair will provided an update on matters considered at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Board held on 16 November 2022. The Panel's request to amend the current Work Programme had been approved by the Board.

22/50 **ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED**

None.