

		<b>AGENDA ITEM 8</b>
		<b>PSEG/13/16</b>
<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee</b>	
<b>Date:</b>	<b>26 May 2016</b>	
<div><b>ESSEX PARKING PARTNERSHIPS</b> (Minute 6/ March 2016)</div>		
<b>Enquiries to:</b>	<b>Christine Sharland, Scrutiny Officer</b> 01245 430450 <b>Christine.sharland@essex.gov.uk</b>	

At its meetings on 21 January 2016 (Minute 5) and 24 March 2016 (Minute 6) the Committee engaged with the Essex Parking Partnerships in order to consider the Executive Review of their formal arrangements and operation prior to any decisions being made on the future of the North Essex (NEPP) and South Essex (SEPP) Parking Partnerships.

Following the March meeting the Committee met to consider its conclusions, which have been captured in the scrutiny report now attached at the Appendix to this report. In the intervening period Members have been consulted upon the content of the report, and the finalised report is now submitted for the Committee's formal endorsement before being forwarded to the Essex parking Partnerships.

**Action required by the Committee:**

**To endorse formally the Scrutiny Report as now attached at the Appendix to this report, and to forward it to the Essex Parking Partnerships so that its recommendations may be taken into consideration before a final decision is reached on future arrangements as a result of the Executive Review.**

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## **APPENDIX**

### **Scrutiny Report on the Future of the Essex Parking Partnerships**

**May 2016**

#### **Executive Summary**

The Committee has scrutinised the Essex Parking Partnerships as part of the Executive Review on the future of those bodies.

Representatives from the Partnerships submitted evidence by way of background to both their operation and the findings of the Executive Review, and they were cross examined at two meetings. The Committee welcomed the positive way that the Partnerships engaged in its investigation, and wished to place on record its gratitude to the following contributors:

#### **Essex County Council**

- Councillor Eddie Johnson, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport Delivery
- Liz Burr, Head of Network and Safety/Traffic Manager (Highways)

#### **North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP)**

- Councillor Robert Mitchell, Chairman Joint Committee
- Richard Walker, Group Manager

#### **South Essex Parking Partnership (SEPP)**

- Councillor Ron Pratt, Chairman Joint Committee
- Nick Binder, South Essex Parking Partnership Manager

County Councillors welcomed the fact that the scrutiny review had provided them with a clearer understanding of the two Partnerships and, in turn, put forward recommendations to influence the executive decisions that would be taken upon their futures.

While both Partnerships are now producing small financial surpluses, in line with original objectives, it was apparent that their respective operations are still evolving as well as new avenues for more collaborative working. In addition the Partnerships' representatives reinforced their intention to embed improved ways of working and provided examples of various projects including an online database on new scheme proposals, and improved engagement with residents.

The Committee's conclusions and recommendations are set out in this report.

On balance the Committee supported the proposed four year extension of the Partnerships' Joint Committee Agreements, and agreed the following recommendations:

**With particular reference to the Executive Review the Essex Parking Partnerships be recommended:**

- 1. That the Essex Parking Partnerships and ECC Cabinet Member be advised that on balance the Committee support the proposed four year extension of the NEPP and SEPP agreements.**
- 2. That the ECC Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport Delivery be advised that the Committee considers that the County Council should not withdraw its subsidy from the Parking Partnerships until such time as they are able to be wholly self-financing.**
- 3. That the Essex Parking Partnerships be urged to provide greater clarity on the role of external funding upon the implementation of new schemes.**
- 4. That the NEPP and SEPP publish a regular newsletter for all elected county and district councillors to ensure that they are kept informed of local parking issues and proposals within each Partner Authority area.**
- 5. That the Essex Parking Partnerships review current practice with a view to further improvements being made to raise public awareness of their role and activities.**
- 6. That the Committee support the introduction of a job description for the Partner Authorities' representatives on the Joint Committee, and propose that it should include a responsibility for ensuring that all elected members of their respective administrative areas are kept informed in advance about NEPP/SEPP activity, and the dates of Joint Committee meetings.**
- 7. It was requested that the Partnerships' formal response to these recommendations be forwarded to the Committee before any final decisions on their future are determined.**

## **Introduction**

In Essex there are two Parking Partnerships that manage parking functions across the county under formal legal agreements.

At its meeting on 21 January 2016 (Minute 5) the Essex County Council's (ECC) Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee (PSEGSC) gave some preliminary consideration of the Essex Parking Partnerships to develop its understanding of their formal arrangements and operation prior to fulfilling an invitation by the Cabinet Member to be given an opportunity to consider the outcomes of an Executive Review prior to any decisions being made (Minute 8/ March 2015).

The terms of reference agreed by the Committee for this scrutiny review are as follows:

‘To scrutinise the proposals arising from the Executive review of the North Essex (NEPP) and South Essex (SEPP) Parking Partnerships prior to a decision being reached on the future of those Partnerships.’

## **Background**

The two Essex Parking Partnerships were established in April 2011 - one for South Essex and one for North Essex. They are formally constituted and governed by Joint Committees. The historical context for the establishment of the Partnerships is summarised in report PSEG/06/16 published with the PSEGSC agenda in March 2016.

The Parking function managed by the Partnerships covers two distinct elements:

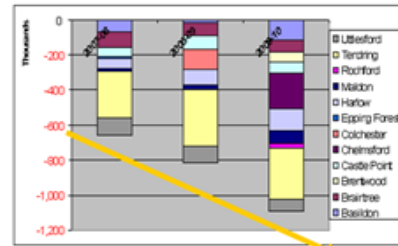
- Off-street parking (car parks): While this is a borough/ city/ district council function, some of those councils have chosen to have the function managed by either the SEPP or NEPP.
- On-street parking: This is the formal responsibility of the County Council as the Highway Authority (also known as civil parking enforcement).

The North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP) and South Essex Parking Partnership (SEPP) replaced earlier arrangements that are summarised in the slide below.

## Previous Arrangements

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- From 2002 until March 2011 on-street parking management and enforcement was delivered separately by the 12 borough, city and district councils through ECC agency arrangements
- **All deficit was funded by ECC** – in 2008/9 this was over £800k and was projected to increase
- Any surpluses made were used within the authority where they arose



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The Partnerships were established formally on 1 April 2011 for a total of eleven years subject to the following caveats:

- Seven year initial term ending on 31 March 2018
- Four year extension available until 31 March 2022. However, agreement for the extension is required not less than fifteen months before the end of the seven year term ie by 31 December 2016.

The Joint Committee Agreement sets out clearly the governance arrangements and the responsibilities of the Joint Committee for each Partnership.

ECC has delegated to the Joint Committees the relevant responsibility for on street civil parking enforcement and charging, relevant signs and lines maintenance and the power to make relevant traffic regulation (TROs) to enable the Joint Committee to carry out a range of functions as set out in the legal Joint Committee Agreement. For example:

- Collection of charges for on street parking within the permitted parking area;
- the administration of residents' parking schemes and the collection of charges for permits;
- issue of Penalty Charge Notices;
- administration of all correspondence, appeals, adjudication and representations to the Traffic Tribunal;
- recovery of payments and charges due under these functions;
- determination of the levels and nature of fees and charges in respect of on street car parking provisions;
- managing the cost of the operation incurred under the Joint Committee Agreement;
- decisions on how any surplus is re-invested in parking services; and

- establish local parking policies, and ensuring that primary legislation obligations are met.

The Partnerships also manage some off street parking enforcement in some districts. Although subject to different legislation the on and off street parking processes are similar and can be enforced by the same patrol teams. However, the fines collected must be kept separate for accounting purposes.

The Partnerships publish full annual reports as required by law. These reports are published on the Partnerships' website and so provide a means for everyone to monitor their operation.

Each Joint Committee will meet four times a year and its meetings are open to the public. Each Partner Authority appoints one of its Members to be a member of the relevant Joint Committee, and that person must be an executive member in order to be able to vote. Each Partner Authority has one vote at meetings of the Joint Committee or any Sub-Committee. Any decision coming before the Joint Committee shall be decided by a simple majority of those present and voting.

All Partner Authorities are equal. The Lead Authority assumes some additional responsibilities on behalf of the Joint Committee, including that of employer to Partnership staff. In the SEPP that Authority is Chelmsford City Council, and Colchester Borough Council in the case of the NEPP.

The arrangements for withdrawal of a Partner Authority from the Joint Committee and the termination of the Joint Committee itself are covered within the formal Joint Committee Agreement. If a Partner Authority decides to withdraw from the Joint Committee on street parking functions would continue to be delivered within that geographical area by the Parking Partnership, but that Authority would no longer be represented on the Joint Committee. In practice a District Council can implement its own legislative responsibility for off street parking, but it would not have the legislative power to deliver an on street parking function that would remain the responsibility of the Highways Authority namely the County Council. If the Parking Partnerships are terminated completely, ECC would need to find an alternative delivery model for those on street parking functions currently delegated.

## **The Executive Review of the Parking Partnerships**

In accordance with the provisions of the formal Agreements, an Executive Review was commissioned by the Partnerships to consider their future operation. The Review was intended to investigate Partner Councils' views on the partnership approach, the overall structure and operation of the NEPP and SEPP, and the way forward.

Detailed evidence on the Essex Parking Partnerships was considered by the Scrutiny Committee in January 2016, and was collated into an interim report that provided Members with some underlying evidence for taking forward consideration of the proposals that would emerge from the Executive Review. The information is not repeated in full in this report, but may be accessed [here](#)

When the Partnerships' representatives briefed the Committee in January 2016, Members took the opportunity to clarify details surrounding the delivery of the parking functions, and how they are being developed to overcome problems that may have existed in the past and to become both more effective and more efficient in the future. It is acknowledged that parking is an area of activity where it is difficult to manage the competing expectations of residents, motorists, commuters, and elected councillors; the management of demands for waiting restrictions and the resources available to enforce those restrictions; and need to consider that the implementation of restrictions in one road may move a parking problem onto adjacent streets with an impact upon a new set of residents.

The Committee was reassured that a majority of the problems that were inherited by the Partnerships when they were set up have been addressed, and improvements are being implemented in the way that proposals are developed locally eg greater engagement with residents. Furthermore there is now greater resilience across the enforcement teams and steps have been taken to ensure that expensive processes are being made more efficient.

### **How did the Scrutiny Committee approach its consideration of the proposals emerging from the Executive Review?**

The PSEGSC has maintained an ongoing interest in the Parking Partnerships since their inception, and the Executive Review provided an opportunity to reflect on those organisations and undertake some pre decision scrutiny of the proposals that emerge on their future operation.

The scrutiny review itself was planned and undertaken by the full Committee in two stages:

- In January 2016 it received a briefing designed to further understanding of the background to the Parking Partnerships and their operation, and
- in March 2016 it considered the outcomes of the Executive Review.

In both cases the Committee conducted a majority of its evidence gathering at formal meetings, and the following contributors shared in the delivery of presentations and answered Members' questions:

#### **Essex County Council**

- Councillor Eddie Johnson
- Liz Burr, Head of Network and Safety/Traffic Manager (Highways)

#### **North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP)**

- Councillor Robert Mitchell, Chairman Joint Committee
- Richard Walker, Group Manager

#### **South Essex Parking Partnership (SEPP)**

- Councillor Ron Pratt, Chairman Joint Committee
- Nick Binder, South Essex Parking Partnership Manager

For ease of reference the following sources of information have been referred to during the course of the scrutiny review:

- Parking Partnerships Joint Agreements Dated March 2011
- Committee reports PSEG/01/16 and PSEG/06/16 that include scoping document and key lines of enquiry agreed by the Committee
- Parking Partnerships Briefing Papers and powerpoint presentations, dated January and March 2016, and audio broadcast of the Committee's formal meetings held on 21 January and 24 March 2016
- Braintree District Council Scrutiny Report dated March 2015

The Essex Parking Partnerships website provides information on the SEPP and NEPP such as policies, annual reports, resident permit schemes, TROs, and Joint Committee Meetings, as well as online facilities including a portal to challenge or pay a Penalty Charge Notice. The website address is [www.parkingpartnership.org](http://www.parkingpartnership.org). Individual Partners also provide information on their own Council websites too and incorporate links to the aforementioned combined Partnership website.

### **County Council Role and Responsibilities**

The Committee discussed the possibility that a lack of understanding about the Partnerships and local engagement may lead to confusion about the role and responsibilities of the Highways Authority itself, so creating the impression that it may need to reinforce its authority.

The documents that were circulated to the Committee prior to the January meeting included the formal legal agreement that established the NEPP and SEPP, and a briefing paper produced for the meeting. These documents underline the fact that the County Council is working in partnership with the districts in both the NEPP and SEPP, and has delegated its responsibilities for civil parking enforcement to the Joint Committees including operational arrangements. Under the legislation ECC retains ultimate responsibility for the function itself by virtue of the fact it is the Highways Authority, and the agreement takes account of that fact in the way the Partnership arrangements have been established.

The formal agreements are legal documents that all the partners have signed, and so each partner is bound by its provisions. The Agreements set out the relationship between the partners and the Joint Committee as well as how the Joint Committee/ Partnership itself will operate. The County Council is one of the partners in the working partnerships that have been established, and it does not have overall control of the Partnerships. There is one ECC representative on each Joint Committee namely the relevant Cabinet Member.

### **Summary of the Executive Review**

On 24 March the Committee received an executive summary and presentation on the review from Parking Partnership representatives.

The ECC Cabinet Member and Joint Committee Chairmen have worked collaboratively as a Governance Group to take forward consideration of the scope



and nature of the four-year extension, and have been supported by an officer working group. Consultants, Blue Marble, were also employed to provide support to the Parking Partnerships for the review.

The Governance Group has examined how the Parking Partnerships have operated to date, and begun to identify the opportunities for further collaboration, innovation and improvements that could be incorporated into an extension agreement.

The Officer Group has collected evidence through a series of workshops and other discussions between November 2015 and February 2016. It has shared the outcomes of its discussions with, and sought input from meetings with the SEPP and NEPP Joint Committees. One to one discussions have also been held with a selection of Local Highway Panel chairmen.

The Committee was advised of the key findings of the Executive Review as follows:

- **Parking partnership operation (initial 7 year term – ending 31 March 2018)**

Overall the new parking partnerships have delivered financial and operational advantages over the previous twelve agency agreement arrangements:

- £900,000 per annum ECC subsidy under agency agreements reduced to an ECC contribution of £150,000 per annum (between the two partnerships) by end of 2016/17 and with a discussion with the two partnerships to try to reduce this to zero by end of 2017/18 (subject to detailed business case).
- The new partnership model has received national recognition through success at the national British Parking awards.
- A range of operational and collaboration innovations have been implemented since partnership set up (for example, rationalised back office operations, joint policies, shared web site, on-line permit system, school parking initiative, staff training, enforcement and TRO management).

- **Parking partnership operation (4 year extension – ending 31 March 2022)**

- There is scope for a self-sufficient financial plan supported by further collaboration and innovation. Concepts that have been discussed and will now be taken to a more detailed feasibility stage including:
  - A single TRO operation (across ECC and the two parking partnerships), including on-line improvements to customer contact and a central on-line data-base and consolidated pipeline for better management and deployment of TRO resources.
  - A best value approach to signs and lines delivery.
  - Expansion of the migration to on-line enforcement activities (payments, permits and customer self-serve – including an on-line PCN challenger).

- Additional income generation schemes (including additional pay and display, increased enforcement activity, reduction in limited waiting time schemes, and new TRO schemes).
- ECC role should transition from a “subsidiser” into a “co-investor”:
  - This could include providing capital pump-prime funding against agreed income generation and efficiency business cases.
  - A return on investment element to be determined on a case-by-case basis.
- The two partnerships and Joint Committee governance system to be retained. The preference of SEPP and NEPP is to retain the two partnership governance model supported by lead agency operations in Chelmsford and Colchester:
  - The size of each partnership is small enough to retain informed decision making and local influence but large enough to provide operational economies of scale.
  - Both partnerships have worked successfully to bed in new arrangements. Keeping the same arrangements through the extension period will provide a secure base from which further benefits can be delivered.
  - Further strengthening to joint working and collaboration across the two lead agency operations (such as sharing of TRO and on-line innovations).
- The NEPP and SEPP Chairmen and the relevant ECC Cabinet Member should continue to meet regularly as a strategic leadership group to ensure:
  - Strengthened communications and understanding across the NEPP, SEPP and ECC.
  - Collaboration opportunities, business growth and efficiency proposals across the two partnerships are pursued.
  - Options are developed in good time before the four-year extension expires in 2022.
- NEPP and SEPP should ensure that their Joint Committee members and lead officers operate effectively as liaison leads with their respective Local Highways Panel (LHP):
  - They should ensure that there is effective sharing of work programmes, meeting minutes and general information updates.
  - This should include the development of a clear role and responsibility descriptions.

All the forward financial *projections and assumptions* reflected in the work to date are draft, indicative and subject to detailed modelling and development of full business cases to be presented to the governance group before final decisions on the terms of the four-year extension are made.

The Partnerships’ representatives emphasised that the key findings set out above are the output from the programme of discussions to date and did not represent the

final set of recommendations to be considered by the SEPP and NEPP Joint Committees.

The Governance Group considered the interim report and draft proposals in February 2016. It had welcomed the outline proposals, and officers from SEPP, NEPP and ECC had been tasked to produce a plan and work through the detailed actions necessary to enable final decisions to be on the extension agreements to be in place by December 2016. It was intended that the Group would continue to meet regularly to oversee progress.

## **Scrutiny Analysis**

The Committee was keen that any conclusions it reached should go beyond merely fulfilling councillors' own need to have a better understanding of the NEPP and SEPP, and to be able to influence any future development of those bodies. Consequently it was necessary to focus upon those matters where the Committee felt that action was necessary to ensure that positive improvements could be made and problems overcome.

While the Committee welcomed the fact that the NEPP and SEPP were now producing small financial surpluses, in line with original objectives, it was apparent that their respective operations are still evolving. Furthermore in their interaction with the Committee the two Partnerships have reinforced their intentions to embed improved ways of working by referring to various projects including improved engagement with residents. Nevertheless Members felt that more effective communication needed to take place with locally elected members.

Before reaching its conclusions the Committee considered in more depth a number of themes as set out below.

- **Financial Situation**

Under previous on street parking agency arrangements, a majority of districts and boroughs were operating at a loss. In the 2003/04 financial year ECC paid a total of £88,350 in deficit support that figure had increased to £815,000 in 2008/09. An investigation of the increasing deficit payments had revealed:

- Limited access to financial or management Information
- No ring-fenced budget at the Area Highway Offices
- Inconsistent parking operation
- Inconsistent approach to restrictions
- Inconsistent organisation structure and methodology
- Multiple software systems for Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs)
- Inconsistent roles & responsibilities for Parking Managers
- No Operational Flexibility
- High staffing levels (over 200 staff )

The Districts and Boroughs were vulnerable to fluctuations in staff levels, and overheads were greater than necessary. It was considered that the service could be operated more

efficiently and at lower cost. In March 2009 ECC gave notice of the termination of all existing Agency Agreements to expire on 31 March 2011. In turn the Partner Local Authorities agreed to form a Joint Committee to manage a new parking management structure in Essex, which culminated in the formation of the NEPP and SEPP in accordance with various enabling legislation.

While the Partnerships have continued to deliver a similar level of service on the ground in comparison with previous district council arrangements, there are benefits and increased efficiencies in the 'back office' operation. Both Partnerships implement their own business plans based on self-contained accounts, and are now able to break even and produce modest surpluses. All surpluses are reinvested into the operation to develop efficiencies such as the implementation of improved technologies.

Strategically the Partnerships have proven to be innovative. They have improved their services at the same time as embedding increased efficiencies and effectiveness in their operation over the longer term. While modest surpluses may be generated at present, consideration is being given to other services that could be managed and/ or delivered by the Partnerships in order to generate income to cover the costs of their operation.

The Executive Review highlights the importance of identifying new streams of income generation, and it was confirmed that the Partnerships were already investigating potential opportunities in this sphere. Although a wide variety of options were under consideration it would be necessary to refer to what was or was not possible under existing legislation, and what could be delivered in practice based on the resources available.

Although the County Council continues to provide some subsidy to the Partnerships on a diminishing scale, it was intended that that situation should cease eventually. However, the Committee considered that any subsidy should not be wholly withdrawn until new income streams are in place and business plans can demonstrate that both the NEPP and SEPP are wholly self-financing. Coupled with this conclusion the Committee confirmed its support for the Partnerships to explore new streams of income aside from that derived from enforcement.

Another financial matter where the Committee considered that there should be greater clarity was around the subject of external funding contributions towards the implementation of particular parking schemes, for instance by parish, town and district councils. Members felt it was unclear how such requests for new schemes are handled and the potential impact of contributions upon the overall position of schemes on waiting lists. In addition there could be ramifications locally in terms of how expectations would be managed for instance in the level of enforcement that would follow. The Partnerships confirmed that local councils are consulted upon proposals as a matter of course.

It was confirmed that as part of business planning moving forward, key performance indicators with SMART objectives will be implemented and begin to define schemes and activities.

With particular reference to performance it was understood that there is now greater resilience across the enforcement teams and steps have been taken to ensure that expensive processes have been made more efficient. However, attention was drawn to figures published by the NEPP that the number of PCNs issued in 2010/2011 had fallen from 13,000 to 10,000 last year in Epping Forest District representing a sum of around £0.5 million in lost income. In response it was confirmed that the NEPP had encountered problems in recruiting and training suitable traffic wardens for the Epping Forest area. It was explained that although traditionally it is an area where people appear to be more willing to park illegally and pay a fine, the NEPP must ensure that any PCNs that are issued are valid and that drivers are encouraged to move vehicles on as appropriate. When Epping Forest District Council had agency arrangements and managed parking enforcement, it had outsourced that operation to a private contractor.

- **Localism and Collaboration**

Aside from developing good practice across the whole of Essex, it was recognised that improvements to processes and procedures could also deliver efficiencies and contribute towards self sufficient financial plans.

The Committee supported the NEPP, SEPP and ECC intention to work more closely together, and collaborate on opportunities for business growth and efficiency proposals across the two Partnerships. By way of example all three bodies currently undertake the processing of new TROs, and it was considered that by consolidating the three bodies' resources into a single TRO operation it would be possible to implement better management of resources, as well as improvements to the way customers may engage with the service. It was noted that joined up working has already delivered a common Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) system.

Individual Partner Councils and their representatives bear some responsibility for the way that their particular Council engages in the NEPP or SEPP, and it was clear from the Committee's own membership that there is variation in ways of working across Essex. For instance the way that proposed schemes are chosen for inclusion in the local lists put forward for the consideration of the Joint Committees each year, and local communication with county/ district councillors and the public. The inclusion of additional schemes that may be funded by other means does not stop others being implemented. Locally some districts have longer scheme lists than others, and while some may leave all proposals on a list others have chosen to delete those that are not viable. It was acknowledged that there are differences across the Partnership areas partly due to the variety of local conditions that exist.

There was also a sense that set against public expectations it was necessary to encourage Councils to engage positively with the relevant Partnership, and to be realistic about both the local and overall workloads that can be delivered through the Partnerships' business plans, and resources available.

At the same time the Partnerships need to take ongoing steps to raise awareness locally of their management and operations as well as current issues. Attention was drawn to the importance of image and public relations. Some Members felt that the public perceive parking fines and finance to be a driving force behind the Partnerships' activity rather than resolving parking problems. This needs to be

countered with highlighting the delivery of broader customer service, and performance to measure success or otherwise. Moving forward it is important that the any confusion about the NEPP and SEPP must be dispelled, and the website cannot be relied upon to ensure that people understand parking matters.

Aside from Joint Committee meetings, the Partnerships have held local meetings at Partner Authorities to explain their role, responsibilities and operation. While the Chairman of the NEPP drew attention to a meeting held at Braintree, which councillors had found useful, he pointed out that parking is a complex topic and one of a range of topics that individuals find frustrating and are inclined to blame other individuals and organisations for 'problems'.

The Partnerships' representatives drew attention to the liaison that already took place with the public on the design and promotion of new schemes, and the framework for residents to put forward proposals including an application form that requires the applicant to liaise with local councillors. Emphasis was being placed on taking forward more innovative ways of working to provide greater transparency that took account of broader public needs from competing demands for road space, to different modes of communication including telephone, written exchange, and online facilities. The Partnerships have published regularly their annual reports and business plans that provide an insight into their operation.

Steps are being taken to collaborate more effectively with the twelve Local Highways Panels across Essex. As part of the Executive Review consideration is being given to a future financial model; synergies with related areas such as the Local Highways Panels, commonalities between partnerships; operational innovation; and diversification opportunities.

The opportunity was taken to clarify parking policies around the suspension of parking restrictions when local events may be held and on bank holidays. TROs are legally binding, and formal steps would be taken to vary a TRO to exclude bank holidays from any restrictions on a permanent basis. If there are local events where there may be reasons for suspending waiting restrictions temporarily, then the organisers should liaise with the relevant Partnership in advance to discuss proposals.

- **Role of the Representatives on the Joint Committee**

At the January meeting the Parking Partnerships confirmed that the Executive Review would be considering the role and responsibilities of the Partners' executive representatives on the Joint Committees. Those representatives are an important conduit between the memberships of the individual Councils and the activities of the Partnerships, and it was necessary to review how those relationships could evolve to improve understanding of the NEPP and SEPP. Consequently consideration was being given to the introduction of a job description for Joint Committee representatives.

The Committee welcomed the introduction of a job description for the Partners' representatives as a way of raising their profile by defining their roles and responsibilities, and improving transparency around their actions. It was suggested

that a description should include a reference to ensuring that the elected members of their respective councils are kept informed about NEPP/SEPP activity, and the dates of Joint Committee meetings.

- **Communication**

Based upon their individual experience Members considered that more effective communication was necessary to enhance understanding about the Partnerships' activities.

Over the past five years the Partnerships have made positive progress in the way that parking is managed across Essex, as well as taking steps to promote transparency about their activities for instance enabling the public to address Joint Committee, a dedicated website, and clear channels for the public to put forward parking proposals.

Although the NEPP and SEPP publish a wide range of information about their activities on the Essex Parking Partnerships, and as well as providing online facilities for the public to manage PCNS and parking permits, the Committee considered that further improvements to the range of information available were necessary.

Aside from online PCN facilities the joint website includes information on the Joint Committees, Policies and Procedures, Annual Reports and Business Plans, and more recently regular blogs have been introduced to inform the public about current issues. While the website requires individuals to interrogate its content, there were some areas where the Committee considered that the website and current systems fail to keep all elected councillors aware of parking issues in their local areas, and where more steps could be taken to generate much more positive engagement with the public as well as Partners authorities.

A number of improvements are already underway. A database is being developed by the NEPP whereby individuals including the public will be able to interrogate the progress of TRO proposals online, and receive automatic updates in some cases.

Concern was raised as to how fit for purpose some aspects of the Partnerships' systems may be for the public to negotiate. One councillor drew attention to the difficulties he had encountered when attempting to lodge a complaint.

The Partnerships' representatives confirmed that two types of complaint are handled, and there provisions in the Traffic Management Act 2004 that have to be adhered to. There is a clearly defined challenge process against PCNs that have been issued, and a separate process for complaints about a service. The Joint Committee meetings also provide an opportunity for individuals to raise matters in a public setting. A system failure problem that had arisen in Harlow District relating to a complaint made online had been addressed and improvements made for users of the online facility. The Committee was reassured that while it is more efficient for complaints to be handled online and it is well used by the public, the Partnerships have maintained the ability for individuals to contact them using more traditional forms of communication including the telephone and written correspondence. The

number of complaints received are published every year are published, albeit not the content of each one.

Attention was drawn to a monthly newsletter that was produced by the SEPP that Committee Member from the Brentwood area received that highlighted parking schemes and resident requests for new restrictions. It provided a useful mechanism for councillors to stay abreast with current parking issues. The Committee considered that it would be extremely helpful if all elected councillors both at county and district levels could be issued with a regularly monthly newsletter to not only inform them about local parking proposals but to raise awareness of the Partnerships' activity in general, and inter alia to provide another opportunity for councillors to be able to contribute to the consideration of new schemes.

## **Conclusions**

Based upon the evidence considered, the Committee supported the ongoing operation of the Parking Partnerships for a further four year period.

In tackling the topic of parking it was acknowledged by the Committee and Partnerships alike that, in practice, it is difficult to balance often competing local demands and produce a scheme that is acceptable to both local residents and motorists. Nevertheless the NEPP and SEPP have fulfilled many of the objectives for which they were originally set up, with progress being made towards developing improved ways of working and overcoming the financial deficits that were being incurred across the county in some districts. The fact that there are two rather than one Parking Partnerships is supported as a strength of the current structure, because it underpins more localised governance at the same time as enabling more effective management of resources.

The Parking Partnerships have been in operation since April 2011 and have made much progress towards embedding ongoing improvements in the way parking functions are delivered in Essex. However, the Committee was of the opinion that there remains a need to enhance overall understanding of the role and responsibilities of the Partnerships, and how localism still plays an important role in the way that parking controls may be proposed and implemented across a district.

Although the NEPP and SEPP have been formally set up as separate organisations, the individual Partner Authorities need to be accountable for their contribution to the image and operation of the Partnerships. Aside from engagement with the public, the local council will influence the extent to which local district and county councillors feel more or less aware of parking issues, and in turn their attitudes towards the formally constituted Partnerships set up to deliver the on street and off street parking functions in Essex.

During the course of its review the Committee had the opportunity to develop a better understanding of the Partnerships' role and responsibilities, and through cross examination of witnesses how their operations are evolving. While welcoming the adoption of new and innovative ways to improve transparency on their activities, the Committee considered that communication remained an issue where it is essential to ensure that effective systems are in place to both inform the public and enable them to engage positively with the NEPP and SEPP.



NEPP has introduced a petitions pathway for residents seeking new schemes, and there is information published on the internet for the public. Similarly the SEPP was responsible for introducing an application form for people to submit proposals for new parking schemes. Furthermore a database is being developed for managing TRO requests, and it was intended that the public should be able to interrogate it to get up date progress on individual proposals.

In summary at a strategic level the NEPP and SEPP publish directly a lot of information on the joint website, and have been implementing improvements on an ongoing basis since their original set up to improve public relations through promoting transparency and understanding about their activity with the public. Furthermore Joint Committee meetings provide an opportunity for both the public and councillors to submit their views in person, and reference was made to some surplus monies being invested in new technologies such as databases that will be capable of being interrogated by the public via the internet to find out how schemes are progressing.

Aside from the wider considerations of the Executive Review in terms of the future operation of the Parking Partnerships, there was genuine concern on the perceived lack of communication with county councillors on the work of the Joint Committees and parking schemes in their divisions, and a failure to consult them directly whether by the Parking Partnerships or via the individual District in the way proposals are handled locally. As the Committee's attention had been drawn to the useful monthly newsletter that SEPP was published for councillors, it was considered that the concept of a regular newsletter should be developed by the Partnerships to ensure that all councillors across Essex are kept informed of matters affecting their local areas.

**With particular reference to the Executive Review the Essex Parking Partnerships be recommended:**

- 1. That the Essex Parking Partnerships and ECC Cabinet Member be advised that on balance the Committee support the proposed four year extension of the NEPP and SEPP agreements.**
- 2. That the ECC Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport be advised that the Committee considers that the County Council should not withdraw its subsidy from the Parking Partnerships until such time as they are able to be wholly self-financing.**
- 3. That the Essex Parking Partnerships be urged to provide greater clarity on the role of external funding upon the implementation of new schemes.**
- 4. That the NEPP and SEPP publish a regular newsletter for all elected county and district councillors to ensure that they are kept informed of local**

**parking issues and proposals within each Partner Authority area.**

- 5. That the Essex Parking Partnerships review current practice with a view to further improvements being made to raise public awareness of their role and activities.**
  - 6. That the Committee support the introduction of a job description for the Partner Authorities' representatives on the Joint Committee, and propose that it should include a responsibility for ensuring that all elected members of their respective administrative areas are kept informed in advance about NEPP/SEPP activity, and the dates of Joint Committee meetings.**
  - 7. It was requested that the Partnerships' formal response to these recommendations be forwarded to the Committee before any final decisions on their future are determined.**
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