

Report title: Local Highway Panels	
Report to: Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
Report author: Justin Long, Senior Democratic Services Officer	
Date: 19 October 2023	For: Discussion and identifying any follow-up scrutiny actions
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County Divisions affected: All	

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee (PSEG) is responsible for scrutinising Strategic Highways and Transportation including Local Highway Panels (LHPs).
- 1.2 The Committee has considered various updates and reports on LHPs following the completion of a Task and Finish Group review in March 2022. These have included:

[Task and Finish Group Review – Final Report and Recommendations \(March 2022\)](#)

[Initial Response to LHP Task and Finish Group Review \(June 2022\)](#)

[Local Highway Panel Task and Finish Group Review – Final Response \(March 2023\)](#)

- 1.3 At the March 2023 meeting, the following points were recorded in the Minutes:

It was agreed that a report on LHPs would be brought back to the Committee in approximately six months' time.

Officers confirmed that the new tracking tool for members to monitor LHP schemes would be available from April.

Officers further confirmed that the training on LHPs referenced in the report would be devised and ready in April.

- 1.4 In September 2023, the Committee considered the following report:

[Withdrawn Call-in: FP/175/06/23 Changes to the composition of the Local Highway Panels \(LHPs\)](#)

This outlined that the proposed Cabinet Member Decision - Changes to the composition of the Local Highway Panels (FP/175/06/23) - was called-in by Councillor Barry Aspinell with the support of Councillors Mike Mackrory, James Newport, and Mark Cory.

1.5 The following reasons were given for the call-in:

"The decision asks the Cabinet Member to agree more 'local flexibility' as to how Local Highway Panels can best work and who can sit on them. However, this leaves the Chair to decide, without input of the panel, who they wish to sit on it. In the case of most LHP's meetings would always take place within the local council offices and voting members would be the County Council members, local district members and a representative from the Parish Councils, plus officers. Meetings would often be clerked by the district Council staff and administrative work carried out by that same office. If this decision is implemented the Chair will have the power to cut membership to only the county members, with no input from district or parish members. This will disenfranchise local members and we will lose valuable local knowledge of areas.

"District Councils may, quite rightly, decide to withdraw their support of the LHP, meaning an alternative venue and secretariat may need to be sought. This would mean that the LHP may not necessarily be in the area in which the Councillors are from, meaning unnecessary travel which also impacts on the climate. The issue of Quorum for meetings is an important one if only the County Members are on the LHP meetings, if one of the County members, for whatever reason cannot attend the meeting will Panels always be cancelled? This has already proved inefficient in the example of the recent Brentwood LHP when one member had to give apologies, the meeting was cancelled as there are now only 4 county members on the panel (although the formal decision has yet to be implemented).

"Would it not be more beneficial to have one unified system for these Panels applied throughout Essex so they can all operate as efficiently and effectively as possible, rather than leaving the format to be decided on the seemingly whim of individual Chairpersons? "

1.6 Following informal discussions between call-in members, the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport and the Chairman of the Committee, the call-in was withdrawn with the agreement that the Committee consider the matter as part of its regular work programme.

1.7 In addition to the above reports, members of PSEG have expressed concerns about the performance of LHPs on numerous occasions including at the June 2023 meeting ([see Minute 3](#)) and requested that the issue be considered as a matter of urgency.

2. Action required

2.1 The Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Sustainable Transport has been invited to the meeting to discuss LHPs.

2.2 Noting the above Introduction three main policy and performance issues can be identified:

- Implementation of the Task & Finish Group recommendations and the

responses given including on budget, member training, tracking of LHP schemes, and the new 'Chair's Panel.'

- Withdrawn call-in on membership issue and the desirability of the 'local flexibility' given to individual LHP Chairmen.
- General concerns regarding the performance of LHPs as expressed by members of the Committee.

2.3 Members are encouraged to discuss these issues with the Cabinet Member and question them accordingly as well as identify any follow-up work or scrutiny action.

2.4 Expected attendees to support the discussion:

Cabinet Member for Sustainable Transport and Highways Maintenance
Justin Styles – Design Manager
Daniel Maclean – Highway Liaison Team Leader

3. Links to Everyone's Essex

Effective LHPs link to several of the ambitions outlined including on Infrastructure, and Transport and the built environment.