

		AGENDA ITEM 11
		PSEG/08/14
Committee:	Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	23 January 2014	
NORTH ESSEX PARKING PARTNERSHIP		
Enquiries to:	Christine Sharland, Scrutiny Officer 01245 430450 Christine.sharland@essex.gov.uk	

On 13 November Councillor Stephen Robinson called in decision FP-383-11-13 relating to Minute 25 of the North Essex Parking Partnership Joint Committee meeting held on 31 October entitled 'On-Street Permits and Parking Report'.

In line with the procedure for handling the call in of a decision, an informal meeting was held on 20 November. A formal note of that meeting and a copy of his Notification of Call-In form is attached at the Appendix.

At the informal meeting Councillor Robinson agreed to withdraw his Call In on the basis of the information exchanged.

(NB: This report was originally circulated as part of an agenda for a Committee meeting in December 2013 that was subsequently cancelled).

Action required by the Committee:

The Committee is invited to note the action taken in this matter.

Appendix

Notes of Informal Meeting regarding the Call-In of a Decision

Call in of North Essex Parking Partnership Joint Committee decision reference FP-383-11-13 (Minute 25/ October 2013) – On-Street Permits and Parking Report

Note of an informal meeting held at County Hall, Chelmsford on Wednesday, 20 November 2013

Present:

County Councillor Stephen Robinson (Committee Member responsible for calling the decision in)

County Councillor Jon Whitehouse (Local County Councillor on whose behalf the call in was made)

County Councillor Simon Walsh, Chairman of the Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Susan Barker, North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) Joint Committee (attending on behalf of its Chairman, who had sent his apologies)

Councillor Gary Waller, Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) Joint Committee Member

Richard Walker, NEPP Manager

Qasim Durrani, Assistant Director (Technical) EFDC

Richard Clifford, Secretary to the NEPP

Christine Sharland, Scrutiny Officer, Essex County Council

Councillor Walsh welcomed everyone to the informal meeting that had been set up as part of the County Council's Call In procedure for the consideration of the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) decision FP-383-11-13 called in by Councillor Robinson on behalf of Councillor Whitehouse.

At the outset Councillor Whitehouse, at Councillor Robinson's invitation, explained the reasons for the call in as set out in the Notification of Call In attached at the Appendix to this note. In summary he challenged the business case and proposed increased charges being made for the residents parking permits. He referred to the situation in Epping Forest District to illustrate his points. While he accepted the principle of harmonising residents parking scheme policy across the Partnership over a longer period, he felt that the percentage price increases were not reasonable. In terms of the budget he also questioned why it appeared that the generation of income from permit charges and that raised through parking enforcement appeared to be handled differently as part of the business case/ budget. He argued that by improving parking enforcement, permits charge increases might not be necessary. He acknowledged that the County Council's Place

Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee had recently agreed to set up a Task and Finish Group to review Parking Partnership working, but had felt it was still necessary to draw attention to this decision by seeking its call in.

Councillor Barker introduced the NEPP case by providing some historical background, and referring to the practical difficulties associated with predicting its budget that had to be overcome for the purpose of its business plan. The cost of implementing and enforcing resident parking schemes was quite high. Essex County Council had written to the NEPP in 2009 indicating its view that it considered that a charge of £70 for a permit was reasonable. If scheme costs are not covered by the income generated by permits then those schemes would in effect have to be subsidised, and in the past Essex residents in general had shouldered that burden. The harmonisation of schemes was also being considered in a much broader context than just permit charges. It was recognised that there are disparities in the criteria applied in different districts eg blue badge exemptions, visitor permits. It was pointed out that motor vehicle ownership necessarily entailed costs, and where someone parked on the public highway as part of a residents' scheme there was an annual charge associated with that particular facility ie parking space provision.

Councillor Waller confirmed that if the NEPP did not seek to cover the costs of residents' parking schemes, then EFDC would have to contribute to any deficit. He believed that those in a scheme would prefer to pay the proposed increased permit charge rather than not having it at all as it still represented value for money.

There was various discussion about the difficulties of planning the budget and parking enforcement. By its very nature the NEPP has had to be objective about the income that may or may not be generated through enforcement activity, and the disparities that exist in costs and income across different locations.

The NEPP target is to become revenue neutral. If the budget does not balance then District Partners will have to contribute to alleviating any shortfall, which the NEPP is trying to avoid. While it was intended that the NEPP should be self-financing, it was not aiming to be a profit making organisation.

Councillor Barker highlighted the importance of the experience being built up by the NEPP on managing its operation, and why some options would not necessarily produce anticipated outcomes. Councillor Whitehouse reflected on the decision to make some enforcement staff redundant, and yet increased enforcement could yield more income. In response Richard Walker explained that while people seemed to want more enforcement, the issue of more penalty notices did not necessarily result in increased income as people took steps to challenge or avoid payment. The NEPP was continually reviewing its enforcement operation in order 'to get smarter' taking into account local circumstances and changes in technology eg payment methods. While enforcement costs tend to be fixed, income generation is variable.

With particular reference to regulatory considerations, Richard Walker explained why the NEPP had to address financial matters relating to resident parking schemes separately


from enforcement, namely such separation was required through the relevant legislation. The budgets cannot be used to cross subsidise operations.

NEPP representatives confirmed that active steps are being taken to develop its management and operation based upon experience in order to achieve the agreed aims for that Partnership, including a break even budget. It was intending to review the way that it communicates with both its Partners and the public in order to provide greater transparency on its activities eg identifying permit charges for a three year period rather than one year.

Based upon the exchange of information at the informal meeting Councillor Robinson, and inter alia Councillor Whitehouse, agreed to withdraw formally the call in of this decision. In doing so they drew attention, in particular, to the NEPP's stated intention to improve public transparency on its activities.

Appendix

Notification of Call-in

Decision title and reference number FP-383-11-13	
North Essex Parking Partnership Joint Committee. Minute 25 of the Joint Committee meeting held on 31 October 2013	Date decision published 8 November 2013
Last day of call in period 13 November 2013	Last day of 10-day period to resolve the call-in
<p>The decision to increase residents' parking permit charges in advance of the figures set out in the business case represents an unreasonable shifting of the cost burden from those who break the rules onto the shoulders of those who are adversely affected by parking problems and play by the rules.</p> <p>The decision to increase the cost of residents' parking permits in Epping Forest by an additional £5 is unreasonable and not well-founded. It represents a 33% increase between 2012 and 2014, and 60% since 2010 and does not reflect the NEPP business case figures provided.</p>	
Signed:  Cllr Stephen Robinson	Dated: 13 November 2013
Called in on behalf of Cllr Jon Whitehouse	
For completion by the Governance Officer	
Date call in Notice Received 13 November 2013	Date of informal meeting 20 November 2013
Date of Audit and General Scrutiny Committee Meeting (if applicable)	Date call in withdrawn / resolved 20 November 2013