

This is one of the toughest nuts we've got to crack....how the hell are we going to do it? .

Exploring school traffic management as a threat and opportunity to promoting active travel to school - perspectives of area and neighbourhood wardens in Bradford

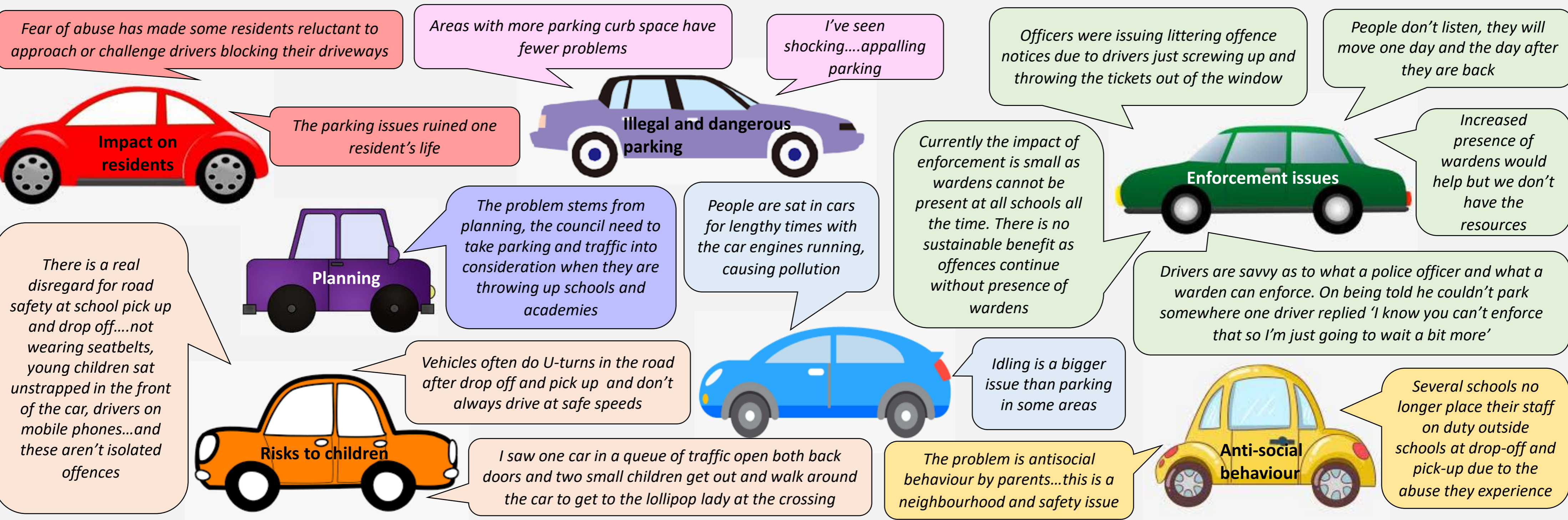
Dr. Amy J Stevens Email: amyjanestevens@doctors.org.uk

This is a decade old problem....and it's getting worse

INTRODUCTION AND METHODS

Promoting active travel to schools is a longstanding ambition of local areas nationwide; yet driving to school remains common. Some local authorities are exploring the effectiveness of closing roads around schools to address this. However, this has its challenges. As part of Bradford Metropolitan Council's Public Health department's commitment to promoting sustainable travel, improving air quality, and reducing childhood obesity in 2019 we undertook qualitative research in the form of area based focus groups to explore the challenges and opportunities of the school commute in Bradford from the perspective of area and neighbourhood wardens. The data was analysed using thematic analysis.

WHAT ARE THE PROBLEMS?



- **Safety:** concerns of narrow footpaths, traffic chaos, dark evenings and risk of their child getting run over
- **Time constraints:** Driving onwards to drop off other children/go to work etc.
- **Distance**
- **Bad weather**
- **Ingrained behaviour**
- **Laziness**

"There is a problem of silo working between departments."

There were examples given of schools, the police and neighbourhood staff working together with school children around road safety. However, there were also accounts of failure to collaborate due to the perception by one party that the problem wasn't their responsibility:

"Some schools don't see the traffic management issues as their problem and take no responsibility for tackling the problems."

"Police say the traffic problems are the local authority's fault for letting parents choose where their children go to school and therefore children aren't attending their nearest school."

There were several comments that planning and education departments should work jointly together when considering school developments.

Education

- Delivered in schools by neighbourhood staff and police from an environmental, health and road safety perspective.

"Neighbourhood traffic wardens currently visit schools to work with the children but the content is directed by the school and the quality of delivery depends on the experience and ability of the warden."

- Education of parents/caregivers by schools through newsletters/ texts/face to face.

Child-led campaigns

- Children dressing up as traffic wardens and issuing pretend parking tickets to offenders outside the school gates;
- Poster competitions about road safety outside schools;
- Distribution of leaflets highlighting road safety designed by school children to driving parents/caregivers outside schools.

It was felt these initiatives had only short-term effectiveness.

Parking and road lay-out initiatives

There have been several initiatives to reduce congestion around schools with mixed success:

"Some schools introduced 'drop-off circles' but these were abused as people parked in them or inappropriately dropped off nursery aged children. They weren't considered to be big enough or fast enough for parents. They aren't in use anymore."

"Bollards the size of children have been used effectively in some areas"

Promotion of active travel

Participants were enthusiastic talking about how some local schools attempted to motivate their pupils:

"At one school kids got stickers or rewards at school if they walked."

"One school got a craft place to paint pebbles in different colours and kids could collect them on the walk to school. A prize was given for the most collected."

Staggered drop-offs and pick ups

Staggered school start and finish for different year groups has resulted in a smoother school pick up/drop off experience in some schools.

Alternative travel options

Walking buses and 'Park and Stride' initiatives

- Ensure public transport and school bus services are affordable and accessible.
- Cycling routes around schools should be improved.

Initiate a behaviour change

- Campaigns and promotion on social media
- Use of evidence to shock drivers into behaviour change:

"Can we use stats on air quality to scare drivers?"

- Harnessing the "pester power" of children
- "If we educate children they may go home and challenge their parents: 'look what driving does to the environment'."**

- Involve children in initiatives to promote sustainable travel

"It's a good time to get children involved. There is a lot of current interest in environmental issues which is driven by young people."

Restrictions and Enforcement

"We don't have much to offer as a carrot. Parents don't want to change their behaviours."

- Traffic calming measures, 20mph speed limits, increased parking restrictions, heavier penalties for offences, and resources to support their enforcement.

"We need re-education but also need to make punishment more severe, for example penalties on licenses."

"Cameras outside schools and mobile vans to capture traffic violations could increase PCN issues and may promote behaviour change but these are expensive interventions."

Some participants talked about the consequences of increased parking restrictions and concerns about displacement of the problem.

Innovation, co-ordination and a multi-pronged approach

With participants stating many things had been tried and failed there was a felt need for innovation, better co-ordination between stakeholders, and a multi-pronged approach for success to be achieved.

"I try to think outside the box but we have tried so many things over the years. The council only has a small pot of money so it doesn't make sense to try things we have done previously."

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

These findings offers an insight into the complexity and challenges associated with traffic management of school commuters. While only the perspective of area and neighbourhood staff are presented here their observations as frontline workers provides a valuable contribution to the evidence base on this issue. Consultation with school staff and parents/caregivers could further increase understanding of behaviour drivers and opportunities for improvement.

Thank you to Sarah Possingham at Bradford Metropolitan District Council who co-led this piece of work and to all the area and neighborhood wardens who gave up their time to participate in the focus groups.

