

## **Divisions Affected – All**

### **CABINET**

**19 June 2026**

### **School Streets**

## **Report of Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
  - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
  - b) Agree that relevant officers will continue to update Scrutiny for 12 months on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations, or until they are completed (if earlier).

### **REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND**

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

### **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

3. The Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the School Streets programme at its meeting on 22 April 2026. This item was requested by the Committee to scrutinise progress and issues in the implementation of School Streets across Oxfordshire, and to explore the effectiveness of current arrangements in supporting the Council's wider transport and climate objectives.
4. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Andrew Gant, the then Cabinet Member for Transport Management, Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways, Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place, Mark Gregory, Team Leader: Behavioural Change and Travel, Cathy Champion, Operations Manager: Civil Enforcement, and Melissa Goodacre, Sustainable Transport

Manager, for attending to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

## **SUMMARY**

5. The then Cabinet Member for Transport Management emphasised that the School Streets programme is a key part of the Council's Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) rather than a standalone initiative. School Streets schemes aim to reduce motor traffic around school gates by restricting non-exempt vehicles at drop-off and pick-up times, encouraging a shift towards walking, wheeling, and cycling. The Committee heard that School Streets have been widely adopted in many local authorities, with over 1,000 schemes nationally, and early evidence in Oxfordshire (for example at Larkrise Primary School in Oxford) showed reduced traffic and improved air quality during operation times.
6. The Committee's discussion focused on how the School Streets programme should develop and expand. Members heard that the scheme is progressing through phased delivery, with further rollout planned following a countywide review of schools. Early evidence was positive, showing reduced car use and increased active travel at Phase 1 sites. However, members were concerned that the programme has so far been more suited to urban settings and may be harder to apply in rural areas or at schools on main roads. They emphasised the need for a broader range of measures, alongside street closures, so that more schools can benefit.
7. A second major theme was how to strengthen the programme's long-term effectiveness and fairness. Members raised concerns about the limits of current enforcement and exemption arrangements, particularly where exempt vehicles cannot be fully monitored and where misuse may undermine confidence. They also discussed the contribution of independent schools to peak-time traffic and the need for more active engagement with them. Finally, the Committee stressed that School Streets and wider active travel principles should be built into new schools and housing developments from the start through planning, section 106 agreements, and developer-funded infrastructure.
8. The Committee makes five recommendations to Cabinet which are focused on strengthening delivery and governance of the School Streets programme as well broadening the programme's reach and long-term impact.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

9. The Committee explored how School Streets are developed and agreed at the local level. In discussion, members noted that, whilst interest in new School Streets often originates from school communities or local representatives, the formal processes for developing a scheme could be more transparent and inclusive, involving a wider range of stakeholders. The Committee was keen to encourage early engagement of local stakeholders (especially county

councillors and parish or town councils for the area in question) as this would be crucial to tapping into local knowledge – for example, about traffic patterns, community needs, and potential issues – and ensuring broad support before schemes proceed to consultation. Such engagement would also ensure that a proposal for a School Street had the support of the county councillor.

10. The Committee highlighted that, when it comes to Controlled Parking Zones, 20 mph limits or part-night lighting, the Council typically involves local elected members early in the design phase and uses established consultation frameworks with parish and town councils. The Committee considers that adopting similar engagement and sign-off processes to those used for other local traffic and transport interventions would strengthen governance. It also believes that applying these proven methods to School Streets will enhance the quality of scheme design and foster community buy-in from the outset.
11. Adopting this recommendation would benefit the Council by improving the success rate and sustainability of new School Streets schemes from an early stage. Stronger local engagement and a clear sign-off process would likely result in better tailored schemes, reducing the risk of unforeseen local objections and ensuring alignment with other local traffic measures. It would build community confidence and help manage expectations by making sure plans are understood and refined collaboratively, thereby smoothing implementation and long-term adherence.
12. On the other hand, the Committee is concerned that insufficient input from local councillors and community stakeholders could lead to avoidable design flaws or public dissatisfaction, ultimately undermining the Council's active travel goals and wasting time and resources if schemes have to be halted or reworked.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council should strengthen early engagement and sign-off arrangements for School Streets proposals, including clearer involvement of county councillors and town and parish councils, drawing on established processes used for other traffic interventions.***

13. The Committee almost without exception welcomed the ambition to expand the School Streets initiative across the county, noting that funding has been secured for planned phases 4 and 5 of the programme. However, members were concerned that the pace of the current delivery is constrained by limited officer capacity and finite funding streams. With the programme's success generating growing demand from many communities, the Committee stressed that the Council needs to plan proactively for sustained resourcing of School Streets, ensuring that there are enough trained staff and adequate budget allocations to continue rolling out new schemes and maintaining existing ones.
14. Officers advised that two School Engagement Officers within the Behaviour Change & Travel Plans team are currently supporting the delivery of School Streets among other duties. The Committee was advised that phases 1-3 have been delivered through a mix of council funding and external Active

Travel grant support. Members felt that scaling up the programme to reach more schools will require not only identifying future capital funding for infrastructure and enforcement technology, but also bolstering the staff resources needed to engage with schools, manage consultations, and oversee implementation on the ground.

15. If this recommendation were to be adopted, the Council would benefit from greater clarity and stability in delivering future School Streets, allowing it to plan ahead rather than proceed piecemeal. Adequate capacity and funding would reduce delays, maintain momentum, and support the LTCP's traffic reduction aims. It would also demonstrate the Council's commitment to tackling school-run congestion and pollution.
16. The Committee is concerned that limited officer support could slow delivery, miss opportunities where communities want schemes, and overstretch staff. Poor budget planning could also prevent expansion beyond the initial grant-funded phases, weakening long-term impact and public confidence.

***Recommendation 2: That the Council should ensure adequate officer capacity and funding is made available to support expansion of the School Streets programme, including consideration within future budget planning.***

17. The Committee noted that independent schools (i.e., those that fall outside the state-maintained system) can be significant generators of car traffic, particularly in urban areas, contributing to local congestion and air quality issues during peak times. Members observed that, in some but by no means all cases, these schools may not yet be fully engaged with the Council's sustainable travel initiatives, even though many independent school sites face similar traffic challenges as state schools. The Committee believes that a more proactive and coordinated approach to working with independent schools is needed so that they adopt measures to reduce car use for school journeys.
18. Officers informed the Committee that discussions are already taking place with certain independent schools on travel planning and potential measures to alleviate traffic – such as promoting dedicated coach and shuttle services, encouraging car-sharing among parents, and facilitating “park-and-ride” arrangements for pupils. Whilst some independent schools have demonstrated interest in these ideas, members are keen that the Council moves more quickly to bring all such schools into the conversation and to share best practice from successful School Streets or similar schemes.
19. Accepting this recommendation would benefit the Council by reducing peak-time traffic from independent schools and improving road safety and air quality. It would also support county-wide congestion and emissions goals. It would show that the Council expects *all* schools to support safer and more sustainable travel. It could also unlock school-led measures, such as funded transport or staggered start times, that complement the Council's ambitions.

20. If this recommendation is not implemented, traffic problems around independent schools may persist or worsen without a coordinated response. The Council could be criticised for overlooking a significant source of local congestion and failing to show leadership. This could weaken the overall programme, as traffic from a few large schools may offset benefits elsewhere, and leave nearby residents facing continued congestion and safety concerns.

***Recommendation 3: That the Council should accelerate engagement with independent schools to reduce traffic impacts associated with school travel.***

21. The Committee discussed how enforcement of School Streets is carried out and raised concerns about the perceived misuse of exemptions and gaps in current enforcement data. School Streets in Oxfordshire are enforced by ANPR cameras linked to Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). These TROs define categories of exempt vehicles (such as residents of the street, blue badge holders, emergency services, school staff and others) which are allowed to enter during restricted times. By design, the Council's camera system does not record trips by exempt vehicles, which means persistent abuse of exemptions is difficult to detect without external reports or cooperation from licensing authorities in cases like taxi misuse.
22. Members acknowledged that enforcement must operate within the confines of national legislation and data protection rules. Nonetheless, the Committee believes there is scope to review the current exemptions list and enforcement practices to address recurring non-compliance. For example, the Committee welcomed the idea of working with district council licensing bodies to remove specific vehicles from the exemptions register if there is clear evidence of them flouting the intent of the rules. Additionally, members supported exploring whether any technological or process improvements could enhance monitoring and compliance without breaching data regulations.
23. If exemptions and enforcement arrangements remain unexamined, loopholes may continue to be seen to undermine the schemes. Visible non-compliance, including repeated use by supposedly exempt vehicles, could erode public trust, discourage active travel, and invite criticism that the Council is not properly enforcing its traffic orders, damaging the credibility of School Streets and related initiatives.
24. However, implementing this recommendation would benefit the Council by making School Streets fairer and more effective. Tighter control and review of exemptions should improve compliance, strengthen safety and environmental benefits, and maintain public confidence and community support. It would also reduce residual traffic during restricted periods, increasing benefits for pupils and residents.

***Recommendation 4: That the Council should review exemptions and enforcement arrangements for School Streets, within legislative constraints, and considers options to tighten controls where persistent issues arise.***

25. The Committee recognises that the most cost-effective way to promote active travel to school is to integrate these principles at the earliest stages of planning new infrastructure. Members discussed the fact that many new schools and residential developments in recent years were approved before current policies on active travel were in place, resulting in designs that still encourage car use by default.
26. The Committee is keen to see the Council take every opportunity to shape future development so that school gate congestion problems are 'designed out' where possible – for example, by ensuring safe walking/cycling routes are built, appropriate drop-off restrictions are in place from the very beginning, and sites are selected or configured to minimise traffic impacts.
27. Officers advised that as part of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan, active travel requirements for new developments are being strengthened. The Committee was also told that planning processes can use tools such as section 106 agreements to secure off-site improvements around schools.
28. The Committee welcomed these steps and highlighted the importance of including School Streets or similar measures as explicit standard criteria when negotiating with developers for new school sites and associated housing developments. The Committee considers that, by embedding School Streets principles into planning policy, the Council can ensure that new communities have safer, healthier travel options embedded from the outset. This would, of course, reduce the need for retrofitting costly interventions later.
29. By adopting this recommendation, the Council would benefit from more sustainable and integrated growth. Prioritising School Streets and active travel in planning would help to ensure that future schools are designed for safer, lower-traffic travel which would both support LTCP commitments to reduce car journeys and also improve public health. This preventative approach should reduce the need for later mitigation and encourage walking and cycling from the outset.
30. If this approach is not pursued, the Council risks missed opportunities to address transport impacts at the planning stage. New schools and housing could entrench car-dependent travel and recreate the congestion and safety problems School Streets are meant to prevent. This would undermine climate and health objectives and could increase future costs by requiring retrofitted measures or responses to avoidable traffic issues.

***Recommendation 5: That the Council ensures School Streets principles and wider active travel measures are prioritised within planning, section 106 agreements, and developer-funded infrastructure for new schools and housing developments.***

## **FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

31. The Committee does not currently anticipate revisiting this topic during this municipal year.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

32. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
33. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

Anita Bradley, Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex:	Pro-forma Response Template
Background papers:	None
Other Documents:	None
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