

## Executive Advisory Panel – Future Communities 7<sup>th</sup> September 2023

<b>Report Title</b>	Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy (SMOTS)
<b>Report Author</b>	Sally Crew - Interim Transport Strategy Manager
<b>Lead Member</b>	Cllr Scott Edwards – Executive Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills

<b>Key Decision</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?</b>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Are there public sector equality duty implications?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Does the report contain confidential or exempt information (whether in appendices or not)?</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
<b>Applicable paragraph number/s for exemption from publication under Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972</b>	

### List of Appendices

**Appendix A** – Sustainable Travel to Education Strategy

**Appendix B** – Equality Screening Assessment

#### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Executive Advisory Panel with an update on the progress of the Sustainable Travel to Education Strategy.

#### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1 The Education and Inspections Act (2006) placed a range of duties upon local authorities to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport, intending to support the choices and flexibility of educational provision across the country.

- 2.2 The Act outlines four main elements to promoting sustainable modes of travel, including the assessment and audit of sustainable travel options within the local authority, the development of a strategy for the promotion of sustainable travel to schools and other educational or training facilities. As such, North Northamptonshire Council is required to produce and publish its Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy (SMoTS) annually.
- 2.3 In developing a strategy, the Council has a statutory duty to follow guidance issued by Government. The latest guidance was published in June 2023 and in which states, Local Authorities must publish a SMoTS for each academic year by 19<sup>th</sup> September.
- 2.4 The current strategy for North Northamptonshire is the Northamptonshire SMoTS, adopted by the former County Council in 2014/15.
- 2.5 The Sustainable Travel to Education Strategy has been produced in line with the requirements of the SMoTS to reflect the needs of the community, priorities and investment plans. The draft strategy has been developed in line with other strategic policies such as the Corporate Plan, Local Development Framework whilst being coordinated with emerging policies for example the Greenway Strategy and Local Walking and Cycling Investment Plans.
- 2.6 It is proposed that the Sustainable Travel to Education Strategy be consulted on for six weeks from 14<sup>th</sup> September until 26<sup>th</sup> October 2023 to allow the community and in particularly the school community to comment on the strategy.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1. It is recommended that Executive Advisory Panel (EAP) is asked to note and provide any comments on the proposals to be submitted to Executive requesting the approval of the Sustainable Modes of Transport Strategy.
- 3.2. Reason for Recommendations: The consultation of the Strategy allows for the community and in particularly the school community to comment on the strategy whilst complying with the requirements to have an updated strategy by the required deadline of 19<sup>th</sup> September.
- 3.3. Alternative Options Considered:
  - To adopt the Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy and engage with the community through its delivery.
  - Not update the Northamptonshire Sustainable Modes of Travel Strategy.

None of these options are recommended.

## 4. Report Background

- 4.1 North Northamptonshire Council are required to arrange free, suitable, home to school transport for children of compulsory school age, who are eligible, to their nearest suitable qualifying school in line with section 508B of the Education Act 1996 and the Government's statutory guidance 'Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance 2014'.
- 4.2 The Education and Inspections Act (2006) also places a duty on local authorities to promote the use of active and sustainable travel to education and further support the choices and flexibility of educational provision.
- 4.3 The Act outlined four main elements to promoting sustainable modes of travel, including the assessment and audit of sustainable travel options within the local authority, the development of a strategy for the promotion of sustainable travel to schools and other educational or training facilities. As such, North Northamptonshire Council is required to produce and publish its annually a Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy (SMoTS).
- 4.4 The Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) Home to School Transport Policy (April 2020) has been consulted to inform the acceptable walking and cycling distances for journeys to schools in the county. The Policy defines the appropriate walking distances for pupils under the Education Act 1996, stating:  
  
*"Section 444(5) defines walking distance as 2 miles for pupils under 8, and 3 miles for older pupils, in both cases measured by the nearest available route."*
- 4.5 Post-16 students may be eligible for other sources of financial help, depending on household income, to help with education costs including travel. There is no legal obligation to provide free home to school or college transport to students over the age of 16 or for those who do not meet the statutory requirements through the Education Act. However, there is a requirement for the local authority to consider unmet demand through the Transport Act 1985.
- 4.6 Section 63(1)(a), explains that local transport authorities must: "secure the provision of such public passenger transport services as the Council consider it appropriate to secure to meet any public transport requirements within the county which would not in their view be met apart from any action taken by them for that purpose."
- 4.7 In developing a strategy, the Council has a statutory duty to follow guidance issued by Government. The latest guidance was published in June 2023 and in which states, Local Authorities must publish a sustainable modes of travel strategy for each academic year by 19<sup>th</sup> September.
- 4.8 In early 2023, the Council consulted on the Home to School Policy. As part of this consultation, the community provided views of possible travel options for

the journey to school. This has been considered in developing the Sustainable Travel to Education Strategy.

- 4.9 The North Northamptonshire Sustainable Travel to Education Strategy replaces the Northamptonshire SMoTS, (2014/15).

## **5. Issues and Choices**

- 5.1 Given the age of the current SMoTs, it has been evident since before the Council's formation that it needed to be updated. The publication of the new Government guidance it is timely to prepare an updated Sustainable Travel to Education Strategy.
- 5.2 Public consultation is a necessary component of the plan's development. The plan will also be subject to an Equalities Screening Assessment.

## **6. Next Steps**

- 6.1 Assuming the approval of this report, the Sustainable Travel to Education Strategy will be consulted for six weeks from 14<sup>th</sup> September to 26<sup>th</sup> October 2023.
- 6.2 The strategy will be reviewed and updated following the consultation and be brought back to Executive for adoption.

## **7. Implications (including financial implications)**

### **7.1 Resources and Financial**

- 7.1.1 The Sustainable Travel to Education Strategy has been developed from using staff funded from existing budgets with its consultation funded similarly.

### **7.2 Legal and Governance**

- 7.2.1 As explained in section 4 above, the Council has a statutory duty to have a Sustainable Modes of Travel to School Strategy (SMoTS). The proposals in this report provide for implementing that duty.

### **7.3 Relevant Policies and Plans**

7.3.1 The proposal will assist the Council in meeting the priorities in the Corporate Plan around:

- Better, Brighter Futures
- Support schools to provide physical activity programmes through our Healthier Schools Programme.
- Support schools to provide physical activity programmes through our Healthier Schools Programme.

**Safe and Thriving Places**

- Enable people to travel across North Northamptonshire and beyond

**Green, sustainable Environment**

- Promote sustainable, active travel
- Embed low carbon technology, sustained and improved green infrastructure, and sustainable forms of transport fit for the future.

7.3.2 The proposal will assist the Council in developing and delivering Council's Local Transport Plan, which the Council has a statutory duty to deliver. As well as the Carbon Management Plan in reducing the carbon impact of travel to education.

**7.4 Risk**

7.4.1 A risk register will be developed as part of the deliver and implementation of the strategy and will ensure risks are identified, recorded and monitored.

**7.5 Consultation**

7.5.1 Public engagement and consultation are a necessary component of the plan's development and will involve comprehensive engagement, including four rounds of public consultation, capturing the views of our partners, stakeholders, interest groups, businesses and residents.

7.5.2 The engagement builds and facilitates a conversation about current and future journeys to education in the authority. It also ensures the more effective development, adoption, and delivery of the plan.

7.5.3 In early 2023, the Council conducted a consultation exercise seeking views on the Council's proposed Home to School policy changes and options affecting the discretionary transport. As part of this consultation, we asked the community for their view of possible travel options for the journey to school. The views provided have informed the Sustainable Travel to Education Strategy.

7.5.4 Assuming the approval of this report, the formal consultation of the Sustainable Travel to Education Strategy will be undertaken for six weeks.

7.5.5 Engagement will be in line with the Council's engagement principles, as set out below and best practice. We will deliver meaningful engagement through being:

- Simple and accessible
- Clear, positive, and informative
- Responsive
- Identifying relationships to other initiatives

7.5.6 To ensure people know how their involvement will shape the plans and development after the public consultation a 'we asked, you said, we did' report will be prepared and published. This report will collate and summarise the main issues raised and recommend how these should be addressed. This will include identifying if and how the emerging plan should be amended. Additionally, a log of engagement activities to demonstrate how stakeholders have been involved and informed.

## **7.6 Consideration by Executive Advisory Panel**

7.6.1 Any comments from the Executive Advisory Panel (EAP) meeting scheduled for Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> September will be provided to the Executive for its consideration.

## **7.7 Consideration by Scrutiny**

7.7.1 This report has not been considered by the Council's scrutiny function.

## **7.8 Equality Implications**

7.8.1 The Equality Screening Assessment has not identified any adverse impact on individuals with protected characteristics.

## **7.9 Climate and Environment Impact**

7.9.1 The Government's Transport Decarbonisation Plan, Levelling Up White Paper and Bus Back Better all lay the groundwork for strengthening the role that transport can play in reducing environmental harm.

7.9.2 This strategy encourages people to the take up of active and sustainable travel to education and introduces measures to support their usage.

## **7.10 Community Impact**

7.10.1 The consultation proposed will support effective policy and decision-making, and scrutiny, making a significant difference to the delivery of sustainable

travel, transport infrastructure and services and therefore have an equally significant impact on the local communities.

## **7.11 Crime and Disorder Impact**

7.11.1 There are no specific impacts relating to the recommendations in this report.

### **1. Background Papers**

8.1 None