

Essex Local Highway Panels (LHP): A Members' Guide

DRAFT

April 2012

Local Highway Panels – contents

1. Foreword
2. About Local Highways Panels
3. Terms of Reference
4. Governance
5. Funding and Budgets
6. Relationship between local highway panels and the Local Transport Plan
7. Scheme Selection
8. Highway Rangers
9. Secretariat and support
10. Terms of Reference review

1. Foreword from the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

As elected members, we all know that highways issues are of critical importance to our residents and communities. Local highways panels are a new way of better connecting the local area with the Highways Authority.

Local Highways Panels (LHPs) will be a new forum for county and district/borough members to come together to jointly consider and prioritise elements of highways spend within their local district or borough boundaries. They are being formed in recognition of the local role and knowledge of elected members and to promote greater partnership working between county and district/boroughs. LHPs will be an important mechanism for ensuring there is proper engagement with local bodies and representative groups.

We believe that members at county and district level have an important role to play in representing their communities, defining and prioritising the schemes for investment, and in engaging with local bodies such as parish and town councils. LHPs will increase the voice of members at both county and district level and we believe this is a positive step forward for partnership working.

This document sets out how certain important services delivered by the County Council (as Highways Authority) can increasingly be programmed and prioritised through the governance and oversight of the new Local Highway Panels. This guide highlights key areas that will be relevant to LHP members. Through the operation of the panels it is foreseen that many elements of the Highways Improvements capital programme will be influenced and steered by the new localism agenda. This is intended as a live document that will evolve over time.

It should be noted that there is not a one size fits all solution for every part of the Highways Service. The individual characteristics surrounding service delivery, operation and procurement of Highways Services must be understood in order to appreciate the range of implications associated with operating at a community level.

I hope you find this guide useful.

Cllr Tracey Chapman
Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation
Essex County Council

2. About Local Highways Panels

Local Highways Panels (LHPs) will be a new forum for county and district / borough members to come together to consider and prioritise elements of highways spend in their local district / borough areas.

The scope of works that can be prioritised by the Panel is broad and will include the following areas of capital spend:-

- Traffic Management improvements
- Tackling congestion
- Safer Roads (including casualty reduction)
- Public Rights of Way improvements
- Cycling schemes
- Passenger Transport improvements
- Minor improvement schemes

In summary, the approach is:

- There will be 12 Local Highway Panels, one for each district / borough.
- Each Panel will consist of the local County Councillors and the equivalent number of district/borough councillors, unless it is agreed otherwise.
- Each panel will be able to recommend schemes to be completed in their local area.
- The schemes will be submitted to the County Council Cabinet Member for Highways & Transportation for approval.
- Once agreed, the schemes will come out of the budget set aside for that local panel.

In setting priorities for local scheme selection, LHP Members will need to have due regard to the responsibilities of the Highways Authority. These will include, amongst other things: its statutory duties, standing orders and financial regulations.

The Panels will need to determine the frequency of meetings to maintain momentum between formal meetings. Where possible, the Panel will need to approve design alternatives and they may choose, for example, to empower the Chairman to comment on behalf of the Panel where decisions are needed between formal meetings.

Responsibility for parking schemes has been delegated by ECC to the two Parking Partnerships and the Panels will not therefore be able to promote parking restrictions unless they are intended to address a serious safety or congestion issue the Panels can however make suggestions for the Parking Partnerships to consider.

3. Terms of Reference

Each Panel will consist of the local County Councillors and the equivalent number of district/borough councillors, unless it is agreed otherwise.

A Local Highways Panel will:

- Prioritise and make recommendations for projects/schemes to ECC Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation within their allotted budget.
- Have regard to the advice from ECC officers on relevant statutory/duty of care requirements.
- Oversee and set priorities for schemes funded through the localism process and the work of the Highways Ranger Service.
- Monitor the delivery of the agreed programme and raise issues and concerns through agreed procedures.
- Consider any other Highways and Transportation matter referred to the panel from time to time by other council constituted bodies, panels or groups.
- Make recommendations to ECC Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation to amend targets or discretionary policies and/or amend budget allocations between programmes if necessary to meet local priorities.
- Take a lead role in liaison with town/parish councils

4. Governance

- The LHP will elect a Chairman, which will ordinarily be a county member unless it is agreed otherwise.
- Decision making to be agreed by LHP and clearly minuted to be actioned.
- Meetings may be in public or private but reports of each meeting must be presented to the Locality Board (or other standing locality arrangement) in that district/borough and recommendations reported to the ECC Cabinet Member for Highways.
- ECC Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation will be minded to accept the advice and prioritisation agreed by the LHP subject to the Highways Authority's Statutory Duties/Duty of Care Obligations consistent with current legislative requirements and regulations.

- ECC Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation reserves the right to reject any scheme promoted by the LHP that falls outside of ECC policies and standards.
- In the event of any disputes within the LHP, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation will take the final decision based on advice from officers and existing Highways Policy.
- Frequency and location of meetings to be determined by the LHP but should be fit for purpose and encourage partnership working. It is suggested that meetings should be quarterly and linked to the budget planning cycle.

DRAFT

5. Funding and Budgets

The ECC Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation has identified budget lines and funding streams that can be devolved to LHPs for prioritisation, covering the following capital budget lines:

- Traffic Management improvements
- Tackling congestion
- Safer Roads (including casualty reduction)
- Public Rights or Way improvements
- Cycling schemes
- Passenger Transport improvements
- Minor improvement schemes

These budgets total £8M in 2012/13 and 2013/14. A formula has been used to divide the funding in such a way that it takes account of a number of influences including road length, population and employment statistics. The amount allocated to each district/borough area will have a floor of £400,000 and a ceiling of £1 million.

The budgets available for 2012/13 are shown below:

Proposed allocation of Integrated Transport (Improvement) budget to the Highways Panel – 2012/13

	Percentage split (%)	Allocation per district (£)
Basildon	12.50%	£ 1,000,000
Braintree	10.19%	£ 815,578
Brentwood	5.62%	£ 449,876
Castle Point	5.72%	£ 457,351
Chelmsford	12.50%	£ 1,000,000
Colchester	12.50%	£ 1,000,000
Epping Forest	8.74%	£ 699,550
Harlow	6.09%	£ 487,315
Maldon	5.00%	£ 400,000
Rochford	5.35%	£ 427,808
Tendring	9.88%	£ 790,481
Uttlesford	5.90%	£ 472,041
Total	100%	£ 8,000,000

All capitalised costs pertaining to schemes prioritised by LHP (including feasibility, design, construction, supervision and safety audit) will fall within the budget allocated to each LHP for prioritisation.

In addition to the above, a revenue element that supports the Highway Rangers service (covered later) will be included within the Highways Panel prioritisation remit. For 2012/13 this equates to £130k per annum for each District/Borough area (c£1.56M County-wide).

DRAFT

6. Relationship between local highway panels and the Local Transport Plan (LTP)

The highways capital improvement scheme, which is prioritised and overseen by the LHP, forms part of the County Council's overall strategy as defined by the Local Transport Plan (LTP).

The LTP3 was approved by Essex County Council Cabinet in June 2011 and contains the aims and objectives for transport in Essex. The LTP is submitted to government as required by the Transport Act 2000. In return the government makes capital funding available to local authorities for maintenance and integrated transport. There is no set way in which the County Council is expected to spend the funding but it is expected to produce local implementation programmes which reflect countywide and localist agendas. The Local Highway Panel is one way of ensuring a strategic approach with regard to local priorities and acceptability.

The LTP3 sets out a number of high level outcomes for transport as follows:

- Connectivity – Provide reliable connectivity for Essex communities and international gateways to support sustainable economic growth, regeneration and wellbeing.
- Lifestyle – reduce carbon dioxide emissions and improve air quality through lifestyle changes, innovation and technology
- Safety - Improve safety on the transport network & enhance & promote a safe travelling environment
- Assets - Secure and Maintain all transport assets to an appropriate standard ensuring the network is available for use
- Sustainable Communities - Provide sustainable access & travel choices for Essex residents to help support strong & sustainable communities

7. Scheme Selection

A list of historical requests has been compiled for each district. The majority of these proposals have arisen from requests from Members (County and District), Parish/Town Councils, residents and local resident or action groups.

In most cases, there is some degree of justification for the request (e.g. to improve safety or facilities for road users) but in some cases the danger may be perceived rather than real. Highways Liaison Officers can provide the Panel with information to aid the decision making process including up to date collision history and speed data.

In prioritising schemes for progression, the Panel will need to have due regard to a number of factors, including:-

- How does the scheme improve safety?
- Will the scheme reduce congestion?
- Will the scheme improve air quality (reduce CO₂ emissions)?
- Does the scheme represent good value for money?

- How does the scheme improve travel choice and travel by sustainable means?

This list is not exhaustive and expert Highways Officers will provide more detailed guidance and advice for each scheme. A scoring matrix is being developed for this purpose to assist with the scheme selection process.

Once a scheme has been selected by the Panel, Officers will need to carry out a 'high level' validation to make sure that it is achievable. This will include things such as checking the highway boundary details and compliance with design guidance.

If a scheme passes the validation stage and there is budget available, the scheme will then be passed to the design team for progression and approval from the Cabinet Member. The Panel will then receive regular and realistic updates regarding progress and timescales.

Inevitably, it is the case with some proposals that there will be unforeseen circumstances that only come to light as detailed design progresses and the Panel will be notified as soon as possible where this occurs as it may impact on the design, timescales and overall cost. Similarly, schemes involving consultation will inevitably attract objections and, in some cases, it will not be possible to resolve these or they may delay delivery of the scheme.

8. Highway Rangers roles and responsibilities

Each LHP will receive a revenue allocation of £130,000 per annum to support the Highways Ranger service.

Typically, the Highway Rangers will consist of 2 trained highway operatives, a van/truck and a small selection of materials and hand tools for repairs. The Rangers can be directed by the Panel to carry out minor works (described below).

The works are normally batched up so that they can work more efficiently in one particular area or Parish at a time, rather than travel extensive distances between jobs.

Works included in the Highway Rangers duties include:

- Cleaning & minor repairs (non electrical road signs and bollards)
- Reinstatement of posts & bollards where no excavation is required
- Small repairs to concrete surfaces
- Trimming of vegetation
- Ad hoc grass cutting & strimming
- Repairs to roadside verges
- Drainage repairs
- Removal of graffiti from road signs
- Painting of street furniture (posts, bollards & benches etc)
- Removal of weeds
- Removal of small non hazardous fly tips from highway land
- Removal of illegal signs & fly-posting

9. Secretariat and support

The frequency and location of meetings is to be determined by the LHP but it is anticipated they will be held 4 times a year linked to the budget planning cycle.

- Meetings may be in public or private but the LHP must present periodic reports to the Locality Board (or other standing Locality arrangement) for each District/Borough area.
- Notes will be produced together with recommendations for the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation.
- It is proposed that district councils will provide the secretariat and arrange meetings for LHPs, unless they have agreed that ECC should act as the lead.
- LHPs will also be supported by 4 Local Highways Liaison Officers from ECC. These are:
 - Natalie Szpigelman Basildon, Rochford & Castle Point, natalie.szpigelman@essex.gov.uk
 - Jon Simmons Chelmsford, Maldon & Epping, jon.simmons@essex.gov.uk
 - Rob Macdonald Colchester, Tendring & Braintree, rob.macdonald@essex.gov.uk
 - Rissa Long Brentwood, Harlow & Uttlesford, rissa.long@essex.gov.uk

10. Terms of Reference Review

This document will be periodically reviewed and approved by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation.