

		AGENDA ITEM 6
		PSEG/02/16
Committee:	Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	21 January 2016	
<div>LOCAL HIGHWAYS PANELS (Minute 7/May 2015)</div>		
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Introduction

A scrutiny review of the Local Highways Panels (LHPs) is identified in the Committee's work programme, and with the completion of other projects resources will become available to support the launch of a new review so that it may be planned in more depth.

Background

The LHP framework was introduced in 2012. Each district has its own individual LHP with an individual Highways Liaison Officer assigned to act as the main interface between the panels and the highways design teams.

Originally this topic was programmed for scrutiny review to begin in Spring 2015 so that any review could capture three years of operational experience. It will provide a means to compare individual LHP operation, investigate what may or may not have worked as well as the changes made to address problems. Ultimately it is hoped to highlight how improvements can be supported in shaping the further development of the LHPs as a whole. It was envisaged originally that the review would be conducted in two parts: A briefing followed by a more in depth investigation.

The Committee received a briefing in May 2015 providing background on the LHPs. It has always been envisaged that a Task and Finish Group (TFG) would be set up to manage the investigation itself. The investigation has been delayed pending the completion of other reviews and the fact that other priorities have affected the work programme. It is intended that the review should begin in February 2016 and be planned on the basis that it be completed within six months.

In August 2015 a questionnaire was sent to the twelve LHP Chairmen so that information would be available to the TFG for the detailed planning of the scrutiny review. From the eight replies received several themes have emerged including:

- Localism – Mixture of operation in terms of choice of membership, transparency, local conditions such as local council engagement, and support available locally
- Transparency – Understanding of programmes and processes, Panel activity (mixture of open and closed meetings)
- Managing Expectations – Understanding what may or may not be delivered, availability of information about schemes and programmes.

While the concerns raised at Committee meetings tend to focus on perceived problems around delays in the delivery of projects and local issues, it is also apparent from discussion with Officers that there may be difficulties associated with the way that LHPs look to influence the scheme delivery.

It is crucial that in pursuing this review the Committee adopts a clear framework for the investigation that focuses upon achieving an objective set of conclusions and recommendations, based on strategic rather than specifically local matters. Time should be spent in planning the review not only to enable relevant information to be sought, but to contain the overall length of the review within a six month timeframe.

Proposal

Based upon the original proposal agreed by the Committee in June 2014 (Minute 5) for a review and further investigation undertaken to inform the planning of the review, the following terms of reference are proposed:

‘The overall objective of the review is to consider if the Local Highways Panels (LHPs) have achieved their original objectives, and what lessons have been learned by individual Panels so that good practice may be shared across the Panels:

- To review the purpose of the LHPs,
- to identify the similarities and differences of the twelve LHPs and consider the implications of how localism is being reflected in each district,
- to understand the way that schemes are identified and developed through to completion,
- to consider how individual LHPs identify and prioritise individual projects, and compile a work programme,
- to consider budgetary implications from corporate and individual standpoints, and
- to consider how to manage expectations.’

While a draft scoping document is being developed for this review it will require further attention by those Members leading the review before its submission for the Committee’s endorsement. In the meantime much of its initial content is reproduced in this report.

Membership

If the Committee prefers that a Task and Finish Group should conduct the more in depth scrutiny investigation review on its behalf, then the role and membership of that Group needs to be considered carefully.

LHPs are a popular topic for concern, and therefore the review may generate a lot of interest across a broad range of issues based on local perceptions. This has implications for the size and conduct of an investigation and what may be achieved. In practice the Committee's smaller groups have proven to be an effective means of promoting team working and reaching clearer evidenced outcomes on difficult and complex topics as opposed to utilising larger teams engaged in the initial stages of detailed evidence gathering.

It is also notable that the Corporate Scrutiny Committee has also requested that two of its Members be included in a scrutiny review of the LHPs, namely Councillors Seagers and Deakin.

The following matters are proposed for the Committee's consideration of the composition of the TFG:

- No Panel chairmen to be included in membership
- Two representatives from the Corporate Scrutiny Committee
- Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee representation be limited to three or five members.
- Lead Member

It is essential that the Group adopt an objective approach to the review, and therefore if there are a large number of Members wishing to be appointed to the Group then it will be necessary canvas those Members in order for the Committee to determine the choice of appointments. Nevertheless all Members will have an opportunity to contribute evidence to the scrutiny review, and consider its findings. In view of the interest in the topic it is emphasised that:

- The TFG will manage the review and undertake the in depth investigation. However, the Group will engage the broader Committee membership in some of its investigative activity in order to raise broader awareness of how LHP schemes are developed, ideas on how to manage expectations, etc.
- To contain the length of the review within a shorter time span, it is necessary that any Member seeking appointment to the Group commits to taking a proactive role throughout the duration of its activity. Subject to the availability of resources to support the launch of the review in February, the following ambitious timetable is proposed:
 - February/ March – Plan the review
 - April/ May - Investigation
 - June - Produce final report
 - July Committee - Endorse the final scrutiny report

Action required by the Committee:

To consider the proposed terms of reference for the scrutiny review and the formation of a task and finish group.
