

## COMMUNITIES AND PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

1 DECEMBER 2021

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### Active Travel and Road Safety for the Journey to School

**Report of:** Interim Executive Director of Regeneration and Interim Executive Director of Planning and Local Services

**Cabinet Member:** Councillor John Riddle, Portfolio Holder for Local Services

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#### **Purpose of report**

This report provides an overview of activities delivered across Northumberland to support more people to walk and cycle for the school journey.

#### **Recommendations**

This report has been prepared to allow the Communities and Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider if appropriate actions are being taken to promote and support active travel for the journey to school.

#### **Link to Corporate Plan**

This report is relevant to the following priorities in the Corporate Plan:

- We want you to feel safe, healthy and care for, 'living'.
- We want you to have access to the things you need, 'connecting'.

#### **Key issues**

This report outlines our approach to encourage more people to choose to walk or cycle for the school journey where this is possible, recognising that due to the rural nature of Northumberland and the distances travelled this may not always be possible.

A range of active travel activities are delivered through the Northumberland Schools Go Smarter programme, including developing travel plans through Modeshift Stars, the support of promotion events throughout the school year and the provision of training and

resources to schools. A wide range of road safety interventions are also delivered at schools across Northumberland to improve the pedestrian environment and encourage use of sustainable travel.

However, the Council have declared a climate emergency, with the aim of Northumberland having net zero carbon emissions by 2030, and a fundamental step change is required to accelerate a behaviour change whereby walking and cycling for short journeys becomes the norm.

This report has been developed to allow consideration of whether appropriate actions are being taken to support this behaviour change in respect of the journeys made to and from schools in the county.

## **BACKGROUND**

1. Each day during term time, parents and pupils travel from home to school in the morning and make the return trip in the afternoon. The school journey affects public transport patterns, causes localised congestion around schools and contributes to the road traffic peak around nine o'clock and three o'clock in the afternoon.
2. The authority supports schools across Northumberland to encourage a greater use of sustainable modes of transport and by supporting more active forms of transport, such as walking and cycling, contributes towards environmental improvements such as air quality improvements and carbon reduction and has personal health and well-being benefits.
3. Each year the authority undertakes a mode of travel to school survey, this is a voluntary data collection of how children from across Northumberland travel to school. During spring 2021, 57 schools contributed to this data collection with data showing 37% of pupils walking to school, 6% cycling or scooting, 6% parking away from the school and walking the remainder of the journey, 20% used school transport or public transport and 30% were travelling to school in a car (with 2% of these car sharing).
4. The performance of the associated programmes is monitored by the following performance indicators, along with the proposed targets for 2022/23:
  - Number of children taking part in Bike Week (June each year) - 4,000
  - Number of children taking part in Walk to School month (October each year) – 3,000
  - Number of children to receive Bikeability training per year – 2,800

## **Schools Go Smarter**

5. The authority supports a Schools Go Smarter programme, which works with Northumberland schools to promote sustainable travel for the school journey. Sustainable travel is promoted through regional and national events, competitions and school specific activities. The authority also works with schools to ensure they have the tools and knowledge to take ownership of transport issues and develop initiatives to tackle these issues.
6. Each term a Schools Go Smarter newsletter is distributed to schools across the County, this highlights upcoming events, areas of best practice and achievements of schools taking part in activities. A Schools Go Smarter lead officer is also available to offer advice and support schools to promote more active forms of travel.
7. Many schools have embraced the Schools Go Smarter project, with some videos demonstrating best practice available on the following links:  
<https://www.northumberlandgearchange.co.uk/stannington-first-school>

<https://www.northumberlandgearchange.co.uk/allendale>

<https://www.northumberlandgearchange.co.uk/eastlea-primary>

8. Activities supported by the Schools Go Smarter programme include:

- **Walk to School month (W2SM)** - During October each year the authority supports schools to take part in Walk to School Month, resources are supplied to participating schools to support a range of activities over the month, including a walk to school challenge, bikers breakfasts and bling your bike, active playtimes, bike rides, treasure hunts, community walks and be bright be seen activities. This year 21 schools signed up, with an estimated 4236 children taking part.
- **Walk to School Week (W2SW)** - During May the authority has previously supported schools to take part in Walk to School Week, in 2021 the focus was changed during W2SW, to more direct engagement with parents to promote an active journey to school, 9 schools signed up to the campaign. The Big Northumberland Gear Change campaign and social media platforms were utilised to support this, schools also shared key messages directly with their parents, and delivered activities such as traffic and bike counts to raise awareness.
- **Bike Week** – During June each year, the authority supports Bike Week and encourages schools to take part in a range of activities to encourage cycling both for the school journey and outside of school. In 2019, 23 schools signed up with an estimated 4,926 pupils taking part in a range of activities including cycling breaktimes, family bike rides, cycling challenges, bling your bike and cycle jersey design competitions. In 2020 Bike Week was cancelled due to Covid and in 2021 the week fell during Northumberland schools summer half term break, we therefore decided to designate the whole month of June as cycling month. Only a small number of schools signed up to the trial (likely to be due to COVID conditions), but we intend to expand on this model of delivery in June 2022.
- **Bike Leader Training** - Schools Go Smarter offer school staff Ride Leader training delivered by British Cycling. After completing training, schools can set up their own cycling projects to pass on these skills, such as bike clubs or delivering led bike rides, which will help pupils become more confident cyclists and encourage a love of cycling. Participating schools are also eligible to receive a small grant from the authority to support this. To date 38 school staff have been trained as Ride Leaders.
- **Walk once a Week (WOW)** – The authority has partnered with Living Streets to support a national programme which rewards pupils for travelling actively, with schools recording how pupils have travelled using an interactive Travel Tracker. 16 schools participated in WOW during 2020/21, recording over 58,857 walking trips between September and May 2021, and an overall increase of active trips

from 47% to 51%. This scheme can support up to 18 schools in Northumberland during the academic year 2021/22.

- **Theatre in Education** – Go Smarter delivers two Theatre in Education productions for secondary age pupils. ‘Why Queue’ and ‘Josh Green Posted On My Wall’ are fun, interactive shows covering travelling to school sustainably and road safety education. The shows raise awareness of how distractions such as wearing headphones and using your phone can have fatal consequences, providing vital road safety messages to support school sustainable travel.
- **Bikeability** - The authority supports a Bikeability programme, delivering practical cycle training to school children, developing skills and providing confidence. During the academic year 2021/22 the authority has secured funding to provide 3,236 Bikeability places.
- **Love Northumberland Awards** – Go Smarter supports a school sustainable travel category as part of the Love Northumberland awards each year. During September 2021 joint winners Stannington First School and Allendale Primary School were recognised for their outstanding active travel projects.
- **Park and Stride**- Go Smarter also supports schools to set up Park and Strides, where a location such as a supermarket car park is used for pick up and drop offs or 5 Minute Walking Zones are established, where parents are encouraged to park away from a school and make the rest of the journey walking, cycling or scooting. Both of these schemes aim to encourage active travel and also reduce traffic near our schools.

9. Feedback from schools shows that schools welcome the initiatives provided through the Schools Go Smarter programme throughout the year, allowing the school to engage with initiatives appropriate to them and keep walking and cycling on the school agenda.

#### **CASE STUDY - Barndale House School**

Barndale House is a SEND school in the market town of Alnwick, catering for pupils from 2-19 years old, with a diverse range of needs and abilities. The school serves a rural area, with most pupils travelling by school transport (62%) or by private car (16%), making modal shift to active travel difficult to achieve, due to the distances involved.

However, the school still wanted pupils to be aware of the benefits of active travel and the importance of road safety. To support this, the school has created an environment where all pupils can participate in the wide range of activities. For example, pupils have the opportunity to take part in events such as Walk to School Week and WOW through lunchtime and breaktime walking clubs; cycling is promoted to improve the motor skills and balance of pupils, pupils are

encouraged to bring in bikes and scooters to use at break time; and independent travel training is provided, with pupils walking to local events whenever possible. Taking part in these activities has a positive experience, helping pupils with their social development as well as learning valuable life skills.

Barndale House is also seeking to change parents and staff attitudes and behaviour by encouraging car sharing and park and stride from the town centre car parks, which are only a short walk away. The school is committed to raising awareness of air pollution and its effects and promoting simple steps which pupils, parents, staff and transport providers can take to improve air quality near the school.

During 2020 the numbers of pupils walking to school increased by 5.5% and were awarded National Modeshift winners in the SEND category of the National Sustainable Travel Awards.

### **Modeshift STARS**

10. All Northumberland schools are encouraged to use the Modeshift STARS system, which enables the school to create and update a travel plan. Through STARS, schools can also work towards national school travel accreditation. The STARS system allows the authority to monitor all initiatives implemented in schools registered on the system, as well as mode of travel trends. The system also allows schools to take ownership of transport issues, with those schools taking part, typically seeing a reduction in car usage.
11. There are currently over 100 schools registered on Modeshift STARS with 17 schools currently accredited and 557 initiatives delivered in the last 3 years, prior to the pandemic 25 schools were accredited.
12. To achieve the green level of accreditation schools need to have planned 10 travel initiatives and 5 supporting initiatives, for bronze level these need to have been delivered. Silver level schools must deliver 20 travel initiatives and 10 supporting initiatives as well as showing a reduction in car travel; gold accreditation schools must have delivered 25 travel initiatives and 15 supporting initiatives and show a reduction in car use of at least 5%. For platinum level, schools need to meet all the previous criteria and also, show an increase in active travel modes of at least 5% over the last 4 years. For gold and platinum accreditation, schools also need to demonstrate how they have exceeded expectations in one area of active travel. As well as delivering initiatives schools also need to complete the other requirements of a school travel plan.
13. Northumberland schools have also been very successful at a regional and national level, this year Northumberland schools won all categories in the regional Modeshift Stars awards (Primary, Secondary and SEND) and Barndale House School and

Tweedmouth Middle School went on to win their categories at the national Modeshift Stars awards, with similar success in previous years.

### **CASE STUDY – Tweedmouth Community Middle School**

Tweedmouth Community Middle continues to raise the profile of sustainable travel and to encourage more pupils to cycle and walk to school. During 2020, mode of travel surveys show that car use has reduced by 7% and travelling to school by active modes has increased by over 16%, since they started working towards their STARS accreditation (2018).

The school takes part in national initiatives throughout the year, such as The Big Pedal, Bike Week, Walk to School Week, as well as running their own projects. The school has 3 members of staff trained as Ride Leaders who act as role models to promote cycling, especially to girls who often lose interest in cycling at secondary age. The school operates a bike club which takes pupils on rides around the local area, helping them gain confidence in their cycling skills. The school also looks for ways to incorporate sustainable travel into the curriculum, using bike counts to produce graphs in maths and learning how to read bus timetables.

### **The Big Northumberland Gear Change**

14. As well as working with schools, the authority launched a public facing behaviour change campaign in April 2021. [The Big Northumberland Gear Change](#) campaign asks residents to think carefully about the journeys they take and consider swapping some car journeys to more active forms of transport.
15. The campaign features inspirational stories, and it is hoped that our residents 'see themselves' in these stories and feel motivated to make the small changes in their lifestyle that make a difference to their physical health, their environment and mental wellbeing. The website also provides a range of practical content such as safety tips with direct links to support in the community. This is being promoted through the council's own internal communications channels, social media and externally to residents via social channels, digital ads, TV and radio.

### **COVID-19 Response**

16. COVID-19 presented schools with unique transport issues, these included changes to how pupils travelled to school, with some hesitancy of public and school transport and school access issues related to social distancing requirements. The Schools Go Smarter project supported schools throughout this time, sourcing funding through the Department of Transport's School Travel Demand Management Fund

and making school grants and support available to schools to address safety concerns and support schools to promote walking and cycling. During this time, 33 schools received school grants, which were used for a range of activities including increased cycle and scooter storage, improvements within school grounds to aid social distancing, playground markings and improvements to school entrances. School Streets were also established to support social distancing outside some schools (discussed below).

### **Go Smarter Safe Routes to School**

17. A joint programme between the NCC's Highways Improvement team and Schools Go Smarter, Go Smarter Safe Routes to School, aims to improve road safety and reduce traffic management issues experienced outside schools. This programme works with schools, to roll out infrastructure solutions alongside promoting alternative modes of transport such as walking and cycling. Where appropriate, School Streets are also considered as a solution to congestion issues outside schools. The introduction of a School Street enables the area around the school to be closed to cars at the start and end of the school day, (residents are exempt); pupils are encouraged to walk, cycle or scoot to school instead. To date, School Streets have been implemented at 4 schools, Bishops School Josephine Butler Primary, Newsham Primary School, Blyth New Delaval Primary School and Hareside Primary School, with a further 4 schools under consideration (New Hartley Primary, Seaton Sluice Middle, Seghill Primary and Central Upper Primary in Ashington).
18. Road safety improvements are also introduced around schools, where considered necessary, as part of the Local Transport Plan capital programme. These can include pedestrian crossings, improvements to footways and cycleways and introduction of traffic regulation orders to reduce vehicle / pedestrian conflict. This work is carried out in conjunction with schools so that engineering measures can work alongside messages to parents and behavioural change to improve overall safety and the environment for sustainable travel. As an example, improvements have recently been introduced on Moorhouse Lane in Ashington where two schools, St Aidans RC Primary and Thomas Berwick Primary are sited. The Council's Civil Enforcement Officers also attend school locations on a regular basis as part of their duties to enforce the regulations in place. This includes use of the Council's Enforcement Vehicle.
19. In addition, the Council also has a policy to introduce 20mph speed limits outside all schools across the County provided it is feasible to do so, aimed at slowing traffic and improving safety. This is an on-going programme over a number of years and to date 101 of the County's schools have 20mph speed limits in place. Schemes recently completed include Broomley First School, Cambo Primary School and Whittonstall First School.

20. To facilitate the walk to school there are 58 School Crossing Patrol sites across the County. These assist with safe crossing of roads at key locations on the route to school and encourage people to make the journey by sustainable means. 47 of these sites are currently staffed, with 11 currently vacant sites. Recruitment of school crossing patrols is difficult as the hours can be seen as restrictive, and the role involves working in all weather conditions for a relatively small salary. Advertising of posts is continually refreshed and where appropriate schools are also involved in publicising the vacancy.

### **Road Safety Education in Schools**

21. The Council has provided Road Safety training to school children since 2003, with the introduction of the 'Kerbcraft' programme. The Council has continued to provide this service, which focusses on a 6-week course delivered to primary school pupils. Safety awareness, through campaigns such as 'Be Bright, Be Seen', is coordinated to schools through newsletters and school assemblies. Some schools also attend 'Safety Works', an interactive training campus based in Newcastle where our Road Safety Training Officer teaches key skills alongside, Northumbria Police, Tyne and Wear Fire Service and St Johns' Ambulance.
22. As an active member of Road Safety Great Britain (RSGB), officers meet quarterly with regional officers to share events, activities and campaigns with key stakeholders in the North East.

### **Planning Requirements**

23. Where there is a significant change to a school the authority would request that a Framework School Travel was provided that provides an on-site assessment of transport links, facilities and outlines defined aims and objectives in relation to travel modes. A full School Travel Plan is required 6 months after occupation of the site and the school should have received bronze level through the Modeshift STARS system by the end of year 1 of occupation.

### **Department of Transport (DfT) Active travel Capability Fund**

24. Through Transport North East, the authority has secured funding through the DfT Capability Fund, it is anticipated that this funding will deliver further behaviour change measures and will look to expand the Schools Go Smarter project through this funding.

## Implications

<b>Policy</b>	The promotion of walking and cycling for the school journey will contribute towards the 'Active Towns' goal detailed within the Northumberland Walking and Cycling Vision, Our Way.
<b>Finance and value for money</b>	Typically, behaviour change activities provide high value for money returns with benefits resulting from modal shift and health benefits.  Behaviour change activities delivered through funding provided by the Department of Transport are benchmarked to ensure value for money.
<b>Legal</b>	none
<b>Procurement</b>	none
<b>Human Resources</b>	none
<b>Property</b>	none
<b>Equalities</b>	(Impact Assessment attached) Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No X N/A <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Risk Assessment</b>	N/A
<b>Crime &amp; Disorder</b>	none
<b>Customer Consideration</b>	An officer who leads the Schools Go Smarter project is available to discuss a specific school need and offer advice on activities that can be delivered through the Schools Go Smarter project. Highways officers work closely with schools where any concerns are identified
<b>Carbon reduction</b>	More people choosing active travel for the school journey as opposed to using a car will reduce carbon emissions.
<b>Health and Wellbeing</b>	Active forms of travel support better health and wellbeing, with healthier individuals likely to utilise less health and welfare support and are more likely to live well and for longer.
<b>Wards</b>	County wide

## **Background papers**

The Big Northumberland Gear Change website: [www.northumberlandgearchange.co.uk](http://www.northumberlandgearchange.co.uk)

## **Report sign off**

***Authors must ensure that officers and members have agreed the content of the report:***

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