

Medway Council
Meeting of Regeneration, Culture and Environment
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Thursday, 19 December 2024

6.30pm to 9.03pm

Record of the meeting

Subject to approval as an accurate record at the next meeting of this committee

Present: Councillors: Field (Chairperson), Brake, Browne, Campbell, Doe, Etheridge, Jackson, Jones, Kemp, Lawrence, McDonald, Mark Prenter and Williams

Substitutes: Councillors: Brake, Browne, Jones, Kemp, McDonald and Mark Prenter

In Attendance: Alex Constantinides, Strategic Lead Front Line Services
Nicola Couchman, Democratic Services Officer
Ruth Du-Lieu, Assistant Director, Front Line Services and Deputy Director of Place
Chris Harrison, Regional Director, Project Centre Ltd
Wayne Hemingway, Head of Democratic Services
Vicky Nutley, Head of Legal Services
Stephanie Weaver, PCL Marstons, Principal Engagement Consultant

554 Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Animashaun, Cook, Fearn, Filmer, Myton and Peake.

555 Urgent matters by reason of special circumstances

There were none.

556 Disclosable Pecuniary Interests or Other Significant Interests and Whipping

Disclosable pecuniary interests

There were none.

Other significant interests (OSIs)

There were none.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 19 December 2024

Other interests

Councillor Lawrence informed the Committee that he was the Chair of Trustees for The Inspire Partnership which governs 9 schools including the Delce Academy and explained that he had considered whether he had a pecuniary interest or an OSI and have concluded that he had neither.

Councillor Lawrence explained that a member of the public with knowledge of the relevant facts would not reasonably think that his interest is so significant that it would be likely to prejudice his judgement of the public interest. On that basis he declared that he would participate in the debate and vote on this matter.

Councillor Field informed the Committee that as part of his day job for Transport for London he assesses School Streets but has not stated whether he is in favour of School Streets or not and this does not impact his ability to participate in and vote on the debate.

557 Call-in: Safer, Healthier Streets Programme - School Streets Tranche 2

Discussion:

Officers addressed the Committee to provide context to the School Streets Tranche 2 decision and explained that this was part of the Safer, Healthier Streets Programme which also included red routes and moving traffic schemes.

The Committee were informed that School Streets Tranche 2 was not far enough along the process to accept formal representations against the schemes, and it would get to that stage when statutory consultation begins. Officers explained that the aim was to work with schools, parents and residents to co-design the schemes and this would take place before any scheme reaches statutory consultation.

Officers summarised key figures regarding the number of cars on the road and children killed on the roads and reported that in Medway, over the 3-year period up to the end of December 2023, there were 223 collisions which involved 248 child casualties up to the age of 16.

Officers explained that the principle behind school streets was to temporarily suspend the access roads around schools so that children can walk and cycle safely at drop off and pick up times. This in general created a safer environment for all, particularly vulnerable road users like pedestrians and cyclists. Although officers understood that not all children can take advantage of walking and cycling, the vast majority can and the idea was to encourage those who can, to change their behaviours and the behaviours of their parents and carers.

The Committee were informed that the feedback from 7 school streets already implemented was positive and the Council had received national recognition

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 19 December 2024

and praise from Active Travel England. Officers explained that they had recently been awarded the Road Safety award from the City Transport & Traffic Innovation publication for the Councils schemes, however, they were not complacent and intended to review the outputs of the existing sites once a full year's data was available in Spring 2025.

With regards to Tranche 2, officers informed the Committee that stage 1 involved looking at locations and deciding if a school street would potentially benefit the children and each location was subject to an extensive review. Officers would then draw up an indicative design and engage with the schools, parents and local residents to gain their thoughts. This could lead to some changes in design and informs if the location was suitable.

Officers explained that following any agreement by Cabinet to proceed, the work would then start in earnest and where necessary officers would work with schools, residents, and parents to agree a final design and operating times. This would then be followed by a statutory consultation process and following statutory consultation, any objections or formal comments would be considered and changes made if required before the scheme was taken to implementation.

Officers clarified that they were at the very start of this process for the schools in Tranche 2, they had not carried out a statutory consultation nor had Cabinet given the go ahead to implement any schemes. At this stage officers had just engaged with stakeholders over the initial design.

The opposition spokesperson explained why the decisions had been called in and said that officers had failed to provide any data for the first and second Tranches of school streets. Concerns were expressed regarding the lack of data on accidents and air quality and the need for policy based in evidence was emphasised.

Public speakers were then invited to address the Committee.

Councillor Trevor Clarke, Ward Member for Fort Horsted, informed the Committee that there had not been any accidents at Horsted Primary School and the school were not aware of their inclusion until the Cabinet report was published. Concerns were expressed regarding the impact on the Davis Estate, the lack of engagement with Horsted School and the lack of data on traffic flows. Councillor Clarke said that there would not be fewer car journeys because of school streets, the individual needs of each street needed to be considered and the areas selected should be reviewed.

Michelle Atkins addressed the Committee to represent residents nearby Fairview Primary School. Whilst acknowledging the safety of children was paramount, concerns were raised regarding the lack of alternative access for residents and displacement of parking onto Maidstone Road and Bredhurst Road which were already busy roads. Concerns were also expressed about the lack of consideration given to the demographics of the area and high population of elderly residents who required the assistance of carers and family and

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 19 December 2024

friends who would not be able to drive into the area if a school street was implemented.

Jim Kehoe addressed the Committee regarding St William of Perth School and Canon Close as a Medway resident and grandparent of a child at the school. The Committee were informed that his principle concern was safety with traffic displaced to Maidstone Road where there was a history of accidents and speeding offences. Jim Kehoe explained that there were a number of recorded accidents in Maidstone Road and it was in the top 20 roads in Kent for speeding fines and there had not been any accidents in Canon Close. Concern was expressed regarding the displacement of traffic and pedestrians onto Maidstone Road which was already used by 2 nearby secondary schools. The results of the public consultation (with 72% disagreeing or strongly disagreeing) was raised and the Committee were asked to listen to this and reconsider the schemes.

David Stubbs spoke as a parent of a child attending St William of Perth School and explained that the problem school streets was trying to solve was not clear for the school in question and there was no data to support this. Concerns expressed included the lack of officer presence to observe safety issues near the school, the lack of data provided and displacement onto Maidstone Road where there were multiple accidents and speeding offences and was more dangerous.

Mark Snoswell, the Development Director at Kings School addressed the Committee and explained that whilst parking had always been a concern and had been exacerbated recently, there were no accidents in the last 20 years. Concern was expressed regarding the lack of transport solutions for parents and displacement to more dangerous roads which were difficult to navigate. The Committee were informed that proposals for an alternative solution had been shared with Councillor Paterson, but he had not responded.

Stuart Bourne addressed the Committee as a parent of 2 children at St Margaret's School and explained he was in favour of the school streets schemes due to the issue of poor air quality on children's health, including his own children and especially those with respiratory illnesses. He explained that road safety was paramount as he had witnessed an accident and near misses outside the school and 64% of parents at the school were in favour of the scheme.

The Committee thanked all of the public speakers for their contributions.

Councillors raised the following issues:

Exemptions for people with blue badges, carers and healthcare workers – Officers explained that blue badge holder residents in a school zone could apply for an exemption and if carers were fined when substituting for other workers this could be resolved.

Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 19 December 2024

Fines issued when children not in school and appeals refused – Officers explained there had been some incidents as the new system embedded but if officers were made aware these would be looked into. Officers were also writing to all schools to understand when training days would take place and would not issue any fines during training days.

Lack of data on air quality and accidents – Advisors from PCL Marstons explained that a 2021 study showed a 23% drop in air pollution during school periods and that air quality data for Tranche 1 would be available after 12 months as the monitoring had been installed prior to the start of the scheme. Advisors agreed to provide the national study to Members.

Lack of data benchmarking and evidence – Members expressed concern at the lack of evidence for accidents and air quality and lack of benchmarking. Members asked to review data from Tranche 1 before going ahead with Tranche 2 and would like to see more focus on schemes to protect children aged 12 and above as the data showed they are most at risk.

Use of cameras outside of the scheme hours – Members asked whether cameras were rolling all the time or just during the hours of the scheme as this was a matter of public interest if the public's movements were being recorded. Advisors responded to say they would have to confirm this outside of the meeting and a briefing note would be provided on the continuous running of cameras.

Feedback from existing schemes – Officers informed Members that there had not been any complaints or concerns about displacement from the existing schemes and the feedback from schools in Tranche 1 had been positive.

Officers explained that the next steps if the scheme continues was to undertake statutory consultation and comments made at the meeting regarding engagement not being as good as it could be had been taken on board. The next stage would include engagement with residents, schools, parents and Councillors as well as talking to children and schemes would not proceed to statutory consultation until all key stakeholders had been listened to.

Members requested monitoring and review of school streets a year after implementation and officers confirmed the review of school streets was already included in the Committee's work programme.

A proposal was put that the decisions be referred back to Cabinet for reconsideration, asking Cabinet to request monitoring and the data that justifies the selection of the schools in Tranche 2, however on being put to the vote the proposal was not agreed.

A proposal was then put that having considered the call in, the Committee agreed to accept Cabinet decisions 135/2024 to 144/2024 and therefore take no further action, and on being put to the vote the proposal was agreed.

**Regeneration, Culture and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 19
December 2024**

Decision:

The Committee having considered the call in, agreed to accept Cabinet decisions 135/2024 to 144/2024 and therefore take no further action.

Chairperson

Date:

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