

		AGENDA ITEM 7
		PSEG/07/16
Committee:	Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	24 March 2016	
HIGHWAYS UPDATE		
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As part of its activity day on 25 February 2016, a briefing was held for the Committee on the Performance Measures associated with the Highways Contract between Essex County Council (ECC) and Ringway Jacobs (RJ). It provided an opportunity for the Committee to ask questions in order to develop a better understanding of the highways performance framework.

Councillors K Bobbin, A Erskine, I Henderson, D Kendall, C Pond, S Robinson, and S Walsh took part in the briefing on the day.

The briefing was led by Councillor Bass, Cabinet Member for Infrastructure, and Councillor Johnson, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport Delivery. They were supported by Sonia Davidson-Grant, Executive Director for Place Commissioning; Laura Lee, Supplier Relationship & Contract Management Lead (Place); and Stuart Greenham, Information Officer.

The following information provides an overview of the information exchanged at the briefing.

Background

In September 2015 the Committee received a briefing on the Essex Highways Contract, and at that meeting it was indicated that further information would be forwarded to the Committee on performance measures (also referred to as KPIs) as a review was underway. A summary of the briefing was set out in a report titled 'Understanding the Essex Highways Contract', which was noted by the Committee on 21 January 2016 (Minute 8).

In December 2015 a question was submitted to full Council by Councillor Henderson seeking further information on the KPIs, namely:

‘In a recent ‘Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee’ meeting, it was revealed that since contract negotiation with Ringway Jacobs, 58 of the required KPI’s (key performance indicators) have been subsequently withdrawn. This drops the total from 115 KPI’s in the 1st year of contract, to 57 currently. Is the portfolio holder able to provide to members details of which KPI’s have been removed?’

In response Councillor Bass as Cabinet Member confirmed that he would be sharing information with the Scrutiny Committee in the New Year.

Development of Performance Measures

When the Highways Contract became operational on 1 April 2012, 115 performance measures were identified within a framework that was aligned to the ECC corporate objectives.

As the contract has evolved the performance framework has been reviewed each year to ensure it reflects ECC delivery expectations and that the KPIs are fit for purpose. As the same time ECC has been transforming into a commissioning led organisation.

As part of the recent review of the performance measures, the County Council decided to put into place 59 performance measures for year 4 of the contract. The process for changing the performance measures was part of a robust contract evaluation process. The amended performance framework provides a stronger and more effective basis for the Essex Highways contract to manage overall performance.

Aside from new performance measures, other general improvements have made to the performance framework such as:

- The quality of data provided has improved significantly to support the performance measures.
- Relevant performance measures have been amended to reflect ‘timely delivery’ instead of start dates linked to programming, which gives a better indication of performance being more accurate and meaningful.
- New performance measures are using project server data for the first time, which enables improved accuracy of information ie the programme delivery measures that are now measured against being delivered on time instead of miles of roads being fixed.
- In the new framework all of the measures are linked to profit. Originally not all measures had profit attached, which supports improvement of behaviours across the contract that in turn reflect overall improvements to service delivery. Reduction of performance measures across each type of category of measure and focused on those delivering the commissioning outcomes.
- Other measures may have been changed or removed from the framework because they were duplicated, an ineffective measure of performance or no longer applicable.

As part of his explanation of the revised performance framework Councillor Bass emphasised that by reviewing the KPIs it was hoped that improved efficiencies could be delivered through the contract. While he was happy to share details of the KPIs with the Committee, he confirmed that he could not necessarily share full information where commercial sensitivities might be compromised.

In response to questioning he also confirmed that while working in partnership with Ringway Jacobs, the performance measures are stipulated by ECC having taken into account discussion with its partner.

General Update on Highways Issues

As a part of exchanging information on performance measures, the Committee also asked questions of the two Cabinet Members on broader highways matters as summarised below.

- **Local Highways Panels (LHPs)**

It emerged that the delivery of the Section 106 (S106) Agreement programme was a matter that should be monitored by the LHPs. However, that was not necessarily the case across the whole county and where such S106 monies were not tracked by a LHP it could result in the failure of developers to deliver schemes and monies not being spent within the required periods of time. Councillor Bass confirmed that there was a standing item on the Maldon LHP to track S106 Agreements to ensure that effective use could be made of the funding available, because the local knowledge provided by the LHP could be pivotal in some cases for ensuring highway improvements.

In raising the issue Councillor Johnson thanked the Committee for drawing attention to an issue where improvements could be introduced, and he undertook to send a directive to all LHP liaison officers to ensure that a standing item was included in every LHP agenda to raise the profile of tracking S106 monies

- **Cycle Paths**

Cycling facilities were raised in terms of the way they are defined for the purpose of performance measures and funding.

Cycleways/ cycle paths tend to fall within the same KPIs as footways in terms of maintenance. However, Councillor Bass took on board the Committee's point that further consideration needed to be given to the way cycleways may be prioritised particularly where they are aligned with footways.

There are a variety of funding sources for cycling facilities both at national and local levels.

- **Footways**

It was confirmed that work is currently in progress and methodology is being developed to categorise all footways in the County. All footways will be surveyed.

Furthermore where maintenance to footways is undertaken, paving stones will be replaced by black surface dressing except where there are particular local heritage considerations.

Members drew attention to the importance of footway maintenance to the public perception of the County Council, and similarly other visual facilities where failure to maintain could attract criticism.

- **Maldon Enforcement Pilot Project**

The Pilot Project has proven to be a highly effective project for instance in respect of flooding problems on the highway. Some disputes have been resolved by way of collaborative working with parish councils and residents, thereby eliminating the need for court action.

Due to financial constraints it was unclear as to whether or not the Project will be continued or rolled out to other Districts within the County. However, a bid for transformation monies was being pursued.

- **Tracking Of Queries Raised**

Members took the opportunity to raise again their concerns around the effectiveness of the Council's systems for addressing highways enquiries, and the lack of progress in the development of online facilities including the ability to download photographs as evidence of problems, and the tracking of logged enquiries. It was acknowledged that there have been problems and action is being taken to implement improvements.

The Council has two separate systems that handle enquiries depending on whether the query is handled initially by the ECC Customer Services Team or Essex Highways. However reassurance was given that queries are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis. If information cannot be obtained online Members should contact Member Enquiries and if this is not successful the Cabinet member should be contacted.

Conclusions

Councillor Bass reassured the Committee that the new performance measures are a more logical and streamlined set of parameters, but at the same time it was still 'Work In Progress' with constant reviews taking place. He confirmed that he would be happy to address the Committee at a later stage on the performance outcomes.

At the end of the briefing the Chairman thanked the Cabinet Members and Officer Team for a very informative briefing session that had provided a useful update on a range of highways matters in addition to performance measures.

Action to be taken by the Committee:

The Committee is asked to note this report, which has been prepared as an overview of its briefing held on 25 February.
