

Report To: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 6th March 2014

Lead Member/Officer: Lead Member for Public Realm

Report Author: Head of Highways and Environmental Services

Title: Safe Routes in Communities

1. What is the report about?

The report examines the Safe Routes in Communities (SRIC) initiative. It discusses the background to the initiative as well as the processes involved at the various stages of a project funded by the Welsh Government's SRIC grant.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

Communities Scrutiny Committee has requested a paper to examine the administration of the Scheme county-wide, the benefits of the Scheme, analysis of any problems encountered and the measures taken to address them

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Committee provides observations and supports the continued application for Safe Routes in Communities funding in Denbighshire.

4. Report details

4.1. Background

Safe Routes in Communities is the Welsh Government's funding programme to encourage increased levels of walking and cycling. It was originally set up as "Safe Routes to School" in 1999 and was renamed "Safe Routes in Communities" in 2008.

Safe Routes to School programmes were originally set up in Denmark in the 1970s as a means of reducing the number of cars being used for the school journey by providing safe walking and cycling routes as an alternative. Benefits arise from reduced congestion, reductions in air pollution and corresponding improvements to health from increased physical activity.

Like most local authorities, the Council regularly receives complaints about school related parking problems. These complaints mostly originate from residents who live in the vicinity of schools although some also come from parents. These problems tend to be worse at opening and closing times but can occur all day at schools with overspill parking problems.

School related problems are often worse at urban schools where school populations are high and there is a large catchment within a relatively compact geographical area. This means that entitlement to free school transport is low, resulting in larger proportions of children being driven to school. A good illustration of this point is a

survey undertaken in 2007 at Ysgol Penmorfa in Prestatyn. This survey found that 90% of pupils lived within 1 kilometre (0.6 of mile) of the school. Despite the relative close distance from their homes to the school, it was found that more than 60% of pupils travelled to school by car.

When complaints are received about school parking, complainants will often make a request for the school to create additional parking within their grounds. Doing so can have short term benefits but can eventually increase traffic levels. This is probably because existing congestion actually acts as a deterrent to some motorists.

4.2 Typical Safe Routes projects

As discussed in Section 4.1, the main aim of Safe Routes projects is to increase the numbers of people who walk and cycle and to also reduce the amount of trips being made by car. New cycle paths and footpaths are a common feature of Safe Routes projects but they can also include the introduction of traffic calming measures to reduce traffic speeds and the provision of new pedestrian crossing facilities.

4.3 Safe Routes projects in Denbighshire

Since 2006, however, a total of £1.4 million has been received. A list of the Safe Routes projects undertaken in Denbighshire since 2006 is attached in Appendix A.

4.4 Administrative process

Until relatively recently, all the Safe Routes schemes undertaken in Denbighshire were focused on schools. The funding application process required the completion of an application form for each school. It was also essential that the school in question had produced a Travel Plan. (A Travel Plan is a document which states how the organisation is going to reduce the number of its employees/pupils etc. that travel by car). The production of a Travel Plan is quite an onerous piece of work. In practice, a number of schools were unable or unwilling to produce a Travel Plan owing to the time commitment involved which reduced the number of candidate projects. Three years ago, the Welsh Government (WG) introduced the requirement for a Community Travel Plan to be produced for all bids. This placed the onus on local authorities to form a Community Travel Committee which would be tasked with producing the Travel Plan.

The actual grant application process is fairly time consuming owing to the extensive amount of survey work that needs to be completed to provide suitable baseline data. The requirement for Community Travel Plans has increased the work required by local authorities.

At the time of writing of this report, the Welsh Government has issued new guidance the SRIC grant which places the emphasis back on school-based bids.

4.5 Delivery of SRIC projects

Over the 15 years since the inaugural grant, Denbighshire has generally been very successful in bidding for Safe Routes funding. There have just been two years where no funding was awarded. The first instance of this was in financial year 2011-12 because the overall grant was substantially reduced and because the Welsh

Government felt our bid had too much of a school-based focus. The second instance this occurred was for the current financial year. Two bids were submitted; one for Ruthin and one for Bodelwyddan. Both bids were for the second phases of projects that had first been funded by the grant in 2012-13. The main reason for the failure of the bids was that WG had recently changed the scoring mechanism used to assess bids, to give a greater priority for schemes in deprived areas.

4.6 Problems encountered

The previous SRIC projects listed in the Appendix have been delivered successfully. Occasionally, technical problems have had to be overcome, but this is common to all construction schemes of this nature and not specific to Safe Routes programme.

Historically, the only specific Safe Routes problem was the difficulty in getting some schools to produce Travel Plans. The challenges of delivering construction projects within a one year time frame have also caused problems occasionally, but this is a problem common to many grant funded schemes.

Both the County Councillor for Bodelwyddan and Bodelwyddan Town Council have expressed concerns about the management of the Bodelwyddan SRIC project. These concerns can be summarised as follows:

- a) Poor workmanship by contractor affecting some speed cushions
- b) Safety concerns about a traffic calming feature
- c) Differences between agreed scheme and what has been implemented on site

Councillor E A Jones, the local member, has provided written evidence for the Committee and this can be seen at Appendix D.

Points (a) and (b) are being addressed. The poor workmanship will be made good by the contractor at their own expense, as is standard practice. The traffic calming feature referred to in (b) has since been removed in response to the concerns raised. It is suggested that neither of these items are something unique to SRIC projects.

The suggestion regarding the apparent differences between the agreed scheme and what was implemented is explained in more detail in a letter to Bodelwyddan Town Council included in Appendix B. Only Phase 1 of the scheme has been implemented to date. There are three elements to Phase 1 which are; a cycle track; a traffic calming scheme with a zebra crossing; and a drop off area at the school. The cycle track was implemented as per the original drawing at the consultation stage. The traffic calming and crossing wasn't detailed at consultation stage. Instead, a note on the consultation plan stated that a traffic calming scheme and crossing would be developed in that location. These elements were fully consulted upon with stakeholders once the traffic calming scheme was designed. Finally, the drop off area was added after the initial consultation exercise because it was requested in a number of consultation responses. This latter change was not communicated to the Town Council members of the Community Travel Committee until after the bid was submitted owing to a lack of time.

The main lesson to learn from this last issue is for us to allow more time to complete the consultation. However, it should be noted that the tight timescale was largely brought about because of the Travel Committee's desire for the scheme to start as soon as possible, rather than waiting 12 months for the next funding cycle.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

Safe Routes in Communities contributes towards the corporate priorities of “Improving our roads” by improving the safety of the network. It also makes a contribution towards the priority of “Vulnerable people are protected and able to live as independently as possible” by providing safer walking and cycling routes including facilities for those with mobility impairments.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

Capital costs of new works are normally fully covered by the grant. Future maintenance costs are considered as part of the assessment of scheme options and this includes consultation with the HES Department’s Asset Management team. Safe Routes projects usually reduce traffic around schools which has a positive benefit for the school in terms of reduced congestion and reduced complaints.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

The EqIA concludes that EqIAs should be undertaken for individual SRIC projects. It also concludes that generally SRIC projects have a positive impact for those with impaired mobility.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

No previous consultation has been carried out with Scrutiny in regard to SRIC. All main stakeholders are consulted during the development of all SRIC projects. It is necessary to evidence this consultation in the grant application.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

As stated in Section 6 all capital costs are funded by Safe Routes In Communities grants, any increase in revenue maintenance costs are planned within the overall Environment and Highways existing budget. Investment in this area may also have a dampening effect on the rising the costs of Home to School Transport.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

A requirement of the SRIC process is that risk assessments are undertaken for each project to manage specific risks associated with project delivery.

Where a scheme is proposed to be funded over subsequent years, there’s a risk that the first phase may get funding only for subsequent phases to not secure funding, so it is suggested that works are planned so phases are fairly “standalone” in nature.

11. Power to make the Decision

Article 6.3.3 of the Council’s Constitution sets out Scrutiny’s powers with respect to policy development and review

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