

ITEM 6(A)

Portfolio Report to Full Council on 10 December 2013 **Cllr Alastair Walters – Community Safety**

Emergency Planning and Local Highway Panel

1. Emergency Planning put to the test

UDC response to ST Jude's Storm

UDC response to the power cuts subsequent to the storm was excellent, timed well and considerate towards the need of the community. Many sheltered housing units were left without power, which caused the housing department to initially work with the Red Cross, who visited individuals in their homes.

As it became more evident that more of the community was affected than first thought, the rest centre at Foakes Hall, Great Dunmow, was opened and blankets, hot drinks and a meal supplied for anybody who registered from an affected area.

Lessons learnt

As a result of the storm, an earlier power cut in the Stansted and surrounding area, plus the arrival of winter conditions and the threat of power shortages, consideration was given to how the district can be more resilient and be ready to deal with problems that may occur.

Consultation by our Emergency Planning Officer will take place throughout the district to determine the expectations and needs of the community, especially in the villages that are prone to power cuts, and the cost to implement recommendations.

Education

There is more time being spent on educating the public on how to be more resilient at home. This includes:

- Home emergency plans and pet plans
- Flood alerts – how to get them
- Encouragement to register vulnerable individuals with their emergency provider
- Encourage parishes to consider and submit emergency plans of their own
- Home and work fire safety
- Resilience road show – UDC holding a smaller event next June

Mutual aid agreement

This should be sought between UDC emergency planning and UDC Community Transport so that in the event of a power cut incident they may be available to help provide transport for elderly and vulnerable people without means of transport to a specified rest centre.

2. Local Highway Panel (LHP)

Role of the LHP

The main role of the LHP is to consider, prioritise and make recommendations to Essex County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways on minor highway capital improvement schemes, to enhance the life of local residents in Uttlesford.

The LHP oversee the work of the Highway Rangers, who undertake a variety of small highway maintenance improvements within their scope of operations for town and parish councils.

To monitor spending of Section 106 funding on highway improvements within Uttlesford.

Members of LHP

This currently consists of CC Cllrs Susan Barker, Simon Walsh, Ray Gooding and John Lodge. Also UDC Cllrs Christina Cant, John Freeman, John Salmon and Alastair Walters. Also 2 non voting representatives of UDC parish councils.

Meetings

The LHP meets at least 4 times a year. Providing 3 days notice is given, representatives of parish councils or a member of the public can attend and address the Panel prior to the formal start of the meeting to speak about their scheme.

Scope of works prioritised by Panel

This is broad and includes pedestrian crossings, traffic management improvements, Public Right of Way improvements, cycling schemes, minor improvement schemes, e.g. new signing provision, safer roads, bus stop improvements and installation of bus shelters.

Funding and Budgets

Funding of the LHP and Highway Rangers is made by Essex Highways. For Panel schemes the budget for 2012/13 was £472K and the same amount for 2013/14, although some this year has been reallocated to road maintenance as a result of delays at ECC processing LHP recommended schemes. This applies to all LHPs in the County.

Overview and performance

The Panel has recommended a variety of 43 schemes throughout the District since June 2012 but, in spite of very best endeavours by members and officers, only 8 schemes have been completed up to September 2013, including the £100K puffin crossing at Newport,. There are 32 LHP approved schemes waiting to start. This illustrates the extent of the bottleneck which has developed in the design and processing of approved schemes by ECC, resulting in much frustration. This is common for all LHPs in Essex and steps are currently being urgently taken by the ECC Highways portfolio holder to rectify this problem, which has unfortunately marred the reputation of this otherwise excellent initiative for the past 12 months.

3. The Highway Rangers

The Rangers team consists of two Highway operatives, with a well equipped van, including a new weed raker machine which considerably speeds up the job of recovering footpaths from overgrown vegetation. It operates on separate budget of circa £80K in total.

Scope of work

This is varied and includes trimming back overgrown hedges, adhoc grass cutting and strimming, recovering footpaths from overgrown vegetation, repainting fingerposts, village pumps and name signs, cleaning and minor repairs to public wooden benches, cleaning reflective faces of non-electrical road signs.

Work achievement

The Rangers became fully operational in June 2012 and in the year 2012/13 199 requests were received from parishes and towns. In this financial year, to date 90 requests have been received, but this apparent reduction in number of requests being received is because for more effective working parishes have been encouraged to submit multi job requests rather than 'one offs'. As a result, the number of actual jobs completed is increasing with the total to date estimated to be in order of 500.

Overview of performance

The Highway Ranger initiative originated and funded by ECC has been very successful indeed. It is simple to administer and low in cost in relation to the work achieved. The Ranger team have received many written and verbal commendations from appreciative parishes in the district for the excellence of their work and efficiency. With their distinctive van, and working throughout the district, they are now very well known to local communities and twice have been the subject of BBC Radio Essex interviews.

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