

<b>Report title:</b> Ringway Jacobs Joint Task and Finish Group – response to recommendations	
<b>Report to:</b> Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee	
<b>Report author:</b> Cllr Kevin Bentley, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Infrastructure	
<b>Date:</b> Tuesday 30 July 2019	<b>For:</b> Discussion
<b>Enquiries to:</b> Hilde Dahmer, Senior Strategy Adviser	
<b>County Divisions affected:</b> All Essex	

## 1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 In November 2018, it was agreed that a joint Task and Finish Group between the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee and Places Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee would be formed, to carry out a review of the Ringway Jacobs highway maintenance contract.
- 1.2 The committees invited Cllr Kevin Bentley to this meeting to present his formal response to the recommendations put forward by the Task and Finish Group.

## 2. Response from Cllr Kevin Bentley to the Task and Finish Group recommendations

I would like to thank members of the joint scrutiny task and finish group for their comprehensive report on the current contractual arrangements we have for the delivery of highway maintenance and management services here in Essex. Whilst there is a large amount of work still on going before we will be in a position to determine the future of the contract, much of the work of the group will be of great value to me in guiding future activity. As is appropriate with such reports, I have asked officers to review all 23 recommendations and provide the committee with responses on each one. In some cases, this provides clarification, and in others confirmation of activity to close out the actions.

These responses are set out below;

- 1) **Members of the Task and Finish Group recommend to ECC Cabinet Member that the most sensible option is to renew the contract with Ringway Jacobs for five years, with the caveat that a number of changes are made to current arrangements. These are set out in the recommendations below in the following categories: ongoing scrutiny, maintenance, reporting of defects, customer services and communications and supply chain works.**

As indicated when I received the report, any decisions on contract extension will be made by cabinet in the Autumn and I have been clear with officers that the decision will be based upon an appropriate evidence base. In the meantime,

preparations are being made for re-procurement should this be the most appropriate decision to make.

- 2) Members still have serious concerns regarding the readiness of ECC to re-procure. Within three years, both Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee and Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee need to be satisfied that ECC is in a secure position to re-procure, with a clear place for scrutiny factored into the timeline.**

We have in place sufficient resource and experience to re-procure the contract if that is the decision taken, as well as having planned the timeline accordingly. Officers have been instructed to engage the market and prepare for a procurement process to acquire a new partner and/or contract for the authority and the timeline for the decision of cabinet in the autumn allows nearly two and a half years for this to occur before the termination of the existing arrangement.

- 3) A working group (hereafter referred to as the Ringway Jacobs and Essex Highways Working Group) should be established to facilitate an ongoing engagement with Ringway Jacobs and ECC Highways officers. This will continue the work of the Task and Finish Group, encouraging member-driven scrutiny looking at procurement, highways policy and overall contract performance. The Ringway Jacobs and Essex Highways Working Group should meet quarterly. A six-monthly update, presented by the Chairman of this Working Group, will be delivered to both scrutiny committees. The Group will be comprised equally of members from both the Place Services and Economic Growth and Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committees and operated through current task and finish arrangements.**

While I welcome the role that scrutiny have to play in having oversight of our highways contract, I believe it appropriate that we wait until we have the outcome of the decision on future provision before determining the exact nature and frequency of this activity which will necessarily be different depending upon whether we extend the existing arrangements or procure a new contract.

- 4) The annual review of Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) that are presented to the Cabinet Member should also be presented to the Place Services and Economic Growth Policy and Scrutiny Committee and the Corporate Policy and Scrutiny Committee for further review, with time to offer recommendations.**

I am happy to endorse this recommendation which should commence with the development of the KPI suite to serve as the performance framework for the 20/21 financial year. These will be draw together in late 2019.

- 5) The Ringway Jacobs and Essex Highways Working Group will continue the benchmarking work of this committee, exploring the work of other highways authorities.**

Please see reference to my earlier response on the role and remit of this group in the different scenarios we are currently considering.

- 6) The Cabinet Member is to be commended for improvements in the quality of relationships between members and Ringway Jacobs officers. This is due, in large, to the success of the ‘buddy system’. Member relationships with regards to local pieces of work however, could be improved. There should be a mechanism put in place for direct scrutiny of specific contract elements or pieces of work, even if this simply involves the local member being consulted upon request. This could be through an enhanced version of the ‘buddy system’ already in operation.**

We continue to work on enhancing the amount of advance information provided to County Members relating to highway schemes of all types. In addition to the introduction of the buddy system we have also implemented new systems in relation to accident reductions schemes which give members early sight via the LHP meetings and have enhanced the amount of information available to members through our website. We will continue to seek ways of enhancing member awareness of activity going forward.

- 7) The Cabinet Member should consider asking officers to review the risk matrix. As it stands, serious defects that might register significantly on the ‘risk impact’ scale, but only slightly on the ‘risk probability’ scale could potentially receive a less urgent timescale for repair than their impact would necessitate. This should be addressed. Members should be engaged through the Ringway Jacobs and Essex Highways Working Group to aid in the review and update of the risk register.**

While I respect the view of members on this issue, the risk matrix we have adopted reflects industry best practice and our inspectors are continually trained to ensure that their application of this approach results in a robust assessment. I would therefore be concerned if we were to amend this approach without significant justification.

- 8) The Cabinet Member and officers should explore reviewing the current Maintenance Strategy (last updated in 2008) with a view to determining suitability of ECC’s current policy priorities and is encouraged to make use of the Working Group. This should include a conversation around road classifications and priorities as well as the current criteria for defects to warrant repair.**

I am pleased to confirm that the maintenance strategy is in the process of being updated and should be available to members shortly. This seeks to expand our best practice approach to the management of some assets across into areas where we haven’t previously had an adopted position such as structures.

- 9) Members noted with concern that particular KPI’s outlining timescale requirements for street light repairs had been removed from the contract. Members ask that KPI A14 (average number of days taken to repair lighting faults within control of the Local Authority is reinstated.**

I am happy to review this and look at the case for re-instatement of KPI A14 for the performance year 20/21 onwards should the evidence warrant it and in line with recommendation 4 would seek the views of the member working group to review.

**10) Members should receive a more accurate indicative timetable for remedial works and larger schemes, with estimates on timescales provided for communication with local residents.**

It was acknowledged by officers during the task and finish process that our ability to transform back office programming information into publicly (or member) available information was deficient at present and I have been clear that we need to improve our systems to allow this to happen.

**11) A specific KPI should be included within the contract for all work carried out by utility companies to be inspected before the two-year maintenance repair ends. This inspection should determine whether the work has been completed properly and to an agreeable standard. Reporting of defects**

I am happy to look at the resource implications of such a requirement and whether the cost/benefit would warrant such a change in activity.

**12) Officers and Members raised a number of concerns regarding the interaction between Ringway Jacobs and Essex Highways systems (Confirm/online reporting tool). This should be seen as a priority moving forward, to ensure a more effective, joined up service is offered in future.**

IS integration has been an ongoing issue between our organisations since the start of the contract but I am hopeful that recent improvements will allow more seamless integration between teams, creating jointly accessible collaborative project spaces and improving access to respective organisations systems.

**13) The ease with which faults can be reported has a huge amount of impact on overall public perception of the highways service offered by ECC. Ringway Jacobs and ECC should learn from best practice in terms of fault reporting with a view to designing a more effective system. This should provide members of the public with more detailed information regarding the defect including an estimated timescale for repair. We are aware that work is already being undertaken to improve the online tools and the Working Group would welcome being involved in this moving forward.**

I am again pleased to confirm that we have a live project in place making progressive improvements to the existing report it tool that allow a more appropriate experience for those wishing to report defects to us. This will see us move to better mobile compatibility and geo-locating for defect identification together with enhancements to the look and feel of the tool to improve the customer experience.

**14) All Members should receive quarterly drop-in and training opportunities on issues around reporting of defects, changes to the online tool, and follow up enquiries.**

While I am happy to offer members the required training opportunities, attendance at these types of sessions to enhance member knowledge of the service and its activity have in the past been less than desirable. I would therefore welcome recommendations from the scrutiny panels as to how we would increase attendance going forward to maximise the benefits?

**15) It was noted by members that, while ECC and Ringway Jacobs are both excellent with regards to reactive communications, both need to work together to produce a more proactive communications agenda. Members of the Working Group gave considerable time investigating this area and would like to undertake further analysis as part of its future programme. Members understand that expectations need to be managed but feel strongly that Ringway Jacobs should be measured on overall public perception through an additional KPI – the manner of which to be determined by the Cabinet and officers, with input from the Essex Highways Ringway Jacobs Working Group.**

Perception is critical to the success of the service however it is difficult to quantify as data points would fluctuate on a daily basis, including the fact that it is incredibly difficult to measure at all.

However, I have worked to improve perception and this has been confirmed anecdotally – asking Essex Highways to work with the Future Highways Research Group to develop a forward calendar of proactive communication activity that will represent best practice in the sector. I am very keen to instigate a culture where communications are part of the first principals for any scheme in the same way as we consider health and safety responsibilities.

**16) Members question the value of the National Highways Tracker (NHT) as an effective method of measuring satisfaction. Officers and Members should explore whether the NHT is fit for ECC, and whether an in-house alternative could potentially lead to greater ownership of results, more validity of feedback, and more control over the questions asked.**

I have instructed officers to address this issue. Again, working with the Future Highways Research Club from Cranfield University who represent the leading highway authorities in the country, we are developing our own satisfaction survey as part of a gradual move away from reliance upon the NHT survey.

**17) A single, clearer set of lines of responsibility for informing members of changes to roadworks and reported repairs be implemented which could be written into the Ringway Jacobs contract.**

Because of the dynamic way in which roadworks change and the fact that our own activity represents only a proportion of disruption on the network, we have moved to adopting the use of Roadworks.org of all activity on the Essex network

including utility company works. This gives members and the public alike the opportunity to get the most up to date information and set up their own updates should they require them.

- 18)The Cabinet Member should consider the potential for ECC to employ or contract its own independent inspectors to assess the quality of works carried out by Ringway Jacobs parent companies, as well as the wider supply chain. This could be conducted as a sampling exercise, with a KPI associated to ensure that the quality of works remains consistent.**

I have asked officers to review to potential for this as part of any variation to the existing contract or new contract in due course. It will require a business case for additional resource to be developed.

- 19)ECC needs to more closely oversee larger pieces of supply chain work. The Working Group should be more engaged moving forward and provided assurances as to the value for money and quality of work provided by third parties.**

It would be useful for the task and finish group to provide me with some examples of the areas there are specifically interested in so that I am able to consider this recommendation further.

- 20)All third parties carrying out work on ECC’s behalf should be branded accordingly, explicitly stating that the organisation is representing ECC. The quality and consistency of signage on Essex Highways works also needs to be greatly improved in terms of the information provided and the expected timescales outlined for completion.**

I am happy to undertake to review this recommendation with officers as we move forward. Some of the recommendation overlaps with my previous comments about communications but there is an interesting issue here about branding that I wish to pick up separately.

- 21)The Cabinet Member should explore encouraging Ringway Jacobs to adopt an incentive-based scheme when procuring further works beyond those originally contracted. This could take the form of a ranked preference system as already in operation in authorities such as Hampshire County Council.**

The existing contractual mechanisms allow for incentivisation of all work through the efficiency mechanism process. We are also establishing the ability to trade Essex Highways for third party work as a further incentivisation mechanism.

- 22)ECC should draw more on expertise from within the Supply Chain Forum, collectively determining solutions to local government pressures around efficiency and reputational damage. There needs to be a mechanism in place to ensure that these efficiencies are monitored and fed back into the supply chain. The Ringway Jacobs and Essex Highways Working Group**

**should engage with these and the Chairman of the Ringway Jacobs and Essex Supply Chain Forum.**

I think it would benefit the scrutiny committee if they had a more detailed understanding of the work of the supply chain forum and how it operates.

**23) Ringway Jacobs is to be commended for its social value work and commitment to activities beyond those required through the contract, especially with regards to work carried out with the armed forces. ECC should be better at publicising this work. The Cabinet Member should encourage Ringway Jacobs to adopt more internal social value measures, and the working group are to be engaged to monitor the ongoing number of apprentices within Ringway Jacobs.**

I would concur with the scrutiny committee wholeheartedly here – the valuable work that we undertake on a wide range of social value issues should be encouraged and more widely publicised going forward. I am also happy to provide nominated representatives of the scrutiny committee with updates on apprentice numbers going forward.”

### **3. Next steps**

- 3.1 Both committees to review the responses above and to have a discussion on the topic during the meeting.