

Committee: Council

Agenda Item

Date: 29th June 2010

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Title: Highways Localism – Local Highways
Panel

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Item for decision

Summary

1. Essex County Council has for some time been rolling out a programme of delegation of highway matters to District and Borough Councils. Uttlesford is in the last tranche and the Council is invited to engage with such a panel. The panel replaces the locally determined budget arrangements which have been moribund for some years.

Recommendations

2. That the Council join with the County Council in setting up a local highways panel, detailed arrangements to be agreed by the Environment Committee.

Background Papers

3. The following papers were referred to by the author in the preparation of this report and are available for inspection from the author of the report.

Impact

- 4.

Communication/Consultation	None at this stage
Community Safety	Highway safety will form part of the panel's functions
Equalities	EqIA will be required
Finance	No financial implications
Health and Safety	Safety will form part of the panel's functions
Human Rights/Legal Implications	The status of the panel within the Council's constitution needs to be considered
Sustainability	Some of the outcomes could reduce journey times/fuel consumption
Ward-specific impacts	All
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

The Local Highways Panel will be the body which will shape the relationship between local and county authority. Where they exist, Local Highways Panels (LHPs) are made up of local district, parish and town members. It is intended that the panel will:

- be provided with a 'menu' of typical highways options and their costs so they can make informed decisions and make the best use of funds;
- meet quarterly;
- oversee and set the priorities for maintenance of local roads and footpaths as well as a range of other highway related work, including traffic orders, on street parking controls, grass cutting, signs and lines and other local improvement projects;
- members of the panel will have full access to Highways staff for professional or technical advice and guidance;
- meetings coordinated to tie in with and inform the County Council's formal budget and programme setting process for highways;
- help inform the County Council's capital budget and even oversee priorities for area-wide schemes such as repairs to estate roads, new public rights of way and cycle paths;
- they will be able to call the County Council Highways department to account for actions;
- they will provide regular bulletins on their activities so the public can monitor their progress.

The District Council would harness existing networks such as parish and town councils to gain closer consultation and communication with the public. This could be a function for the Community Forums.

Highways Liaison Officers

It is proposed that Highways Liaison Officers will be the professional, qualified experts who will make the changes proposed by the LHP turn into action. They will be the main point of contact for highways matters for the LHP, providing information to the panel on options and costs. In addition they will co-ordinate communications with the local community and give out information relating to highway works to the public. They will:

- assist with communicating the messages which the LHPs wish to get out to the public;
- set the agenda for LHP meetings in consultation with the chairman;
- essentially be a 'Highways Doctor' able to be the first point of contact for the local community;
- attend local surgeries.

Highways Surgeries

Highways surgeries will be the key to giving a forum to feedback from the public. They will give an opportunity for members of the public to have face-to-face contact with their Local Highways Panel, Highways Rangers, Liaison Officers and the County Council.

- The surgeries will take place several times a year in each local community
- They will take place in District or Borough Council Offices
- Members of the public will be able to ask questions directly to the people who control their roads and paths
- They will be jointly advertised by the District and Borough Council

Highway Rangers

Highways Rangers will deliver immediate improvements to the road and path network. They will be the public face of Highways Localism and will be seen out and about in their communities on a daily basis. They will:

- work to the requirements of the Local Highways Panel;
- carry out day to day maintenance tasks such as clearing and recycling untidy areas, sign cleaning, removing unlawful signs, street clutter, clearing overgrowth, sorting out weeds, hedge trimming, carry out simple roads repairs and respond to emergencies and many other tasks;
- be clearly recognisable and approachable to the public and will wear uniforms and drive to their work in liveried vehicles;
- feedback any encounters to the Local Highways Panel.

Highways Community Infrastructure Fund (HCIF)

Community Infrastructure Funds will allow communities and neighbourhoods to decide how they want money to be spent in their area. The concept is put forward by the County Council as the ultimate element in devolving governance to a local level and will result in long lasting benefits to local communities.

- They will enable parish and town councils and other community groups to bid directly for funds for improvement schemes
- Schemes which the money could be spent on, could include street-furniture such as improved lights, benches, bollards, street cleaning or village signs
- This money could be added to other more costly initiatives if required
- Applications would be assessed and approved by the Cabinet Member at Essex County Council in consultation with the Highways Director and reported to the LHPs.
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5. Officers consider that this is an excellent opportunity to work in partnership with the County Council, Parish/Town Councils and our local communities to bring about highway improvements that meet local needs.

Risk Analysis

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Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
The Council does not agree to an LHP	2 The Panel would compliment the Council's existing arrangements for public engagement	3 The Council would be unable to influence highway matters locally	[Click here]

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.