

2 December 2002

**Improving Road Safety in relation
to Child Deaths and Injuries**

Report of Head of Overview and Scrutiny

Purpose of Report

1. To report the outcome of a seminar about improving road safety in relation to child deaths and injuries.

Background

2. Members of the Scrutiny Sub-Committee for Strong Healthy and Safe Communities resolved at their meeting on 2 September 2002 to hold a seminar about improving road safety in relation to child deaths and injuries.
3. Child deaths and injuries form one of the elements of Target 8 within the County Council's Local Public Service Agreement (LPSA) for the period 2002 – 2005. The target concerns the number of people (including children) killed or seriously injured in road accidents (National Target 26) and seeks to reduce the numbers of people killed or seriously injured to 228 by the year ending 31 December 2004, a reduction of 13 on the performance expected without the LPSA target. Improving road safety in relation to child deaths and casualties is also identified as a key area for improvement in the County Council's Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA) Self Assessment.
4. A seminar about the issues was given to Members of the Sub-Committee by Mr Dave Wafer, Traffic Group Business Manager and Mr Alan Kennedy, Senior Road Safety Officer from the Environment and Technical Services Department at County Hall on 14 October 2002 (copies of the presentation slides have been distributed to all members of the Sub-Committee).

Seminar Content

5. The main themes in relation to child casualties outlined in the seminar were:
 - 2010 Target – Tomorrow's Roads – Safer for Everyone
 - LPSA Targets
 - Child Casualties -The problem
 - Child Casualties – What are we Doing about it?

6. As regards the 2010 targets, members were advised that by 2010, reductions of 40% were sought in the number of people killed or seriously injured (KSI), and 50% in the number of children KSI, together with a 10% reduction in the slight casualty rate. The LPSA target, however, was more stretching than those for 2010.
7. With reference to international comparisons, Great Britain had the lowest rate of casualties amongst European Union Members in 2000 in terms of road deaths per 100,000 population, but the picture regarding children was less promising, with fatality rates for child pedestrians (0-14 years) of 0.94 per 100,000 in the UK in 1997 as compared with rates of 0.22 for the Netherlands and 0.52 for Germany.
8. The rates for injuries to children in road accidents in County Durham were nearly twice the national average, with 313 children injured in 2001. The highest rates for child casualties were in Easington District and across the County there appeared to be a strong correlation between child casualty rates and deprivation. The figures for child casualties in County Durham in 2001 were:
 - child pedestrians 42%
 - child car passengers 35%
 - cyclists 15%
 - other child casualties 8%
9. Actions being taken to reduce child casualties could be summarised under the following headings:
 - Engineering (accident improvement projects, safer routes to schools, and working with District Councils in areas of deprivation)
 - Education (in schools and colleges, skills training both pedestrian and cyclist, local, national and regional publicity campaigns and the National Driver Improvement Scheme)
10. A new initiative, to be piloted in Easington District, was the child pedestrian training scheme. The scheme would involve paid volunteers working in schools to teach young people road safety skills and to put these into practice.
11. As with all schemes, there were issues around sustainability and it was important that areas of funding be identified to enable this important work to continue.

Issues Raised

12. The following issues were raised in the ensuing discussion:
 - School Gate Parking – There were concerns about the hazards presented by school gate parking. Many schools appeared unwilling

to take action to address the issues. However, there had been research to show that school gate parking, whilst causing frustration for some drivers, had the effect of substantially reducing traffic speeds in the vicinity of schools.

- Most accidents to children occurred in the early evening and at weekends, with increased evening rates in the summer months.
- Behaviour of parents – Recent research had shown that many parents set a bad example to their children in relation to crossing the road. Leaflets containing road safety messages were available for parents.
- The funds available for individual members to direct for traffic calming measures etc., within their Divisions were felt to be insufficient.
- The areas with the highest child casualty rates in Easington District were Seaham and Dawdon.
- In relation to cyclists without bells, or lights during the hours of darkness, enforcement was a matter for the police.
- The figures for injuries to children being carried in cars could relate to injuries incurred by more than one child carried in the same car involved in an accident.
- There was a need for better and continuing education of school crossing patrols. Examples of bad practice were cited.
- Road Safety education was being progressed through SureStart and the majority of schools in County Durham were receptive to road safety education. However, the other daily demands upon schools meant that “selling” the road safety message was an ongoing process.
- Concerning the links between deprivation and child road accident levels, action should be taken to seek NRF funding for schemes.
- There were a number of factors contributing to the difference between international casualty rates, such as road engineering; the design of housing estates and better public transport systems on the Continent.
- Recent figures had shown an increase in the current year in road accident fatalities in County Durham and work was ongoing with the police to address the issues. It appeared that alcohol or drugs might be playing a greater causative role in some of the fatalities. However, the increased findings of these substances might simply be a consequence of the now routine toxicology tests carried out by

the police on persons involved in road fatalities. It was also important to note that, although tests might reveal the presence of alcohol or drugs, there may be other factors which might be of more relevance to the accident, such as driving an unroadworthy vehicle, not wearing a seat belt, or not conforming to speed limits.

- Work was ongoing towards achieving the LPSA target, although it was appreciated that more still needed to be done.

Recommendation

13. That a further report on progress towards reducing child casualties and achieving the LPSA target be given to the Sub-Committee in March 2003.

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