

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 10 July 2014 **Time:** 7.30 - 9.30 pm

Place: Council Chamber, Civic
Offices, High Street, Epping

**Members
Present:**

Representing Epping Forest District Council:

Councillor(s): A Boyce, K Angold-Stephens, Mrs M Sartin and
Mrs J H Whitehouse

Other Councillors:

Councillor(s): R Bassett, G Waller, G Chambers and D Stallan

Representing Essex County Council:

County Councillor(s): M McEwen, Mrs V Metcalfe, C Pond,
J M Whitehouse and Mrs R Gadsby

Representing Local Councils:

Mrs S Jackman (Ongar Town Council), R Balcombe (Fyfield Parish Council), Councillor Mrs J Bowerman (Matching Parish Council), Councillor Mrs N Bridge (Fyfield Parish Council), L Burrows, S Caves (Sheering Parish Council), J Farren (Stapleford Abbots Parish Council), H Kane (Waltham Abbey Town Council), Councillor B Miller (Epping Upland Parish Council), R Northwood (Sheering Parish Council), Mrs C P Pond (Loughton Town Council), C C Pond (Loughton Town Council), P Price (Lambourne Parish Council), A Raven (Lambourne Parish Council), Mrs K Richmond (Waltham Abbey Town Council), D Roberts (Ongar Town Council), R E Russell (Stapleford Abbots Parish Council), A Shaw (Epping Town Council (Clerk)), B Surtees (Ongar Town Council) and N Wilkinson (Roydon Parish Council)

Apologies: Epping Forest District Council –

Councillor(s): B Rolfe

Essex County Council –

Councillor(s): J Knapman and A Jackson

Parish/Town Councils: -

Mrs J Ballard (Roydon Parish Council), Mrs D Borton (Nazeing Parish Council), Mrs G Castle (Nazeing Parish Council), Mrs V Evans (Epping Upland Parish Council), R Morgan (Sheering Parish Council), R Morgan (Matching Parish Council), Miss H Nicholas (Roydon Parish Council), Mrs E K Walsh (Loughton Town Council) and K White (Chigwell Parish Council)

Officers Present: D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Neighbourhoods), A Cronin (Interim Assistant Director), K Durrani (Assistant Director (Technical Services)), S G Hill (Assistant Director (Governance & Performance Management)), P Millward (Business Manager) and J Leither (Democratic Services Assistant)

By Invitation: County Councillor R Bass (Essex County Council Portfolio Holder for Transportation and Highways)

1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Assistant Director of Governance and Performance Management reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

2. REMEMBRANCE OF COUNCILLORS MRS PENNY SMITH AND KEN AVEY

The Vice Chairman of the committee asked the committee to stand for a moment's silence to remember the contribution made to this committee by Councillors Mrs Penny Smith and Ken Avey who died last month.

3. MINUTES

(a) Minutes of the Last Committee Meeting

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the last Committee meeting held on 6 March 2014 be agreed subject to an amendment under "Members Present," "Representing Local Councils" – Town Councillors R Witham and P Price (Lambourne Parish Council) had not been recorded.

(b) Matters Arising

Under Item 24 (2) Collection of Rubbish and Recycling from Community/Village Halls, Councillor C C Pond requested information on recycling collections and its costing. The Deputy Chief Executive advised that he did not currently have an update but would send the information on to the Councillor.

4. INVITE TO ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR TRANSPORTATION AND HIGHWAYS

The Chairman welcomed County Councillor R Bass, Essex County Council Portfolio Holder for Transportation and Highways.

County Councillor R Bass congratulated the Chairman on being recently appointed as Chairman of Council and hoped that he would have a happy year in office. County Councillor R Bass stated that it was a great privilege to attend this meeting, the county of Essex had 5,200 miles of roads and 6,000 miles of public rights of way. The county was one of the biggest local authorities in Europe which illustrated the size of the problem which his portfolio was tasked with tackling. He received 300 emails per day regarding highways issues and although he had been criticised in the press for not always responding to enquiries, it was impossible for him know every detail of the county's road problems.

There was a 2 year programme to improve the county's road. Because of the back log of work, officers were playing catch up with the workload. He acknowledged that the situation was getting worse. It would take 2 years to make the improvements he intended to make.

The roads would be re-prioritised to:

- (1) Priority Route 1 – A roads;
- (2) Priority Route 2 – B roads; and
- (3) Local routes.

The local routes were suburban estate type roads.

Defects on Priority 1 and 2 roads would be repaired within 28 days. Every defect on these roads would be repaired this year. He emphasised that estate roads were not the same priority and therefore would wait longer for repair work. Priority 1 and 2 made up 40% of the county's roads, there were too many roads to repair.

He advised that he would repair all defects including footways, drainage, road markings on the worst 100 roads in the county, 10 of which were within Epping Forest. 60 of the worse estate roads would be comprehensively repaired this year. The County Council website would contain these highways earmarked for priority. He added that these priorities were not determined by himself but by the severity of the road conditions.

The Portfolio Holder informed members that there were conflicting financial priorities with other services. Sacrifices by other County Cabinet Portfolio Holders had been made in order to support Transportation and Highways. However, he said that his portfolio had made important savings by switching off street lights between midnight and 5.00a.m., £1.3 million would be saved per annum.

The Government had awarded £8 million to spend on defects, with the County Council awarding a further £9.5 million, making £17.5 million extra for repairs, the grand total being £32 million.

The County Council had expanded the 4 man work gangs repairing defects from 16 to 38. An extra £1 million was being spent on white road markings. Although these would only be spend on Priority 1 and 2 roads.

The Chairman thanked the Portfolio Holder for his presentation. The committee went on to ask questions.

(a) Ongar Town Councillor B Surtees asked about the poor repair work in rural areas he had experienced recently, which had taken a long time to complete. In addition road repairs undertaken were not always linked to drainage repairs. The Councillor commented on the short length of Zebra crossing markings.

County Councillor R Bass advised that the standard of repairs had much improved over the year and the County Council were in partnership with a company who though at the forefront of road technology were being held to account by the authority. New Government legislation had been introduced controlling the right of utility companies to make repairs irrespective of the highways authority. There would now be a permit

scheme whereby utility companies would be required to request permission before undertaking road work and could be charged, particularly if their work overran.

(b) The new road hierarchy prioritisation could lead to conflict with Parish Councils.

County Councillor R Bass advised that there has been no direct consultation with local councils, there had been consultation with County and District Councils. There simply wasn't enough time. Individuals could approach him if a priority was incorrect.

(c) Damaged footways and pavements that were not in the Priority 1 and 2 category could cause trips and falls, of which there were a high number in the area.

County Councillor R Bass advised that there was a separate budget for footways and pavements. He supported undertaking footway work in estate roads alongside general repairs of those roads.

(d) Were yellow lines the responsibility of Highways or North East Parking Partnerships?

County Councillor R Bass said that the Parking Partnerships dealt with yellow lines and disabled parking bays. There would be a review of the partnerships before April 2015. Each district should play a full part with their partnership representatives. The Local Highways Panel would deal with residents parking permit schemes.

(e) Were there on-line maps indicating roads earmarked for repair available? The Roydon/Nazeing area had a glasshouse industry with HGV access causing problems in rural areas.

County Councillor R Bass said that HGVs were permitted to use the highways, they were sustaining the local economy. However, as Portfolio Holder he may consider imposing restrictions on them.

(f) The Vice Chairman asked if the Highways and Transportation Portfolio included cutting back grass verges along the A414 between Writtle and Ongar. Bollards were destroyed or damaged and road signs needed cleaning.

County Councillor R Bass advised that there was a service level agreement whereby county paid the District Council to manage additional cuts a year. The District Council augments the sum. The Highways Rangers were operated by the Local Highways Panel which was a County Council responsibility. The District Council sponsored work on roundabout greens. He added that £50,000 had been invested by the County Council into vegetation control and drainage which hopefully would be matched by the District Council, making a total of £100,000 a larger sum than the £80,000 spent by the Highways Rangers.

5. ISSUES RAISED BY LOCAL COUNCILS

(1) iPlan

The Committee received a report regarding the Parish Councils iPlan User Group from the Planning Business Service Manager.

The ratio of electronic planning applications to manual paper planning continued to increase. The District Council currently received 46% of all applications in electronic format which was expected to increase to over 60% in the next twelve months. It was advised that nationally 82% of all planning applications were being processed in electronic format. Some urgency was needed to support Parish and Town Councils in moving from receiving manual paper planning applications to receiving them electronically.

Notification had been given at the March 2014 committee, that as of 1 October 2014, the District Council would no longer be in a position to print and distribute electronically received planning documentation to local councils due to resource limitations. It was advised that copies of plans received in paper format would continue to be distributed to local councils.

Members were informed that Development Management intended supporting local councils through this process with the following measures:

- (a) Provision of a limited number of small projectors to assist in presenting applications electronically. This would take the form of a one off grant to the local councils concerned and the District Council would not be responsible for the maintenance or replacement of equipment provided;
- (b) Parish and Town Council feedback was being actively encouraged both from the iPlan User Group and individual councils;
- (c) Parish and Town Councils had been encouraged to visit planning services to gain familiarity with planning processes and an understanding of the electronic processing of applications. Further visits throughout 2014 would continue to be supported;
- (d) The District Council's ICT section had raised the issue of connectivity with BT Superfast Broadband as there were on-going problems with Broadband access in some areas. ICT had communicated to Buzzcom about Broadband service to some of the Town and Parish Councils, they were also checking services for North Weald and Chigwell; and
- (e) A pilot project was in the process of investigating whether it was feasible to provide access to planning documentation held by the District Council on their in-house ICT system for Parish/Town Council clerks. The benefits of this would improve image quality of plans and quicker downloading times.

RESOLVED:

That the following be noted:

- (1) That a meeting of the iPlan User Group held on 29 May 2014 discussed the difficulties in accessing Broadband with slow speeds creating downloading difficulties;
- (2) That the District Council is assisting Parish and Town Councils move towards paperless planning meetings by providing a number of support measures;
- (3) That further meetings will take place during 2014 with Parish Clerks for training and support;

- (4) That Development Management (Planning) has allocated projectors/screens for the display of planning information at Parish Council planning meetings;
- (5) That the District Council would purchase projectors/screens for the use of Parish/Town Councils, but would not be held responsible for their maintenance including equipment failure; and
- (6) That no further paper copies of plans received electronically will be distributed to Parish/Town Councils in paper format from 1 October 2014.

(2) EFDC Staffing Re-Structure

The Deputy Chief Executive updated the committee on the recent Corporate Re-Structure. The Council agreed the Re-Structure programme in December 2013 and implementation commenced on 1 April 2014. It was noted that the District Council undertook many tasks very well but there was room for improvement particularly in terms of internal communications and corporate co-operation.

The Chief Executive now had responsibility for the role of Returning Officer/Registration Officer and had reduced the directorates from 7 to 4 which were now as follows:

- (a) Director of Resources/Chief Financial Officer – Bob Palmer;
- (b) Director of Governance, Monitoring Officer/Solicitor to Council – Colleen O'Boyle;
- (c) Director of Neighbourhoods, Deputy Chief Executive, Overview and Scrutiny Lead – Derek Macnab; and
- (d) Director of Communities, Alan Hall

The Committee were advised that there had been no compulsory redundancies consequent to the re-structure, 4 senior officers did leave the Council's service, J Gilbert, J Preston, I Willett, M Tipping and G Lunnun of whom he wished well for the future. A chart of the re-structure with contact details has been attached to these minutes.

(3) Community Agents

The Committee received a report regarding Questions and Answers – Community Agents Essex from the Deputy Chief Executive.

The Community Agents Essex Scheme for older people was a new county wide approach to prevention and early intervention in adult social care. The scheme looked to build on the learning from the Village Agents programme that worked solely in mid-Essex providing support to vulnerable adults, mainly aged 50 and above in rural communities. Through the establishment of a network of community agents and volunteers, the scheme managed demand on social care and health services targeting older people and their carers most likely in need of support in the near future.

(a) Why was the Community Agents Essex Scheme needed?

The scheme aimed at managing an increasing demand on health and social care within the broader landscape of strengthening community resilience and increasing independence. The scheme was to enable timely and effective resolution of issues with

better outcomes for people and also avoiding escalation of need and crisis with the associated social care costs.

(b) Was the scheme about saving expenditure?

The scheme was not about saving on expenditure, it responded to the findings of the Who Will Care Commission and work done by the Whole Essex Community Budget Programme which showed that residents aspired to live independently. The scheme proposed savings, but delivered support for residents.

(c) Who Proposed the Scheme?

The four partners, Rural Community Council of Essex, British Red cross, Age UK and Neighbourhood Watch approached the local authority in response to the findings of the commission indicated above, to propose the scheme for managing demand on health, social care and voluntary sector resources.

(d) What was Essex County Council's Involvement in the Scheme?

The County Council would fund the scheme in full for three years, and reduce this for the following two years. The partners were expected to produce a sustainable funding strategy identifying long term sources of finance. It was advised that the service would not be delivered and owned by the County council, which reflected the change in community expectation needed whereby local authorities would not necessarily provide support for them.

(e) How many people would benefit from Community Agents Essex?

Once fully established, the scheme was expected to support 6,000 people per year, across the county with 36 Community Agents and 72 aligned volunteers per district.

(f) When would the scheme start?

Recruitment of the Community Agents would begin in April with agents in place by June. The scheme would take referrals in October 2014.

(g) What were the main differences between Village Agents and Community Agents?

The Village Agents scheme differed in that it was targeted to a specific cohort of residents and their carers with an emphasis on supporting people in finding their own solutions.

(h) What about the organisations already working in this field?

Organisations were encouraged to communicate with Community Agents and the delivery partners. Agents would offer a facilitative and solution finding service, not provide care. They were working to support individual's confidence and understanding, enabling them to carry on managing their own lives. The agents were not providing a care and support service, but attempting to link people or refer them to other services.

(i) How much was the Community Agents Essex Scheme costing?

The implementation of the scheme was costing £600,000 per year for three years reducing to £400,000 and £320,000 in years 4 and 5 respectively. Expected savings were likely to be £2 million.

6. LOCAL PLAN - PROGRESS REPORT

The Committee received a progress report on the Local Plan from the Planning Policy Portfolio Holder. He explained that the Local Plan had to be evidence led, and that councils who had not followed this approach had fallen foul of the inspection process. Epping Forest was endeavouring to learn from this, and to carry out the process correctly rather than as fast as possible.

Officers continued to collate good evidence for the Local Plan and to keep it up to date. Evidence was reported to the Cabinet as it was completed He had been visiting Parish and Town Councils discussing their concerns and needs and encouraged them to continue their involvement.

7. LOCAL HIGHWAYS PANEL

The Committee agreed to hear this item earlier on the agenda as it was linked to the presentation from County Councillor R Bass. The Committee received an update from County Councillor V Metcalfe on the work undertaken by the Local Highways Panel. The Panel met two weeks ago, they had been allocated £700,000 from the County Council to invest in various road projects over 2014/15. The Panel had spent £5,000 on the Highways Rangers. She advised that progress had been slow due to lack of technical resources and there had been substantial catch up concerning the back log of work.

County Councillor R Bass commented on the Panel's problems, they had an overloaded system with slow progress being made to agreement. He was confident that the bulk of schemes would be delivered this year. The programme of schemes for the ensuing year should be arranged before the end of the previous year. He added that the Panel was getting better, but all schemes needed evaluating and checking before final agreement.

Ongar Town Councillor B Surtees asked about gaining information on Highway Panel work in his Town Council area and defects to footways which cause trips.

County Councillor R Bass advised that different Highways Panels had their own arrangements for referring schemes from Parish/Town councils. He felt that generally it was better to receive endorsement from the county prior to any formal approval. He confirmed that footway problems were not a responsibility of the Local Highways Panel.

Epping Town Council asked why should potential schemes be routed through the County when under Government Localism criteria, they could be submitted directly to the Highways Panel.

Epping Town Council advised that they had experienced problems in establishing a clear route to the Highways Panel to change a sign.

County Councillor R Bass said that the County Council was the responsible authority, street signs, for example, needed consent, but his authority had been delegated to the District Council. However variation in a sign design from the standard, needed regulatory compliance but could still be noted by the Highways Panel.

The Planning Policy Portfolio Holder advised that there were other routes in order to make changes to existing signage.

Councillor M McEwen asked if the email system for making referrals was in current use?

County Councillor R Bass said that the Panel members can agree to put items on the agenda for discussion. He reassured Members that there wasn't a formal system for accepting referrals or suggestions. However a long "wish list" should be avoided.

Councillor B Surtees of Ongar Town Council asked about information about the work the Panel and the Highways Rangers had undertaken in the Ongar area, he requested more information on the priorities.

County Councillor R Bass replied that the Local Highways Panels asked routinely for requests from Parish Councils concerning schemes etc. He added that defects generally were the responsibility of the Panel.

8. PUBLIC SCRUTINY

The Committee received a presentation from the Assistant Director of Governance and Performance Management regarding Public Scrutiny.

Last year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee made changes to its rules in order to allow public requests for scrutiny which would be a programme driven by local issues. A copy of the request form was made available to Members at the meeting with any requests being prioritised at the following Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting and a decision made there on what would be pursued. The form with further details had been published on the District Council's website. Local councils had an important role to play as they had a long reach into the community and could provide items for scrutiny. It was advised that topics should be of wider concern than just those covering a single parish council. For the benefit of Members officers had provided a Request for Scrutiny Review form to use.

9. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

(a) The Forester

Matching Parish Council advised that they were not receiving copies of The Forester, it was suggested that other rural parts of the district were experiencing the same problem. The Deputy Chief Executive said that this issue had been raised before, there were enough copies printed for all the district's households and the company responsible for distributing The Forester were going to electronically monitor the delivery. Members advised that tracking systems did not always indicate what was actually delivered to an address. Matching Parish Council proposed that some parishes could undertake the delivery as they were used to delivering parish newsletters.

(b) Consultation

The Assistant Director Technical Services advised that there was a consultation published on the Council's website regarding off-street car parks, closing date for responses as 21 July 2014. Resources were encouraged.

10. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next meeting of the Committee was scheduled for Thursday 20 November 2014 at 7.30p.m. in the Council Chamber and then on:

- (1) Thursday 26 March 2015

CHAIRMAN