

NORTH ESSEX PARKING PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE FOR ON-STREET PARKING

**31 October 2013 at 12.00pm
Epping Forest District Council Civic Offices**

Executive Members Present:-

Councillor Susan Barker (Uttlesford District Council)
Councillor Tony Durcan (Harlow District Council)
Councillor Martin Hunt (Colchester Borough Council)
Councillor Robert Mitchell (Braintree District Council)
Councillor Nick Turner (Tendring District Council)
Councillor Gary Waller (Epping Forest District Council)

Non-Executive Members Present:-

Councillor Eddie Johnson (Essex County Council representing Councillor Bass)

Apologies: - Councillor Rodney Bass (Essex County Council)

Also Present: -

Lou Belgrove (Parking Partnership)
Richard Clifford (Colchester Borough Council)
Trevor Degville (Parking Partnership)
Vicky Duff (Essex County Council)
Qasim Durrani (Epping Forest District Council)
Joe McGill (Harlow District Council)
Samantha Sismey (Colchester Borough Council)
Andrew Taylor (Uttlesford District Council)
Ian Taylor (Tendring District Council)
Shane Taylor (Parking Partnership)
Richard Walker (Parking Partnership)
Sarah Ward (Colchester Borough Council)
Leah Whitwell (Braintree / Colchester)
Matthew Young (Colchester Borough Council)

Apologies:- Paul Partridge (Braintree District Council)

Councillor Hunt chaired the meeting for the items at minutes 21 - 24. Councillor Mitchell chaired the meeting for the remaining items.

21. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Barker, in respect of being a Member of Essex County Council, declared a non-pecuniary interest.

22. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 8 August 2013 be confirmed as a correct record.

23. Have Your Say!

Ben Emslie addressed the Joint Committee about the parking scheme in Eastbrook Road, Epping, and presented a petition from local residents. Such was the demand for parking that residents often had to park 3-4 streets away. He requested that the road be professionally surveyed and improved.

The Chairman received the petition and suggested that Mr Emslie meet with Shane Taylor, Parking Partnership, to discuss his concerns and see what could be done to deal with residents concerns.

Councillor Jon Whitehouse (Epping Forest District Council and Essex County Council) addressed the Joint Committee to express his concern about the pressure that was put upon parking provision in Epping by non-residents parking in Epping to access the Central Line into central London. He presented a petition about parking issues on Allnuts Road and flagged up the issues that were arising on St John's Road and The Drummonds. He also stressed the need for the Parking Partnership to ensure it got its enforcement strategy right. Safety should be the main consideration, especially in respect of parking near junctions. Enforcement should be concentrated where safety issues arose and where flouting of restrictions was greatest. He welcomed the fact that Partnership had not agreed to the installation of parking meters at its last meeting.

In response, Councillor Hunt stressed that no parking meters would be installed in the NEPP area unless the local authority concerned had agreed to their installation. Councillor Waller indicated he had also received representations about St Johns Road. He would welcome further information on enforcement and Matthew Young offered to set up a meeting with the Area Enforcement Officer for Councillor Waller and Councillor Whitehouse.

Councillor Janet Whitehouse (Epping Forest District Council) addressed the Joint Committee. She endorsed the earlier comments made about parking problems in the vicinity of Epping Station. She also expressed concern that a resident had been informed by a Civil Enforcement Officer that faded yellow lines on Charles Street could not be enforced and that painting and lining work would not now be begin again until the spring. This was a particular concern due to the proximity of the lines to a dangerous junction.

Lou Belgrove, Parking Partnership, responded that it would depend on how faded the lines were, but that if they were still visible, enforcement should still be possible. She would investigate the issue further

Councillor McEwen, (Epping Forest District Council and Essex County Council) addressed the Joint Committee to state that she had some difficulty obtaining information about the work of the NEPP and to suggest that minutes of all meetings be circulated to all Essex County Councillors and Epping Forest District Councillors. As a member representing a rural ward she asked the NEPP to take account of the needs of those who needed to drive and park near rail stations in its considerations.

Councillor Hunt acknowledged that that awareness of NEPP meetings and decisions was an issue and he had recently instructed that all agenda and minutes be circulated to all Colchester Borough Councillors and suggested that similar arrangements be put in place for all partner authorities.

24. NEPP On-Street Financial Position at Period 6 2013/14

Matthew Young, Head of Operational Services, Colchester Borough Council, presented the report setting out the financial position at period 6 and the forecast outturn for the NEPP on-street account. A deficit of £21,000 was forecast. This was a prudent forecast and was a smaller deficit than at a similar point the previous year. He sought the Joint Committee's view on a proposal that a deficit or surplus of less than £30,000 be retained by the NEPP. This would mean that there would be no need for either a further contribution or distribution of funds to the partner authorities in those circumstances. If there was support for the idea, a report formally proposing this would be submitted to the next meeting.

He explained that significant reductions in expenditure on staff and vehicle rentals had been achieved. Income was projected to be £90,000 below target but this was being carefully scrutinised and was liable to change. The Partnership was looking to improve enforcement, particularly in Epping.

In respect of income from enforcement, Councillor Durcan noted the significant increase in income from Harlow. He queried whether Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) were being "over enthusiastic" and stressed the need for a common sense approach. Richard Walker explained that the same team operated in Epping and Harlow and that was no apparent reason for the proportionally larger increase in Harlow. He had asked for a review which should reveal if there was any significant difference in approach to enforcement across the two areas. In response to the comments about a common sense approach, he explained that the NEPP's enforcement policy was available to view online. CEOs were allowed some leeway but this was linked to the type of parking control and the seriousness of any infringement. For instance, CEOs would be much less likely to exercise any leeway over cars that were illegally parked on yellow lines or in bus lay-bys.

Councillor Waller noted that it appeared from the report that Epping Forest was underperforming and would welcome the opportunity to work with the CEOs to ensure they worked more effectively.

Councillor Turner welcomed the proposal that a deficit or surplus of less than £30,000 be retained by the NEPP and members agreed that a formal report should be submitted to the next meeting. However, Councillor Turner reiterated that Tendring would not commit any further funding to cover any losses incurred by the NEPP.

Councillor Mitchell sought further information on how fuel was purchased and stressed the need to control costs on the cash office and on postage. Matthew Young explained that in the eastern and central areas of the NEPP fuel was bought in bulk through a national agreement. For the western areas a similar approach was used for diesel but there were two vehicles which ran on unleaded fuel which had to be purchased at a garage. The delay in the introduction of MiPermit had had an impact on postage costs. The NEPP was also handling more challenges to Penalty Charge Notices online. Members stressed the need to handle all correspondence online once a web based challenge was received, if this satisfied legal requirements. Richard Walker stressed that the NEPP was aiming to introduce a system for managing challenges which would enable all correspondence to be dealt with online and comply with legal requirements around the service of documentation.

The Joint Committee noted the information submitted about the comparative financial position with the SEPP. Matthew Young explained that some accounting differences made direct comparisons difficult. However central costs were broadly comparable. The most striking difference was that the SEPP did not fund its TRO staff through the on street account and was receiving funding from Essex County Council to cover this for the first three years of operation. Councillor Mitchell felt that this was a very significant difference. In response to questions it

was explained that it would not be possible to account for TRO's separately as it was only staff costs that were handled differently. Councillor Turner made the point that it would be possible to seek to renegotiate the agreement.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The financial position to the end of period 6 21013/14 for the NEPP on street account be noted.
- (b) The comparative financial position of the NEPP and SEPP be noted.

25. On-Street Permits and Parking Report

Richard Walker, Parking Partnership, introduced the report setting out proposals for the pricing for on-street permits. It was recommended that fees change in line with the principles set out in the Business Case previously agreed. This sought to harmonise the way charging was carried out and schemes administered. He explained that the proposals brought forward for kerbside machine managed parking had been misinterpreted. The Partnership was not seeking the wholesale introduction of kerbside parking machines but was seeking more effective and efficient enforcement of "limited waiting" parking areas. Current processes involved multiple visits by CEOs.

Concern was expressed by Councillor Barker about the number of free permits issued by some authorities. Whilst it was accepted that it could be entirely appropriate for some organisations to receive free permits, it was necessary to ensure this was not abused. It was agreed that each authority should review the free permits it issued and report back to the next meeting.

Councillor Hunt stated that he was uncomfortable with the proposed increase to £60 for an on-street permit in Colchester and felt this increase should be staged over two years. He also sought an update on whether some of issues around the introduction of MiPermit had been resolved. He was concerned that the phone line was not available at certain times on Saturday and not at all on Sundays. Richard Walker stressed the benefits of MiPermit. As well as cutting stationary and postage costs, it would allow better monitoring and audit of the issuing of permits. The Partnership could seek to extend the hours of operation of the phone line, if there was demand. Alternatively, it could seek to enforce less at these times, but some members indicated they would not be content with such an approach.

Councillor Durcan expressed concern about the high percentage increase in the cost of a permit in Harlow. Historically, restrictions had not been enforced on Sunday, partly in recognition of that fact that many residents received visitors then. He stressed the need for a common sense approach to enforcement. He also felt that the Partnership should incentivise visitor permits to encourage residents to buy more.

Councillor Barker asked whether it would be possible for a household to have a second permit that was not specific to a car, which could be used by visitors. Richard Walker confirmed this was possible but it depended on the type of system that had been set up originally.

The Committee agreed to a request from Epping Forest District Council that Business Permits that had already been issued be retained and that it be allowed to consider new requests for such permits.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) the proposed pricing details set out in Appendix 2 of the report be agreed;
- (b) Business Permits already issued by Epping Forest District Council be retained and that it be allowed to consider requests for further Business Permits;
- (c) Each authority review the free permits it issues and report back to the next meeting of the Partnership when further consideration be given to the issue of free permits.

(FOUR voted FOR, ONE voted AGAINST and ONE ABSTAINED from voting).

26. Handling NEPP Media Enquiries

Sarah Ward, Colchester Borough Council, introduced the report proposing amendments to the NEPP's media enquiries policy. It was stressed that this applied to relating to enquiries requiring a factual spokesperson response, rather than a political response.

The proposals in the report were welcomed but it was agreed that the process should be amended to ensure that the media and communications team of the relevant partner authority was made aware of any press releases relating to their area as they were issued to ensure that they were kept fully informed.

RESOLVED that the proposed approach to preparing NEPP media responses to more involved enquiries and to trend based media enquiries as set out in the report be agreed, subject to the inclusion of a requirement that the media and communications team of the relevant partner authority be made aware of any press releases relating to their area as they are issued.

27. NEPP Operational Report

Lou Belgrove, Parking Partnership, presented the Operational Report for On-Street Parking. She highlighted in particular the clearing of the backlog of informal challenges. Officers had worked hard to clear the backlog. The office was now fully staffed and officers had been set robust performance targets to prevent another backlog building up. Councillor Mitchell suggested it could be worth investigating the possibility of utilising staff at the SEPP if another backlog did begin to build up.

Councillor Hunt observed that there was considerable variation in the monthly figures for the issuing of PCNs in Colchester. It was explained that this could be due to the impact of redundancies and sick leave in the team serving Colchester. It was anticipated that the figures would now become more stable. Councillor Durcan noted that the level of PCNs issued in Harlow was significantly higher than in previous years and hoped that this was not a result of disproportionate enforcement. Richard Walker explained that this was a consequence of a more consistent approach to enforcement across the Partnership area.

Councillor Waller asked whether there was any conflict between the proposed use of the CCTV vehicles and the recent announcements by the Department of Communities and Local Government. Richard Walker explained that the CCTV vehicle would be used mainly to tackle indiscriminate and dangerous parking outside schools, where it was impractical and inefficient to use CEOs. The Partnership would advertise where the car would be operating, which it hoped would have a deterrent effect. It was anticipated that the CCTV vehicle would become operational in January 2014.

In response to a suggestion from Councillor Durcan, it was agreed that the recruitment process for internal vacancies in the Partnership should be amended so that once they had been advertised to the “at risk” pool at Colchester Borough Council, they would then be advertised internally across all the partner authorities.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) The Operational Report for On-Street Parking be noted;
- (b) The recruitment process for internal vacancies be amended so that once internal vacancies had been advertised to the “at risk” pool at Colchester Borough Council, they are then advertised internally across all the partner authorities.

28. Technical Team Update

Trevor Degville, Parking Partnership, presented the report updating the Committee on works carried out by the Technical Team since the previous Joint Committee meeting.

Councillor Turner thanked the Partnership for the large amount of work carried out in implementing the Clacton Town Centre Review. It was confirmed that the schemes at Anchor Road and Crossfield Road would be implemented before the end of the year. Other members of the Partnership expressed their frustration about comments made by the Leader of Tendring District Council about the NEPP, given the considerable resources that had been invested in Tendring, at the expense of work in other authorities. Such comments were against the spirit of the Partnership. Councillor Turner responded that these issues needed to be taken up with directly with the Leader of Tendring Council.

RESOLVED that the Technical Team Update be noted.

29. Annual Return 2012/13

RESOLVED that the publication of the audited Annual Return for 21012/13 be noted.

30. Traffic Regulation Order Request

The Joint Committee noted the information about the scheme for Little Parndon Road contained in the report. Councillor Johnson explained that the scheme had been submitted to Harlow’s Local Highway Panel but it had been unable to fund it. The Committee’s view was that this scheme should be considered alongside other Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) requests and should be resubmitted to the next meeting when TROs would be considered, Harlow would have the opportunity at that point to prioritise the scheme as it saw fit.

RESOLVED that the scheme be considered alongside other Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) requests and be resubmitted to the next meeting when TROs would be considered.

31. Forward Plan

RESOLVED that the current Forward Plan be noted.

32. Essex County Council Report to Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee on Parking Partnerships

The Joint Committee received the report on Parking Partnerships provided to Essex County

Council's Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Barker indicated that she had volunteered to give evidence to the Committee and Councillor Mitchell indicated that he would be willing to do so also. The Joint Committee looked forward to seeing the outcome of the scrutiny.

RESOLVED that the report on Parking Partnerships provided to Essex County Council's Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee be noted.