

STRONGER COMMUNITIES & NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY BOARD

20 JANUARY 2021

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(VIRTUAL MEETING)

MINUTES (EXTRACT)

1. SPEED ENFORCEMENT IN SOLIHULL – A NEW APPROACH

In attendance: Alan Brown (Assistant Director – Highways & Environment); Paul Tovey (Head of Highway Management); David Keaney (Traffic Manager); Councillor K Hawkins – Cabinet Member (Environment & Highways); and Inspector Sharon Jones (West Midlands Police).

The Board was invited to (i) consider a detailed report which set out an overview of the current practice; and (ii) discuss moving forward towards a new, partnership led, approach to speed and traffic enforcement within Solihull. To complement the report, Officers also delivered a PowerPoint presentation to highlight the key objectives of the report.

It was anticipated that the report would facilitate a discussion regarding the setting of 20mph speed limits on the local road network in Solihull and, in turn, future policy making. The approach would also facilitate information sharing on behalf of the Police and the Highway Management Team in respect of current priorities and levels of service.

Officers also highlighted that the report provided an opportunity for the Board to feed into the review process at an early stage in order to help achieve the overarching road traffic casualty reduction targets set out in the Council's Road Safety Strategy 2017 to 2030.

The Board's recommendations resulting from the above would be fed into the Environment & Highways Cabinet decision-making process at a later point in the year.

The views of the Board were requested in respect of a number of specific questions pertaining to 20mph speed limits and potential new ways of working for speed enforcement. The following questions and observations were noted:

Speed Limits

- Members welcomed this aspect of the overall Review and highlighted that excessive traffic speeds were regular Ward issues raised with them by local residents.
- The report highlighted that feedback on the current use of 20mph speed limits within Solihull had been mixed and Officers were asked for further local evidence to support their introduction. Officers highlighted a similar picture from a number of local authorities where 20mph speed limit zones had been introduced. The Board was advised that as a benefit of lowering the speed limit, collisions were likely to be less severe rather than eradicating collisions completely. The DfT's own data also indicated that general compliance with 20mph speed limits was poor.
- The safety of children was a clear priority and the use of 20mph speed limits around school sites particularly, was supported. The Board highlighted the potential usefulness of additional roundel signage on the carriageway surface where permissible. Officers highlighted the significant number of school locations in Solihull and the small number of those sites which currently had 20mph speed limits in force. The Board was further advised of the use of carriageway roundel markings for speed limits and the regulatory requirements surrounding their use (i.e. they could not be used in areas with part-time variable speed limits). Officers also highlighted the strict regulatory signage requirements for 30mph speed limits.

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- Members reiterated that traffic congestion and inconsiderate parking was a factor to consider for road safety initiatives in and around school sites, in addition to new 20mph speed limits.
- The Board also highlighted the importance of highway signage being maintained in good order and kept unobscured. Member's perception was that poorly maintained highway markings, such as demarcation lines, had a negative effect on road safety. Officers were also requested to review the Council's decluttering policy for highway signage to ensure that historical signage/markings which had not been reinstated had not had a negative effect on road safety thereafter. In this year's Resources and Priorities Plan, soon to be considered by the Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways, more funding was being added to the carriageway marking and maintenance budget which would address that concern going forwards.
- Members questioned if it was feasible to set key performance indicators to measure the success of 20mph speed limits and to help draw comparisons within Solihull. Officers advised that KSI data (killed or seriously injured) was utilised as there was an acknowledged under-reporting for minor, damage-only, collisions. On average, there were now 45 KSIs each year which was a continued annual reduction in comparison with data taken from across the last three decades. A bi-annual review of all roads was also undertaken to inform future road safety priorities to the Cabinet Member for consideration. Additionally, some school sites were prohibitive to the introduction of 20mph speed limits due to their individual locations and network constraints.
- The Board asked what the Council's current stance was on physical traffic calming features; if they were still proven to be effective; and what new alternatives there were. Officers advised that a number of engineering measures were still available for use although speed limit proposals were typically brought forward as a separate individual review. The "low traffic neighbourhoods" initiative was being considered for some areas within Solihull and work around that would also be brought forward in the coming months.
- The Board also asked what investment was being made to ensure the overall journey to school was safe beyond the 20mph zones to ensure child pedestrian casualties were as low as possible. Additionally, Members asked if any pilot schemes had been undertaken and were advised that eight schools within Solihull currently had schemes in operation for either permanent or part-time 20mph speed limits. Officers advised that evidence showed that the beginning and end points of school arrival and departure times tended to be the periods where traffic speeds were the most critical from a road safety point of view as traffic congestion was not at its peak and some drivers did not expect to encounter child pedestrians. 20mph speed limits tended to become self-enforcing as congestion levels increased closer to the actual school start and finish times where child pedestrian activity was more concentrated and visible to drivers.
- The Board highlighted the issue of inconsiderate parking around schools, which when tackled, resulted in traffic speeds increasing as the removal of parked cars facilitated higher speeds by default.

Speed Enforcement and New Future Ways of Working

- The Board highlighted that enforcement was a key part of road safety and asked what enforcement resources were available at school start and finish times where 20mph speed limits were in force at present. West Midlands Police advised that enforcement activity (by them) was undertaken on an evidence-based approach and Police attention was directed toward problematic locations specifically. Additionally, the Chairman sought clarification as to where such evidence would need to be

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received from and was advised that complaints from any origin (i.e. Councillors, residents or the schools themselves) would be considered and could be sent to either the Police or the Local Authority. The Police were also thanked for their support following the introduction of the School Streets initiative and the second phase, going forwards.

- The Chairman highlighted that the use of mobile camera enforcement was quickly publicised by residents via social media in his particular Ward which tended to dilute the impact of the enforcement exercise being undertaken.
- The Board supported the retention of obsolete GATSO camera housings and signage as long as they were in a safe condition to remain in situ. The perception from a number of Members was that they still caused the majority of motorists to be aware of their vehicle speeds at those individual locations.
- The Board commended the continued use of the average speed cameras which they perceived to be very effective in reducing vehicle speeds. Officers were asked if any additional funding streams were available to provide coverage to a greater number of locations. Members were advised that the HS2 Road Safety Fund could potentially include schemes such as average speed cameras. The intentions of that Fund was to create a legacy for road safety.
- Locations for new average speed camera sites were submitted by Members, such as the A34 (Stratford Road, Shirley) together with the suggestion that dummy equipment could also be used to increase coverage at minimal cost. Officers advised that all current (and historically obsolete) sites were live and dummy locations had never been used in Solihull.
- In terms of costs, the establishment of the three current average speed camera sites amounted to £250k, including the setting up of the back-office function. Officers advised that there was presently a funding gap for the ongoing maintenance costs which needed to be addressed going forwards with the aim that they became self-funding. The establishment of additional new sites would amount to tens of thousands of pounds with exact costings being determined by the individual locations and the number of carriageway lanes of traffic needing enforcement. Officers estimated that the establishment of a new site on the A34 (a dual carriageway) would be nearer £100k. The Board supported the A34 as a future priority site.
- The Board commented on the Prolaser enforcement and asked how many PCSO's were able to undertake those duties in addition to uniformed Police. West Midlands Police advised that an estimated three Officers, per policing team, were trained to use the Prolaser equipment. Further training to increase capacity had been hindered recently owing to Covid-19.

Educational Activity including Speed Aware

- Members considered that driver behaviour was the overriding issue that needed to be addressed via ongoing and future campaigns with a variety of audiences. Officers drew attention to the current educational campaigns to support road safety and explained how they were delivered.
- The Board welcomed the current and future Speed Aware Programme and highlighted several additional preferred poster designs for future use. These were (utilising red wherever possible in the artwork to signal danger), "speed kills"; "its 30 for a reason"; "20 is plenty" and "slow down – drive like your kids live here". The Board also asked if any research had been undertaken locally or regionally as to which poster campaign worked best. Officers advised that the current poster campaign had been used in Solihull for some years and there was a desire to refresh

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it and make it more visible to road users. The Board also supported the use of digital flashing signage to support this particular campaign where appropriate.

Other Considerations

- The Chairman asked if, in addition to all the initiatives covered in the report, optical illusion road markings and/or different coloured road surfaces had been considered for use in Solihull which gave the perception of a narrowing carriageway in an attempt to reduce vehicle speeds. Officers advised that, in their professional opinion, such markings and colourings had a very minimal effect on reducing vehicle speeds as drivers soon became familiar with them. In terms of engineering solutions to avoid the need for ongoing enforcement, physical traffic calming measures had proved to be the most effective at certain locations.

RESOLVED

That, subject to the comments and views recorded in the preamble above, the Board **UNANIMOUSLY** made the following **RECOMMENDATIONS** to the **Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Environment & Highways**:

Speed Limits

- (i) That the Board supports the use of 20mph maximum speed limits at the suggested location types as set out in the report. The Board particularly acknowledges their importance in the vicinity of school sites where local road networks allow for their use;
- (ii) That, subject to regulatory signage compliance, Officers be requested to consider the use of painted carriageway roundels to give new speed limits maximum visual impact upon implementation; and
- (iii) That Officers review the Council's current approach to signage and road marking de-cluttering to ensure that this policy does not have a detrimental effect on road safety;

Speed Enforcement and New Ways of Working

- (i) That the Board supports the proposed review of the existing Average Speed Camera sites and those sites being maintained where evidence still exists; the development of a future regional approach as detailed within the report, and; to keep an element of flexibility within that initiative to move to new locations where evidence of similar road safety concerns exist;
- (ii) That the Board supports the proposed review of Mobile Enforcement sites;
- (iii) That, noting the financial implications of maintaining obsolete GATSO camera housings and associated signage, the Board highlights their perceived ongoing contribution to road safety. In that regard, the Board supports their retention on a site-by-site basis where it is safe and viable to do so;
- (iv) That the Board supports the ongoing use of Prolaser, Police-led, enforcement and encourages the Police to ensure that

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they have a consistent number of trained Officers across each Ward to perform that type of enforcement; and

- (v) That the Board supports the ongoing Speed Aware Programme, utilising the suggested preferred poster campaigns as set out in the preamble above.

Educational Activity

- (i) That the Board supports ongoing and targeted educational activity and awareness to promote road safety to all user groups, especially child pedestrians.