

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLACE SERVICES & ECONOMIC  
GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL,  
CHELMSFORD ON 28 MAY 2015**

**Present:**

Councillor S Walsh (Chairman)	Councillor V Metcalfe
Councillor K Bobbin	Councillor C Pond
Councillor G Butland	Councillor S Robinson
Councillor C Guglielmi	Councillor A Wood
Councillor T Hedley	
Councillor D Kendall	

Members also in attendance: Councillors E Johnson, S Barker, J Knapman, and M Mackrory.

**1. Membership**

It was noted that at Full Council in May 2015 Councillor Simon Walsh was appointed as Chairman of this Committee. The membership of the Committee has also changed as Councillor Keith Bobbin has replaced Councillor Dave Harris as a member of the Committee. The full Committee membership is set out below:

Councillor S Walsh (Chairman)	Councillor I Henderson
Councillor K Bobbin	Councillor D Kendall
Councillor G Butland	Councillor V Metcalfe
Councillor T Cutmore	Councillor C Pond
Councillor A Erskine	Councillor S Robinson
Councillor C Guglielmi	Councillor K Twitchen
Councillor T Hedley	Councillor A Wood

**2. Apologies and Substitution Notices**

Apologies were received from Councillors Erskine, Henderson, and Twitchen.

**3. Appointment of Vice-Chairman**

Councillor A Wood was nominated as a Vice-Chairman and with the agreement of the Committee was duly appointed.

Councillor D Pond was nominated as a Vice-Chairman and with the agreement of the Committee was duly appointed in line with Minute 3/ May 2014.

**4. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 26 March 2015 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

## **5. Declarations of Interest**

With reference to Minute 7 below the following Councillors declared their personal interests as members of Local Highways Panels: Bobbin, Guglielmi, Hedley, Johnson, Kendall, Metcalfe, Pond, Walsh and Wood.

## **6. Questions from the Public**

No members of the public had registered their interest in asking a question on any of the items to be considered at the meeting.

## **7. Local Highways Panels**

The Committee considered report PSEG/08/15 providing an overview of the Council's Local Highways Panels (LHPs) as part of a more detailed scrutiny review moving forward.

In June 2015 (Minute 5 refers) when the Committee agreed its work programme it was envisaged that a review of the Local Highways Panels (LHPs) would be initiated this Spring so that it could draw upon the three years of experience since the LHPs were first established. Also a review would be able to reflect upon changes that were in the process of being made at that time.

The LHP framework was introduced in 2012. Each district has its own individual LHP, and a variety of local practice has arisen. The Committee will provide a means to scrutinise what may or may not have worked well and what changes have been made to address any problems, compare their operation as well as address any criticisms, in order to identify and share good practice.

At the meeting Andy Turner, Head of Project Delivery (Highways) gave a presentation to the Committee based upon his briefing paper included as part of the aforementioned report, and answered Members' questions.

Councillor Eddie Johnson, Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Schemes was also in attendance for this item.

Mr Turner gave an overview of his responsibilities as Team Manager and the changes that have been made to the Project Delivery Team that supports the LHPs. He confirmed that a review had been undertaken to identify problems encountered during the early operation of the Panels. The measures taken to overcome those problems include greater transparency through improved management of information and team co-ordination, the introduction of clearer lines of accountability, and staff has also been empowered to take action as appropriate on individual schemes to overcome obstacles.

A flow chart was circulated at the meeting to illustrate how projects will be delivered (Commission, Design, Target Costing, Mobilisation, Construction, and Final Account). One person will now be responsible for a project throughout its life cycle, and all schemes subject to annual review.

When the Panels were set up originally there were underspends in the budget in years 1 and 2 based on the under delivery of schemes, which attracted significant criticism. Following a review, the approach to budget allocation was changed.

There is currently around £9 million allocated for LHP schemes across the county with a number of historic schemes from previous financial years. There is a mixture of schemes that can be designed and delivered on the ground relatively quickly as dictated by the frequency of LHP meetings, and subsequent sign off at the Commissioning Board. Other more complex schemes require a two year cycle (year 1 design and year 2 delivery) to provide real assurance and confidence in delivering a schemes to budget, on time and of an appropriate quality.

The current total allocation of LHP schemes is higher than the budget for 2014/2015. The Panels have been encouraged to allocate fully their total budget for 2014/2015 to create a bank of work capable of beginning a twelve month rolling cycle. It was confirmed that LHPs will incur costs whether a scheme is implemented or not, because there are costs necessarily incurred with the evaluation process. The new restructured team will also manage schemes to be funded from Section 106 monies.

In his summing up Mr Turner drew attention to the improvements being made in the operation of the LHP processes, but reiterated that it was work in progress together with implementing better communication channels. All twelve LHPs operate differently at a local level, with some working more effectively than others. He acknowledged that it would be helpful if a forum could investigate what best practice exists among the LHPs, and how it could be shared across the whole county.

Following the presentation various issues were clarified for the Committee via a question and answer session, which included the following information:

- **LHP Remits**

Members were referred to published guidance called the Essex 'Local Highways Panels Terms of Reference and Members' Guide' for confirmation on those matters considered by the Panels. Street lighting issues are not within the remit of the LHPs, and similarly schemes covered by the Parking Partnerships.

- **Membership**

Concern was expressed that not all County Councillors are members of LHPs for instance in Chelmsford and Colchester, making it more difficult for some to understand what is happening in their divisions. The Chairman suggested that this could be looked at as part of the Committee's own scrutiny review of LHPs going forward.

- **Budget Allocation**

Aside from discussion on the way that LHP funding is allocated and spent, questions were raised about the ability of the LHPs to consider the allocation of their limited funds to schemes costing £0.5 – £1million, and creating a reserve of any underspend from LHP budgets. Councillor Johnson suggested that these might be matters that the Committee could take into account as part of its own scrutiny review.

- **Highway Rangers**

Highway Ranger teams have been put into place across the twelve districts in Essex to undertake small works that are not given to a contractor but may make a huge difference to an area. Confirmation was given that working practices differ in each district and the teams may or may not be used by some LHPs. It is hoped that a consistent system of “best practice” may be adopted in due course.

- **Communication**

Linked to the issue of membership of the LHPs, it was felt that communication about individual LHP activity needed to be improved. In response to a suggestion that information on individual schemes should be published on the ECC website, Mr Turner stressed that while consideration was being given to improving communication it was essential that any information published is clear and accurate.

Although not a matter that is specific to the LHPs, Members took the opportunity to voice their concerns about the County Council’s Member Enquiries service. Councillor Johnson gave an assurance that this matter was being looked at with a view to improving responses on highways matters in terms of timing and clarity.

- **Staffing**

The new Team structure has been implemented over the past 18 months, and it was confirmed that there were no staffing issues such as a lack of technical engineers that were causing delays in scheme design and delivery.

- **External Factors**

In response to questions about the causes of delays it was confirmed that the statutory undertakers and legal factors can affect service delivery. It was confirmed that discussions were taking place with relevant parties to remedy any problems.

On behalf of the Committee the Chairman thanked both Councillor Johnson and Mr Turner for a very helpful overview of the operation of the LHPs that would be used to inform further scrutiny work, and acknowledged that much had been done to improve service delivery.

As stated in the covering committee report a task and finish group would be set up in due course to carry out a more in depth investigation of the individual Panels in order to identify and share good practice.

Councillor Mackrory, who was attending the meeting as an observer on behalf of the Corporate Scrutiny Committee, drew attention to that Committee’s wish that Councillor Young and he join the proposed task and finish group and take part in its investigation.

## **9. Call In Of Decision FP/081/04/15: Colchester Town Centre Traffic Regulation Orders**

The Committee noted report PSEG/09/15 concerning the calling in of decision FP/081/04/15: Colchester Town Centre Traffic Regulation Orders and in particular the making of traffic regulation orders including the introduction and revocation of various waiting and loading restrictions, dedicated disabled parking bays, and no stopping restrictions except for buses in Queen Street, Head Street and High Street, Colchester. The call in was subsequently withdrawn.

At the meeting the Chairman took the opportunity to draw Members' attention to the changes agreed at full Council in May to the Call In arrangements. In addition to the provision that any member of a scrutiny committee may call-in a Cabinet Member decision falling within its remit, 'Where a decision affects the division of a Member significantly differently from the generality of divisions, that Member may, subject to the agreement of the chairman of the relevant committee, call in the decision himself, and the call in shall be regarded nominally as in the name of the relevant chairman.'

## **10. Work Programme**

The Committee noted report PSEG/10/15 by the Scrutiny Officer updating Members on the Work Programme, and planned committee activity.

At the meeting oral updates were provided on the following issues:

- Third Party Responsibilities and Flood Management, and Jobs, Welfare and Skills Task and Finish Groups: Scrutiny reports were being drafted for the two Groups' consideration prior to their submission to Committee.
- Bus Passenger Transport Strategy: Members referred to the Committee's Seminar last December and the setting up of a new Delivery Board. They expressed their concern that no further information had been provided on the purpose and makeup of the Board, and its relationship with the Scrutiny Committee. Consequently it was agreed that the Cabinet Member should be requested to provide a briefing paper setting out the latest situation on the development of the Bus and Passenger Transport Strategy, and the new Delivery Board.
- Local Highways Panels: It was confirmed that this will be considered as a part of the 2015/17 Work Programme with a Task and Finish Group being formed to take the matter forward.
- Pavement Parking: A briefing paper will be commissioned in due course to provide the Committee with up to date information on the topic.
- Visit to Tovi Eco Park (formerly Courtauld Road): The site visit will now take place on 25 June and not 23 July as originally reported. It will comprise a visit to the facility, and a briefing on
  - How the Park functions as part of the Waste Strategy
  - Solid Recovered Fuel (SRF)

- Longer term vision for Recycling Centres for Household Waste
- Formal Committee Meeting on 23 July: The meeting will include consideration of the following matters:
  - Work programme for 2015/2017
  - Third Party Responsibilities and Flood Management Scrutiny Review
  - Jobs, Welfare and Skills Scrutiny Review
  - Financial Inclusion update.
- Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs): A Member suggested that it would be helpful for the Committee to receive a briefing on the LEPs, and the Chairman agreed that this would be looked into with a view to the topic being included in the July agenda.

#### **11. Date of Next Meeting**

The Committee noted the next committee activity day was scheduled for Thursday 25 June 2015, and will comprise a visit to Tovi Eco Park (formerly Courtauld Road).

It was further noted that the July meeting could comprise committee activity throughout the day.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 11.25 am

Chairman