

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE PLACE SERVICES & ECONOMIC  
GROWTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL,  
CHELMSFORD ON 24 OCTOBER 2013**

**Present:**

Councillor S Walsh (Chairman)	Councillor R Hirst
Councillor M Buckley	Councillor J Huntman
Councillor T Cutmore	Councillor D Kendall
Councillor M Danvers	Councillor M Maddocks
Councillor A Erskine	Councillor C Pond
Councillor I Grundy	Councillor S Robinson
Councillor C Guglielmi	Councillor A Wood

Also in attendance were Councillor A Naylor, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Wellbeing and Councillor B Aspinell.

**1. Apologies and Substitution Notices**

The Committee Officer reported apologies for absence from Councillors J Spence, A Hedley and I Henderson with the substitutes being Councillors T Cutmore, C Guglielmi and M Danvers respectively.

**2. Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of personal interest were given:

Councillor T Cutmore as District Council representative on the Parking Partnership, in relation to Minute 5 – Parking Partnerships.

Councillor I Grundy as the former Chairman of the South Essex Parking Partnership, in relation to Minute 5 – Parking Partnerships.

**3. Minutes**

The Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 26 September 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman subject to the following amendments:

- Minute 4 – Councillor Pond wished to clarify that reference to a point he had made should be amended to read ‘Councillor Pond suggested that given the experience with Chelmsford Park and Ride, the economics and desirability of a Park and Ride scheme in Colchester should be revisited.’
- Appendix to Minute 7 under the heading ‘Consultation process’, last paragraph, the word ‘trance’ should be replaced with the word ‘tranche’.

**4. Local Highways Panels Call In**

The Committee considered report PSEG/07/13 on the two Call Ins received in respect of decision FP/282/08/13 on Local Highway Panel (LHP) Budget

Allocations. Councillor R L Bass, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation was in attendance for this item. He was accompanied by Chris Stevenson, Head of Strategy and Engagement and Sean Perry, Strategy and Engagement Manager.

- Following the procedure for considering a Call In each Councillor responsible for the Call In was given the opportunity to make the case for calling in the decision.

With reference to his Notification of Call set out in the report, Councillor S Robinson explained his reasons for calling in the decision including a proposal to review the reallocation of the LHP budget, and to consider using some of the under-spend on buying in additional design expertise so that approved LHP schemes could be implemented.

With reference to his Notification of Call set out in the report, Councillor C Pond explained that he had called in the decision on behalf of Councillor J Abbott who is not a member of the Committee. The reason for the Call In was to enable further discussion on the issue and to seek assurances that the budget will be set at the same level again next year for continuity and for enhanced capability to be built in for the design and 'working up' of schemes so that they can be delivered in a timely way. Councillor Pond congratulated Councillor Bass on keeping the under-spend within the overall Highways Budget but questioned whether this should be spent equitably across the County on local schemes. He pointed out that part of the reallocated budget that was being spent on strategic central schemes such as in Chelmsford and he felt this would not be acceptable to local residents in other parts of the County.

- The Cabinet Member, Councillor Bass, was then invited to respond to the call ins and justify the decision taken. Councillor Bass referred to a briefing note which he had circulated setting out the facts, which is attached as an appendix to these minutes.

Councillor Bass set out the capital and revenue budgets for LHPs for 2013/14. He explained that an under-spend in the capital budget allocation for 2012/13 meant that £7.3m was re-profiled into the current year 2013/14. A further £8m allocation was made for the current year totalling £15.3m for 2013/14. The expected outturn is now estimated as £10.7m, leaving an underspend of £4.6m which was being reallocated to other Highways Schemes, which the service had the capacity to deliver as set out in the appendix briefing paper.

The Cabinet Member advised that the aim is to strengthen support to the LHPs with officers to augment with engineers to give advice and monitor delivery of schemes. Guidance had also been issued to LHPs to help ensure effective delivery of schemes. The advice given to LHPs was to determine schemes for 2014/15 by March to ensure a realistic prospect of delivery and to invest more in scheme preparation and surveys etc.

In response to the issues raised by those Members who had called in the decision, the Cabinet Member confirmed that more schemes had been delivered

this current year than the previous year. There was no intention to buy in consultancy for scheme design.

- Other Members of the Committee were then given an opportunity to debate the issues raised.

While not linked in particular to the two call ins a local member sought clarification on a particular issue he had concerns about in Brentwood, namely that he believed that previously there had been an understanding locally that if a scheme went over to a new financial year, the allocated budget could be kept and new monies added. However, this had not been the case with a large scheme in Brentwood which after a number of months had not received sign-off and the money was no longer available. The Cabinet Member advised that there needed to be an ability to flex money between LHPs. Schemes could not be signed off into next year until such time as there was a budget commitment. While he could not guarantee funding, the Cabinet Member was committed to bidding for funding and he hoped that the allocation in each district would be broadly the same as in previous years. Councillor Bass accepted that for larger schemes it could take a long time for the scheme to evolve and there were necessary elements of preparation such as design and safety audits.

The Cabinet Member advised that the LHPs should consider having two lists: A potential schemes list and an approved schemes list. When the budget was agreed for 2014/15, schemes could then be submitted to Councillor Bass for formal approval. Monitoring of the delivery of schemes would be necessary.

Councillor Pond raised concern that the reallocation of money to the four hubs of Basildon, Chelmsford, Colchester and Harlow was unjustified and divisive, particularly as there are eight other districts with centres that were then disadvantaged. In response the Cabinet Member explained that dealing with some schemes systematically was more efficient. Schemes such as the white lining also included routes and corridors approaching the centre hubs and were also the areas with the greatest volume of pavements.

It was requested that LHPs be advised where these wider schemes have actually dealt with a local issue which has been identified by the LHP so that funding could be reallocated to other schemes.

The Cabinet Member advised that he was committed to the concept of the LHPs, and he hoped that within the next budget they would have a sensible allocation based on what they could deliver.

Members of the Committee confirmed that they had appreciated the information and explanation given by the Cabinet Member.

Following the withdrawal of the Call Ins by Councillor Pond and Councillor Robinson, the Committee **Agreed** to take no further action.

## 5. Parking Partnerships

The Committee considered report PSEG/08/13 and a presentation by Liz Burr, Head of Network and Safety/Traffic Manager, providing an overview of the Essex Parking Partnerships. Councillor R L Bass, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation was also in attendance for this item.

The presentation included an explanation of the following issues:

- The Parking Function – with on-street parking being the responsibility of Essex County Council (ECC) as Highway Authority.
- Under the former agency arrangements there were deficits of up to £800k per year being funded by the ECC, which could not continue indefinitely. Therefore notice was given to the borough/city/district councils that ECC would terminate the agency agreement and a project group was established to look at the options for delivery of the function. The key aim of the project was to consider how to improve the efficiency of the on-street parking service if groups of authorities worked together.
- In April 2011 two new Parking Partnerships were established: The North Essex (NEPP) and South Essex (SEPP) Parking Partnerships.
- A new style of Governance arrangements were introduced through a formal Joint Committee Agreement supporting the operation.
- New Financial Arrangements are now in place.
- ECC has established a parking policy framework with the two partnerships.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- Concern was raised regarding the consideration and implementation of Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). In response it was confirmed that the criteria was for County Council funding of TROs, however if a Parking Partnership wished to put a scheme in place it was entirely for the Partnership to decide as they could choose to fund any scheme. If a new parking scheme/TRO is required, ECC has set out the circumstances in which it would fund these (via LHPs) –
  - Schemes required for safety reasons – i.e. that meet the safety criteria of a location having 4 or more personal injury accidents in a three year period in a 100m radius.
  - Schemes required to address a congestion problem on a PR1 or PR2 road (as defined in the hierarchy).
  - In addition, ECC will endeavour to ensure that restrictions required as part of a new development are funded via the section 106 process.

All other new restrictions/TROs must be funded via the parking partnerships themselves.

- Some Members expressed their opinion that in order to ensure the accountability of decisions made by the Parking Partnership, they needed to be more clearly and consistently advertised to ensure the public know how they operate. Guidance was also needed on how Members can input to the Partnerships. In response the Cabinet Member agreed that revised

guidance on the governance arrangements of the Parking Partnerships would be made available in due course.

- It was clarified that a Chairman of a Parking Partnership Joint Committee had a casting vote unless the decision being made for their area and then the casting vote went to the Vice-Chairman. However, in practice within the committee system a formal vote was not always necessary. The County Council Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation could only overturn a decision which affected a priority 1 or 2 route.
- Concern was raised regarding residents being penalised with on-street parking permit pricing. In response it was explained that the aim was to have a consistent approach to the scheme, not a standard charge. The Cabinet Member reminded Members that on-street parking was effectively renting road space.
- Councillor Barker raised an issue regarding the South Essex Parking Partnership receiving additional funding for TROs, where the North Essex Parking Partnership was doing this within budget. The Cabinet Member agreed to look into this.

Members of the Committee expressed mixed views on the effectiveness of the Parking Partnerships. Some Members felt that the Partnerships were now working effectively, with districts working together to gain some consensus and clear deficits. However, other Members felt that the Partnerships were not working for their area, particularly where they had not been in deficit and had been able to determine schemes locally. Under the Partnership arrangements each district was represented by one Executive Member.

It was clarified that within the Joint Committee arrangements, there was an option to give notice to cease the partnership from both parties. However, the services would still be delivered through the Partnership and would mean that the particular district involved would not have an input into the decisions being made.

The Committee **Agreed** to establish a Task and Finish Group in the New Year to investigate the Parking Partnerships along the lines of the terms of reference set out below:

‘Are the original objectives of the Parking Partnerships being delivered, and what lessons have been learned to inform more effective partnership working in the future?’

## 6. Work Programme

The Committee noted report PSEG/09/13 on the Work Programme and updates.

### Task and Finish Groups:

- Financial Inclusion – it was confirmed that work would be starting in due course on the monitoring of the original report. The Membership was confirmed as Councillors Grundy, Hedley, Kendall and Walsh.

- COMAH – At the meeting the following Members indicated their interest in conducting this review, Councillors Cutmore, Hedley, Maddocks, and Wood.
- Part Night Lighting – it was confirmed that there would be an opportunity for Mark Palmer from South East Employers, to provide some mentoring support for this review with the first meeting being scheduled for Wednesday, 27 November 2013.
- Parking Partnership – the Committee agreed to establish a Task and Finish Group in the new year under Minute 6 above.

#### Next Activity Day

It was confirmed that the next activity day scheduled for Thursday 28 November 2013 would be a full day meeting on the Economic Growth Strategy.

#### Other Issues:

- Councillor Cutmore requested that the issue of dedicated officer support for scrutiny be reviewed. The Chairman confirmed that this issue would be considered by the Scrutiny Board.
- Councillor Robinson asked if there was any resource to commission outside research. It was confirmed that there was a small scrutiny budget for visits, training and mentoring.
- Councillor Kendall requested that the issue of Bradwell Nuclear Power Station be considered in the future.
- Councillor Aspinell sought an update on the issue of the Country Parks review. The Chairman confirmed that he had been liaising with the Cabinet Member for Libraries, Communities and Planning on this issue.

#### **8. Date of Next Meeting**

The Committee noted that its next activity day was scheduled for Thursday 28 November 2013.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 12.25pm.

Chairman

## Appendix to Minute 4

### LOCAL HIGHWAYS PANELS – FUNDING ISSUES

The aggregate approved budgets for the LHPs in 2013/14 are £8m Capital and £1.3m Revenue.

The original budget of £1.6m provided £131,000 to each LHP for administration and the work of the Highways Rangers. To the extent that any potential underspends are apparent, LHPs are encouraged to expand the work of the Rangers (which they direct) to include at their discretion, additional vegetation clearance, overhanging branches which obstruct sight lines, sign cleansing and possible assistance with emergency snow clearance. At half year report stage, however, a realistic view was taken as to delivery and £0.3m of the budget was released as a one off adjustment in 2013-14. The current budget and forecast spend is therefore £1.3m at an average of £107,000 per district, so that over 80% of the original budget is on track to deliver.

The Capital budget is very different. Of the £8m Capital allocation last year (2012/13) only some £0.7m was spent leaving an underspend of £7.3m to be re-profiled into the current year (2013/14). Against this, a further allocation of £8m was made in 2013/14, making a total of £15.3m for 2013/14. The expected outturn is now estimated at £10.7m, leaving an underspend of £4.6m. The forecast outturn is based on the LHPs projects that will actually be delivered on the ground in 2013/14. This is a much improved position than in 2012/13.

It makes sense therefore to reallocate this potential underspend to other Highways Schemes that we do have the capacity to deliver rather than simply re-profile it again. This is not a claw back of LHP schemes but a sensible piece of prudent budgeting and reallocation.

This decision will also enable additional Highways works to be carried out this year:

(1) Planned capital maintenance (additional schemes)	£1m
(2) Footway maintenance	£1m
(3) Scheme preparation/design	£1m
(4) Other adjustments (not new money)	£0.3m
<b>Total</b>	<b>£3.3m</b>
Balance will be used for	
(5) White lining (funded via revenue programme)	£0.5m
Reduction in highways capital programme	£0.8m

**£4.6m**

I trust this clarifies our intentions. In order to ensure that any LHP allocations next year are fully spent, guidance given earlier this year encourages LHPs to consider “soft” measures this year such as design and surveys and to determine their firm programmes for next year (2014/15) by, say, end February or mid March latest. The LHPs are making good progress and I hope this further guidance will help.

Cllr Rodney L Bass  
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation  
Essex County Council  
24 October 2013