

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MINUTES

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee **Date:** Tuesday, 5 March 2013

Place: Council Chamber, Civic Offices, High Street, Epping **Time:** 7.30 - 9.12 pm

Members Present: Councillors R Morgan (Chairman) K Angold-Stephens (Vice-Chairman) K Chana, Mrs R Gadsby, L Girling, D Jacobs, Ms H Kane, P Keska, A Lion, Mrs M McEwen, J Philip, Mrs M Sartin, Mrs P Smith and D Wixley

Other Councillors: Councillors Mrs A Grigg, Mrs J Lea, B Rolfe, D Stallan, Ms S Stavrou, G Waller, Mrs J H Whitehouse, J M Whitehouse and J Wyatt

Apologies:

Officers Present: D Macnab (Deputy Chief Executive), J Gilbert (Director of Environment and Street Scene), T Carne (Public Relations and Marketing Officer), I Willett (Assistant to the Chief Executive), K Durrani (Assistant Director (Technical)), A Hendry (Democratic Services Officer) and M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant)

By Invitation: P Massie (Essex County Council)

69. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Chairman 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.

70. SUBSTITUTE MEMBERS

There were no substitute Members for the meeting.

71. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 29 January 2013 be agreed.

72. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest made pursuant to the Council's Code of Member Conduct.

73. PRESENTATION FROM COUNTY HIGHWAYS

The Committee welcomed Peter Massie, the Head of Highways Commissioning at Essex County Council (a copy of his presentation is attached).

Mr Massie told the meeting that Essex County Council (ECC) in wanting to contract out it's highway services and wanting continuous improvement, chose to go into partnership with 'Ringway Jacobs' to enable them to keep within the budget they were allocated.

Ringway Jacobs have two main parent companies backing them, Vinci and Jacobs. Ringway Jacobs was a company in its own right and not two companies joined together. They have contracts across the country and are structured for collaborative working.

He acknowledged that they had experienced some delays during the past year while trying to maintain a level of service and still achieve efficiency savings. They did not have a traditional client contractor relationship – as they work together on solutions in a partnership. ECC did not take a traditional leadership role but had a joint lead role with the Ringway Jacobs's managers. They always considered their customers and were committed to continuous improvement and to developing their own people.

Each of their areas have, as part of their yearly plan, efficiencies and targets that they must meet, so they know what is expected of them.

At the top of the structure they have a Strategic Partnering Board, bringing together their national management structure, with an Operations Board, made up of Heads of Service, sitting underneath that. Sitting to one side of that they have their Commissioning Core, of which the Strategy Team looked after major projects and Commissioning, which Mr Massie looked after. They have now reduced what used to be thousands of orders. Service areas are now provided with one service order for an area/type of work, enabling greater economies of scale. Under the Operations Board there sits various delivery units headed by a service leader, Mark Rowe, a Ringway Jacobs employee. The delivery units that deliver the work are made up of five service areas. Erwin Deppe (a Ringway Jacobs employee) leads the Transport & Improvements Unit, which looked after transport planning, structures, design and consultancy and passenger transport infrastructure. Bob Southey (a Ringway Jacobs employee) leads the Programme & Information Unit, which looked after communications, Public Rights of Way (PROW) and records management, development management, asset management and programme and project control. David Forkin (an ECC employee) leads the Maintenance & Operations Unit looking after maintenance, operations and inspections, street lighting and capital works and improvements. Liz Saville (an ECC employee) leads the Network & Safety Unit which looked after road safety, network management and traffic signals. And, lastly Sean Acton (a Ringway Jacobs employee) leads the Finance & Commercial Unit which was responsible for buying, organisation support and finance. Again, Mr Massie emphasised that as a structure these teams sat together to enable them to operate as a partnership.

In answer to questions on when projects were going to happen, Mr Massie stated that they were put on their website. They endeavoured to put as much information as they could about highways maintenance and safety etc. which was updated on a regular basis by one team with information being fed to them from all the other teams, keeping a reasonable level of information updated on the site.

As for individual contacts they now focus everything into their Customer Teams. They do not have the same officer contacts that they used to have. The Customer Teams are now tasked to go to the different service areas to get an appropriate response.

In Conclusion Mr Massie gave the meeting an email address for any enquiries they may have and also a telephone number they could use:

- the email address was: highway.enquiries@essex.gov.uk
- the telephone number was: 08457 037631

The meeting was then opened out to questions from members present.

Q. I find it irritating that when I contact highways and have to phone Colchester. You seem to have lost the personal touch; years ago we could go straight to an engineer based in Harlow. We should have a contact point just for Councillors.

A. We have looked at our staffing levels and how we deliver our service and we have restructured to have a centralised Contact Office in Colchester. We have set up Customer Teams to answer queries by doing research on your behalf and get the response you need.

Q. We have now got used to the new arrangements, however it was thought that there was plans to put in an intern from your contact team out to each district. I know the districts were quite receptive to this as we had lost some knowledgeable officers over time. Will you introduce such an arrangement?

A. I am aware that this was raised a few years ago but I am not aware that anything was happening at present along those lines. We do not have the room in our present structure to do this.

Q. There is an issue of road safety and the upkeep of white lines and cat eyes, particularly in the rural areas which seem to have disappeared.

A. If you have any specific areas in mind then let me know separately and I shall feedback this to the appropriate team. Generally, on white lining, in the past we used to raise thousands of separate orders. We now have a programme for white lining by area.

Q. This is not just a few roads but more of a general problem across the district.

A. I will pass on your comments.

Q. The grass verges in the area always seem to get damaged by traffic, even though they may have signs up. There seems to be no resources to enforce this. Could you put some bollards to stop their destruction?

A. This is a thorny issue. The problem with bollards is the cost. Enforcement is difficult and there are no easy solutions. We do speak to the people we see and tell them not to do this, but the problem is that we cannot prove that any particular vehicle cause the damage.

Q. I have used your website; it's a faceless site with no human interaction. Can we have a more direct interface so that we can deal with individuals?

A. I am not aware that we could accommodate you. However, we are bringing in a tracking function to enable you to see where we are on your query. I accept that it is faceless, but we do deal with a vast amount of queries.

Q. How do you prioritise your projects and what are your procedures?

A. It depends on what type of project it is. Generally it can happen through the Highways Panel or through our website. The Highways Panel prioritises the work they want done. We also scan our data at the start of the year looking at the area in most need for our maintenance schemes. We then select what we want to deliver and the timeframe it should be carried out in.

Q. Is there an upgrade and maintenance programme for pavements and footpaths and what about the private areas such as those outside schools and on the high street by shops.

A. We do have a specific budget programme for this and have put in more money this year. We prioritise on areas with defects. We also look at the area where claims have been made and join this up with our own surveys. It was difficult to bring in enforcement action in private areas. Ideally we would do the repair and recharge them afterwards, but if we do this we find it difficult to get any money from them and therefore try not to do this.

Q. Street signs have been disappearing across the district. Is there a policy to replace them with non-valuable signs? What is Essex County's policy on this?

A. We do have a programme to replace them and before we do so we decide if they were necessary and if they really needed replacing. We can use cheaper material but sometimes they are not as strong as the metal signs. We have also looked at different fixings to fix them to the post. We used to use rivets, but the government has now asked us to use glue.

Q. Three observations:

- 1) a number of yellow lines are worn out and are no longer enforceable;
- 2) we no longer have the continuous expertise of officers who know the district;
- 3) what happens about roads that are closed without ECC Highway's permission and what about enforcement?

A. Yellow lines are part of the Parking Partnership Arrangements; as for officers, part of the restructure reduced the number of officers. We still have John Simmons for the west area who has worked here for a number of years. And roads closed without our permission should be subject to enforcement.

Q. There are varying reports on the quality of repairs for potholes and the possible differences depend on which operatives carry out the repair.

A. We have had discussions around this issue before. We are trying to avoid putting in temporary repairs, but have to do this sometimes to put in a quick fix to be done permanently at a later date. We have had an extra £11 million put in for new machinery to enable quicker permanent fixes and to get it right the first time.

Q. This is about the interface between the public and highways. We had an area that flooded recently and our drainage engineer reported this to highways. Eventually the road was closed and the work done, but we had no contact with you after our initial report, which left us in the dark somewhat.

A. I am pleased that something was done. There are a lot of schemes like this happening, especially as we have had such a wet year, but we are trying to improve our communications.

Q. Do we have any statistical data on the time taken for something to be reported to Highways and then on to the Contractors and then the time taken for the repair to be done?

A. I am not certain if we have something that would keep track of this information. We now have inspectors who reports defects and put them into our system. We also try to aggregate our work into areas and do the repairs in that area at the same time. As for a tracking system, we do not have that as yet. We do not have average times, but will be monitoring this for the new contracts that we raise. We normally place an order for a years worth of work to be delivered in a cost effective way.

Q. Do your new structures work as currently the man in the street has no faith in Essex Highways?

A. The structures are there now, as a restructuring of the Department has only just taken place. We are presently trying to put people into teams, but it should be noted that we also have budget pressures.

Q. Your inspectors that are out everyday inspecting the roads, what are their responsibilities?

A. They look at the issues they encounter, prioritise them and log all the defects that they encounter. They go out on a daily basis and have their routes given to them. Once they log the information we prioritise the work that needs to be done, putting together work into geographical areas. The major routes are surveyed on a monthly basis and the minor ones are done on a less frequent basis.

Q. If a utility company wants to work on the highways they have to contact you. If you have other work to do in that area could you not do both jobs together?

A. That information is held on a separate system so it is not joined up. Coordinating was problematic as we would not allow them to work under our traffic management system and vice-a-versa because of health and safety reasons.

The Chairman drew the questions and answers session to a close and thanked Mr Massie for his excellent presentation and for answering all the question put to him.

74. CABINET REVIEW

The Committee reviewed the Cabinet's agenda for their 11th March meeting but there were no specific items that the Committee wanted to be brought to their attention other than Councillor Philip, who wanted to know, under Cabinet agenda item 10, 'extending the range of pre-planning application charging', how could charging for retrospective applications be ultra-vires?

75. KEY OBJECTIVES FOR 2013 -14

The Committee considered the report from the Leader of Council on the Corporate Plan 2011-2015 and Key objectives 2013/14.

They noted that the annual identification of key objectives provided an opportunity for the Council to focus specific attention on how areas for improvement were to be addressed, opportunities exploited and better outcomes delivered over the coming year. The key objectives were intended to provide a clear statement of the Council's overall intentions for each year, containing specific actions to achieve desired outcomes.

It was also noted that the identification of the Council's medium-term aims over the four-year period of the Corporate Plan, and the annual adoption of key objectives and service delivery priorities, provided an opportunity for the authority to focus specific attention on how areas for improvement were to be addressed, opportunities exploited and better outcomes delivered.

The Corporate Plan for 2011 to 2015 included an annual supplement reflecting the Council's key objectives for each of the four years to 2014/15.

The key objectives were intended to address national and local priorities and specific service challenges, and to provide a clear statement of the Council's overall objectives for each year.

In order to complete the Business Plans for 2013/14, Management Board had identified a range of proposed key objectives and supporting deliverables, drawn initially from objectives developed for the Chief Executive in discussion with the Leader of the Council. Current progress in respect of the key objectives for 2012/13 had also been reviewed by the Board, and a number of objectives had been carried forward from 2012/13 (with new or revised actions and outcomes), alongside new objectives responding to other issues of national or local importance. The draft key objectives for 2013/14 were also considered as part of a joint Cabinet and Management Board meeting held in December 2012.

Councillor Philip commented that:

- These all seem to be medium term aims with nothing beyond 2013/14;
- Item 3 on the draft key objectives - 'Decision Making Framework' was a council wide objective but seems to only be targeting front line services. In addition there was no reference to the Key Aim to protect front line services;
- Item 5 on the draft key objectives – 'Operating Models' would contribute a major change to the democratic structure of the authority and would have expected more consultation.

Councillor Lion commented that item 3 – 'Decision Making Framework' should be addressed first as it was the responsibility of the Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

(1) That the Committee considered the Council's proposed key objectives for 2013/14, and commented as appropriate; and

(2) That, subject to the concurrence of the Cabinet, progress against actions to achieve the key objectives be reported to the Committee on a quarterly basis.

76. WORK PROGRAMME MONITORING

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

It was noted that the proposed presentation for the April meeting, the Local Strategic Partnership update, had to be postponed. It was hoped to get someone there to speak about Children Services and Essex County Council (item 14 on the Work Programme) in their place. If possible, item 17 (Corporate Parenting) should be brought to the same meeting as they appeared to be linked.

It was agreed that the review of Epping Forest College be moved into the new year as the college did not have a new permanent principal as yet.

Items 13 (review of PCT) and 15 (Mental Health Services in the District) should be linked as topics.

It was agreed that item 18, the Essex Probation Service, should go to the Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel as it was more appropriate.

Standing Panels:

Constitution and Member Services Standing Panel

It was noted that there were three reports that would have to go to the Committee's next meeting. They were:

- a) Review of Contract Standing Orders;
- b) Review of Officer Delegation; and
- c) Review of Financial Regulations.

Safer Cleaner Greener Standing Panel

It was noted that the Police and Crime Commissioner had been to their last meeting to talk about his first few months in office, and his aspirations for his term in office and to answer any question from Panel members.

Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel

It was noted that their next meeting would be on 12 March. They were considering looking at cross charging issues and the format of certain reports such as the Value for Money report and the business plan.

Task and Finish Panels:

Overview and Scrutiny Review Task and Finish Panel

It was noted that their next meeting would be held on 25 March. Hopefully they would only need one more meeting after this to finish their task.

Review of Chief Executive Appointments Task and Finish Panel

This panel would need one more meeting to complete its work and report back to the April meeting.

Review of Licensing Services Task and Finish Panel

They had their final meeting and were now finalising their report to go to the April Committee meeting.

CHAIRMAN

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Introduction to Essex Highways



Briefing Content

- Overview
- Structure
- Services delivered
- Ringway Jacobs
- Contacts



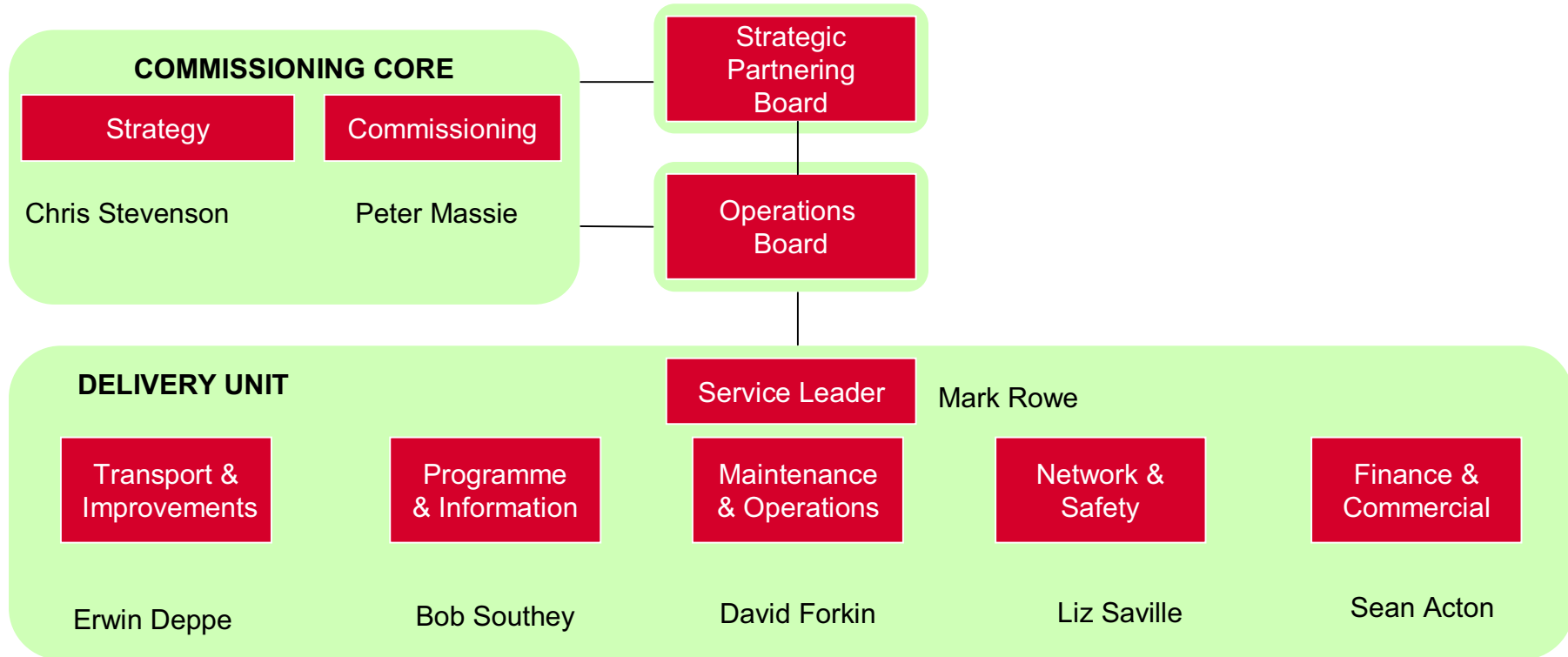
Overview

- Always consider our customers
- Build a successful partnership
- Collaboration and integration
- Be effective and efficient
- Continuous Improvement
- Develop our people

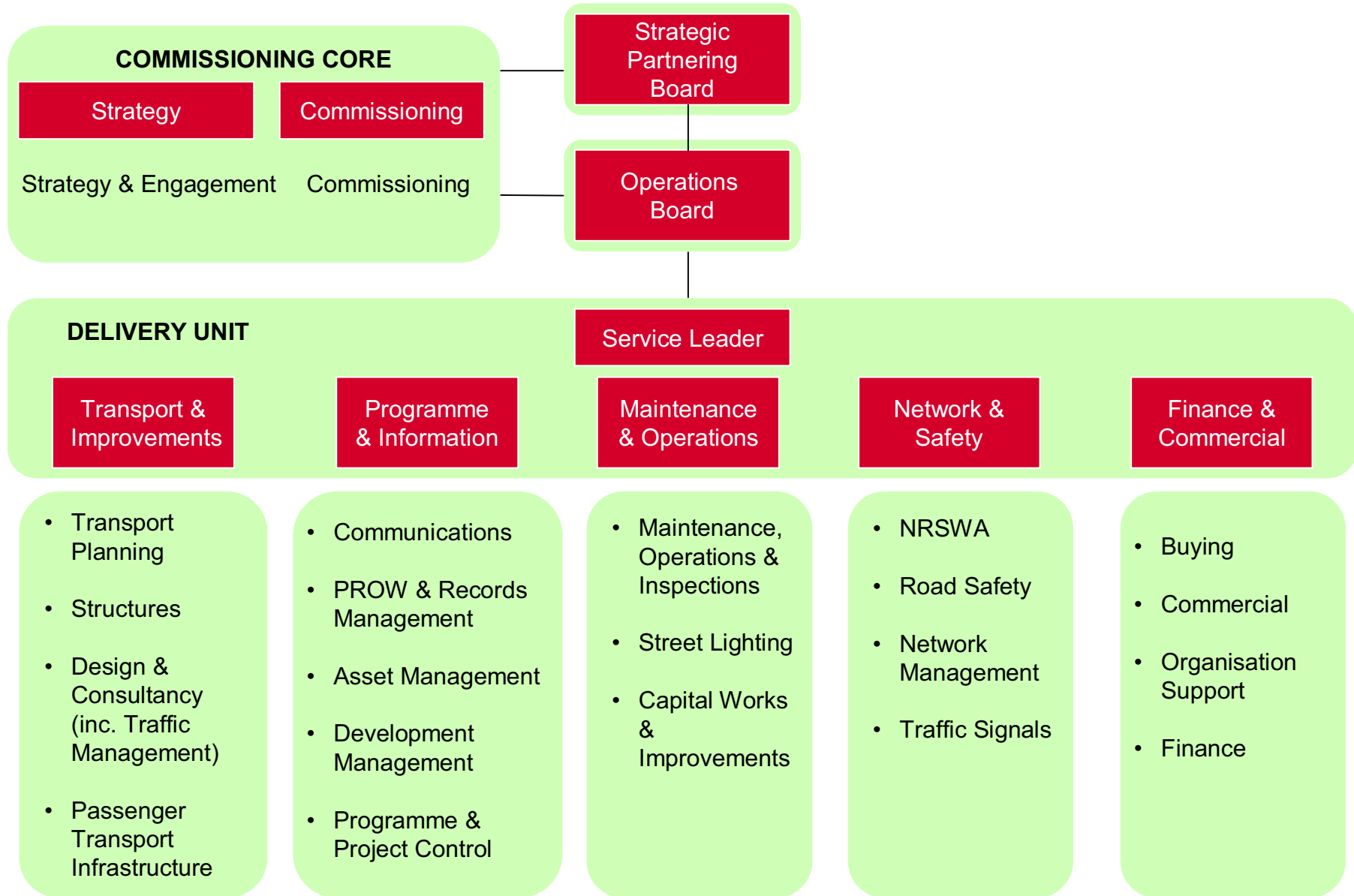


Essex
Highways

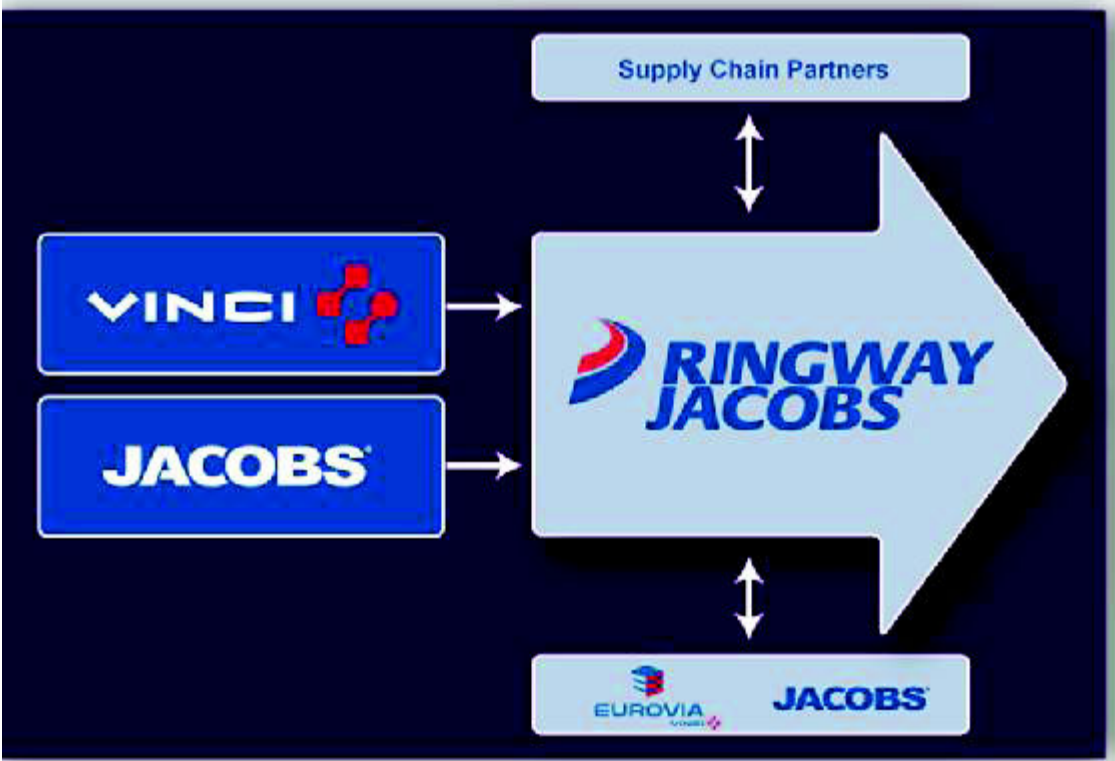
Structure with Heads of Service



Services delivered



Ringway Jacobs



Contacts

ECC Customer Team

By email:

highway.enquiries@essex.gov.uk

By telephone:

08457 037631



Thank you

