

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30 pm on 4 SEPTEMBER 2012**

Present: Councillor E Godwin – Chairman.
Councillors G Barker, P Davies, I Evans, S Howell, D
Morson, E Oliver and D Watson.

Also present: Councillors R Chambers (Portfolio Holder – Finance), J
Cheetham (Deputy Leader) and A Walters (Portfolio
Holder – Community Safety).
Peter Massie (Highways and Transportation, Essex
County Council)

Officers: J Mitchell (Chief Executive), R Auty (Assistant Director
Corporate Services), R Dobson (Democratic Services
Officer), R Pridham (Head of Street Services) and A
Webb (Director of Corporate Services).

SC15 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors S Harris and J Rich.

Councillor G Barker said he had a disclosable pecuniary interest in that his spouse was a member of the District Council, and that he had been granted a dispensation regarding this interest by the Monitoring Officer.

SC16 HIGHWAYS STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

Peter Massie, Head of Highways Commissioning for Essex Highways and Transportation, gave a presentation on the new Highways partnership with Ringway Jacobs.

Mr Massie said it was intended that this partnership would achieve better collaboration than under the previous regime of entering into contracts with numerous other bodies. The new partnership should improve efficiency in terms of the programme of works and in making it possible for customers to access more live data online.

Mr Massie gave an overview of the contract with Ringway Jacobs which had been entered into on 1 April 2012, with a term of 10 years and the option to extend this term for a further 5 years. He explained there would be an opportunity under the contract for the strategic partnership to become a joint venture, that is, a separate company. Although itself a joint venture, Ringway Jacobs was fully accountable to the Highways service and operated to the standards and policies of Essex County Council. Mr Massie outlined how responsibility for the partnership was structured, explaining that the Cabinet

Member and Director of Highways and Transportation were responsible for the service and that Essex Highways now comprised two parts: the Commissioning Core and the Delivery Unit. He said the latter unit was staffed from both Highways and Ringway Jacobs, and that all staff answered to the Service Leader.

Members then asked questions as follows: how roadworks were scheduled in conjunction with works being done by the utilities companies; how the ordinary customer would benefit from this initiative; whether the contract provided for a get-out clause if the partnership failed to be effective; what the prospects were for repairing potholes; what future major roadworks were planned for Essex; and how Highways would address repeated damage to verges on rural roads caused by lorries and farm vehicles, resulting in wasted repair work to such areas.

Replying to these questions, Mr Massie said the periodic lack of communication from statutory undertakers was frustrating not only for customers but also for Highways as these bodies were obliged to inform Highways of their proposed works. There were various reasons why co-ordination sometimes failed. The partnership intended to run a programme management office for the whole area so as to link up better with the statutory undertakers.

Regarding the improvement of the service for customers, Mr Massie said the aim was to achieve efficiency targets and carry out more work for the money available, and to have better dealings with customers.

Regarding the options if the partnership were to fail, Mr Massie said the contract contained a get-out clause, but that the style of contract emphasised co-operation and trust between the partners. There was a performance framework which would help monitor whether such co-operation was achieving the targets.

Regarding potholes, Mr Massie described the new 'jet patcher' treatment now being applied to potholes, for which an extra £11 million had been provided. The process should ensure that the surface of treated potholes was sealed against winter conditions. Programmed remedial works were planned to start in the New Year as part of this planning cycle rather than waiting for the next financial year.

Regarding major roadworks planned for Essex, Mr Massie said he would obtain such information for Members.

Regarding repairs to verges and potholes Mr Massie gave a detailed explanation of the way in which the jet patcher equipment worked and said it enabled more repair work to be carried out than the method previously used.

Councillor Chambers said he endorsed the new jet patcher method although it was expensive.

The Chairman thanked Mr Massie and suggested that he be invited before the Committee at a future time to report on the partnership.

SC17 **MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING**

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2012 were approved and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:

At Minute SC13, regarding outcomes of the Member survey, at the end of the first sentence of the last paragraph, to add the words 'and that there were some learning points that could be used for the future'.

SC18 **FORWARD PLAN**

Regarding the Jubilee Fund outcomes, Councillor G Barker asked whether Members would be supplied with a list of the funds allocated. Councillor Chambers confirmed that this information would be made available on the Council's website following its ratification at Cabinet on 13 September. He said bids from town and parish councils had amounted to £233,000, some £17,000 less than the £250,000 allocated; but bids of £720,000 had been received from voluntary and community groups, indicating very successful publicity.

SC19 **SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME**

The Assistant Director Corporate Services explained the two scoping reports originally listed under the October meeting were to be dealt with later on tonight's agenda in order to clear time at that meeting for training. Tim Young, a Scrutiny training consultant and former Head of Scrutiny at the London Borough of Camden, would attend to provide training for Scrutiny Committee Members and for any other Members or officers who were interested. An earlier start time for the training session was requested, to which Members agreed.

SC20 **HIGHWAYS PANEL UPDATE**

Councillor Walters, Portfolio Holder for Community Safety and Chairman of the Highways Panel, gave an update on the work of the Highways Panel. He said the Panel had been set up at the end of 2011, and following a refreshment of the terms of reference all such panels in Essex, it had made good progress with a number of initiatives. The Panel had been diligent in allocating its budget of £472,000 towards a list of potential projects in this district supplied by County as 85% of the budget was now allocated, ahead of all other Highways Panels in the County.

Councillor Walters described the types of scheme which the Panel would be approving, such as a puffin crossing in Newport and in Saffron Walden, a safety scheme on Stortford Road; bus stop cleans; traffic calming schemes and a 20mph speed limit in Great Chesterford, which would be the first such scheme in Essex. Councillor Walters explained there were certain criteria for imposing a 20mph speed limit, as this measure was only appropriate in areas where the mean speed was already less than 24mph and factors such as the impact of street furniture on an area needed to be considered very carefully.

Councillor Morson asked how matters from town and parish councils could be referred to the Highways Panel. Councillor Walters said the views of town and parish councils were reflected as the Panel included representatives nominated by the Uttlesford Association of Local Councils.

Members asked further questions regarding some of the schemes to which Councillor Walters had referred. In relation to cycle schemes, Councillor Walters said these were the subject of current campaigns, but that money was a factor, as well as whether certain narrow roads were suitable. The receptiveness of landowners regarding the widening of some roads would also be a factor.

Councillor Evans asked about the reference to a £200,000 scheme. Councillor Walters said this related to a use of section 106 money in Great Dunmow to design a traffic lights system, which represented a start in what could then be a longer term project to be taken on by Highways.

Councillor Howell congratulated Councillor Walters on the excellent initiative he was taking forward with the Highways Panel and said this work was an important part of the localism agenda along with the Highway Rangers. He had a concern about budgets; he also had a concern about cases where traffic management works seemed to appear overnight with no forewarning or explanation, such as the peninsula scheme in Thaxted. Councillor Howell said he also wished to thank Councillor Walters for his assistance in obtaining a footpath in Hempstead and asked that he continue to support this proposal.

Councillor G Barker asked about the use of section 106 funds. Councillor Walters said it was important to use money available from previous schemes which would otherwise be lost, so the Panel considered how best to do so. Where the money was insufficient to implement a scheme, the Panel took the view it would at least be progress to use funds for designs for traffic schemes to be drawn up.

Councillor Cheetham said many of the new section 106 agreements required the money to be spent within the development to which they related, as the rules had changed over the years. She was pleased that Section 106 agreements were now dealt with from within the Council.

The Chief Executive confirmed in response to a question from Councillor G Barker that a report on section 106 funds would be brought to Cabinet on 25 October.

Councillor Walters then described the work of the Highway Rangers, who carried out smaller works across the district, in order to address minor maintenance or clearing jobs. The Highways Rangers comprised two people and a van; they worked to a programme which aimed to cover equally the North and South areas of the district, but which was inevitably flexible due to weather or other circumstances. The allocation of their work was done through parish and town council requests to Highways. The Highways Rangers had been averaging 30 to 40 jobs per month, and Councillor Walters said he was delighted to have had an opportunity to promote this service recently on BBC Radio Essex.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Walters for his presentation on what was clearly an excellent endeavour.

SC22

WASTE SERVICES UPDATE

The Committee considered the report of Councillor Barker on waste services. In Councillor Barker's absence the report was introduced by the Head of Street Services.

In reply to a question from the Chairman, the Head of Street Services confirmed the single pass system would commence on 18 September.

Members welcomed this initiative which would be less expensive than the former system and which would be likely to increase recycling. Regarding parish green waste skips, it was noted that responses were awaited from town and parish councils as to whether they wished to continue to participate in the scheme.

Councillor Howell commended officers for the enhanced recycling service due to be implemented as there were many challenges to be faced in setting up the new system. He commented on the references in the report to the ordering of an additional 4,000 caddies which had been ordered, and to reports of theft of a number of caddies.

Councillor Oliver asked for reassurance that initial problems with the operation of the new vehicles had now been resolved.

In reply the Head of Street Services said seven of the vehicles were now operational, and one was still awaited following initial problems with the mid wheel steer. These problems had been rectified by the contractor, Dennis Eagle; and three days of training would be given. The successful operation of the vehicles meant that already the number of kitchen waste crew needed

had already been reduced. Although the trucks went at a slower pace, this was mainly due to the need for the drivers to gain experience.

The Head of Street Services said the contractor would provide for a week or so a maintenance officer at the depots every day to be on call in case of any mechanical difficulties with the vehicles when the scheme was implemented. He said he was pleased to report there had been no problems in hard to reach areas such as Stoneyfield Common.

Members queried the delivery of excess numbers of caddies following requests for additional caddies in Birchanger and lack of security regarding the stack of caddies prior to distribution which had been left in a car park in Stansted.

The Head of Street Services gave an explanation for having to order a further 4,000 caddies. He said he had overestimated the number of flats in the district, and therefore more caddies had had to be ordered.

Members raised further points regarding 'hard to reach' properties; concern about how people would dispose of green waste if parish councils did not subscribe to the green waste skips; and the retention of bottle banks in some areas of the district.

The Head of Street Services said he would supply a list of hard to reach properties; that if people needed a second green bin they could apply for one; and that it was preferable for people to recycle their glass in the green bin because the Council received £45 per tonne for it. He asked Members to ensure that their parish magazines encouraged this practice.

Members commended the recycling team for having improved what was the Council's most high profile service whilst at the same time saving a significant sum of money. The Chairman thanked the Head of Street Services for attending.

SC23

EAST OF ENGLAND AMBULANCE SERVICE STATION CLOSURES

The Committee considered a brief report submitted by the East of England Ambulance Service on initiatives to be implemented. The report set out brief details of how the scheme would affect Uttlesford. The initiative would involve no change to the ambulance station in Dunmow and a small reduction in hours at Saffron Walden. The ambulance station at Stansted would no longer have any vehicles starting or finishing from it but would continue to be used as a deployment/standby point. Bishop's Stortford ambulance station, which was located nearby, would cover that area; and staff from Stansted would be redeployed to other local stations.

Members found the report to be lacking in clarity in some respects and expressed concern regarding the proposals affecting Stansted and

Birchanger. Councillor G Barker said a significant problem for ambulances was the shortage of beds available at hospitals, resulting in ambulances spending time outside Accident and Emergency departments unable to send the patient into the hospital. Members raised further issues such as the level of training of ambulance staff and response times.

The Chairman asked officers to seek clarification regarding the closure of Stansted Ambulance station. The issue of waiting to transfer patients to hospital was a matter about which the Committee was very concerned; as was the fact that no-one from the ambulance service had attended the meeting to enlarge upon the report. The Committee would note the report and seek a further presentation from the ambulance service in June 2013.

SC24

REVENUES AND BENEFITS PARTNERSHIP UPDATE

The Chief Executive presented a report updating the Committee on the proposed revenues and benefits partnership with Harlow Council. He said there was nothing to add to the written report, as the next meeting of the Joint Partnership Committee would take place on 16 October, when the matter would be discussed.

Councillor Morson asked a question about the financial contribution to be payable under the contract with the consultant Steria, should the partnership not proceed. The Chief Executive said this outcome had been budgeted for, and further details depended on the forthcoming discussion with Harlow.

In reply to a question as to whether Harlow was more keen to proceed than this council, the Chief Executive said the tenor of the reports and minutes of the last Council meeting indicated the position and that there had been enormous changes to the national situation regarding the introduction of Universal Credit, such changes having been identified by the section 151 officer. The Chairman noted that national circumstances had greatly changed since the proposals were first considered.

SC25

CAR PARKING – SCOPING REPORT

Members considered a scoping report on the issue of car parking in the district, in order for officers to produce a full review of this subject which they had requested following an increase in parking charges in 2011.

Draft terms of reference were discussed and the following suggestions were made regarding the report's scope: assessment of complaint levels and the success rate of appeals against fines; benefits and disadvantages of local business and the Council of introducing free parking at certain times of the day and analysis of the use of the car parks.

The Committee also approved the terms of reference suggested in the scoping report.

SC26

ENFORCEMENT – SCOPING REPORT

The Committee considered a further scoping report to enable a full report on enforcement of airport-related parking to be prepared. Suggested terms of reference were approved and an additional proposal for the report to address was suggested: to consider levels of use of Stansted Airport's parking helpline and public perception regarding its effectiveness.

The meeting ended at 9.35pm.