

**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD
SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30pm on 26 SEPTEMBER 2016**

Present: Councillor A Dean (Chairman)
Councillors H Asker, G Barker, R Chambers, B Light, E Oliver and
G Sell.

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director Corporate Services),
M Cox (Democratic Services Officer) R Harborough (Director of
Public Services) and A Webb (Director of Finance and Corporate
Services).

Also present: Councillor S Barker (Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services).

SC25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Davies, Felton and
Harris.

Councillor Asker declared a non-pecuniary interest as a member of Saffron
Walden Town Council.

**SC26 NORTH ESSEX PARKING PARTNERSHIP – EXTENSION OF THE JOINT
COMMITTEE AGREEMENT**

Presentation

The Chairman welcomed from the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP),
Richard Walker, Group Manager and Lisa Hinman, Central Area Manager.
Richard Walker gave a presentation about the NEPP service to assist with the
pre-scrutiny discussion on the decision to be taken by Cabinet on whether to
commit to the partnership for a further four years.

Richard Walker explained the history of decriminalised parking in Essex and the
subsequent development of the Parking Partnership. He explained that after
decriminalisation, ECC had established 12 agencies in the districts to run
parking enforcement. This arrangement had proved ineffective and had resulted
in a growing deficit that had reached £900K countywide by 2011.

ECC had therefore cancelled the agencies and established the north and south
parking partnerships to achieve operational and administrative efficiencies,
reduce the deficit, and provide a surplus to invest back in enforcement and the
making of Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO). Other improvements sought were
greater resilience, clarity of policy and consistency of approach.

The parking function covered two distinct elements

- Off- street parking - this was the responsibility of district authorities
(UDC). The budget contribution was via a service level agreement.
For UDC this was £154K

- On street parking - this was the responsibility of ECC as highway authority. The budget expands or contracts to suit income.

Each Partnership had a lead authority, which was Colchester for the NEPP, and Governance was by way of a Joint Committee comprising one Cabinet member from each authority together with a county member.

Richard Walker gave details of the areas of work covered by the NEPP and said that it had met its objectives to achieve an overall financial account to operate parking enforcement and the TRO function. The partnership now had zero deficit, and was looking to invest the surplus back into the service. He explained the challenges and plans for the future of the Partnership.

The member authorities were being asked to consider whether they wished to extend the agreement for a further 4 year term. The current term was 11 years, but as the decision to extend was to be made not less than 15 months before the end of the 7 year term a decision had to be taken by December 2016, when a new business plan and legal agreement would be put in place.

Questions

Members of the Committee asked a number of questions, as follows

Q - Who do you consider to be the customer of the service? How do you find out the views of the general public, is there a problem with public perception?

A - Everyone who uses the service is a customer. The partnership is looking to be more outward looking and intends to arrange more focus groups and events.

A - There should however be caution when asking the views of the general public as there tends to be a binary response. People either think there is too much or too little enforcement, but rarely express satisfaction with the service.

Q - How many Civil Enforcement Officers (CEO) are employed in Uttlesford?

A - There is always at least one CEO in the Uttlesford District, on average there will be two, one concentrating on Saffron Walden and one covering the rest of district. The teams work 4 days on and 4 days off, from 7am – 9pm or 7.30am – 7pm. These are long shifts, and there are a lot of hours to cover. It is often difficult to recruit to these posts as it and the nature of work requires a certain type of person.

Q - How many CEO's are employed by the partnership as a whole?

The partnership employs 51 FTEs. The number currently employed is in the 40's, recruitment takes place on an ongoing basis.

Q - How do the CEO's know which areas of the district to target? Do managers have detailed knowledge of the area?

A - The officers' understanding of the district is improving all the time. Detailed surveys are carried out for TRO's to ensure it is the right scheme for the

area. The NEPP has a number of officers with technical knowledge of the areas and CEOs develop their own personal knowledge on the ground.

Q - Why do officers often patrol in pairs and why do they enforce on bank holidays? As inappropriate parking is often the cause of traffic disruption, does the parking partnership work with ECC highways to help traffic flow in small towns?

A - The officers do not generally patrol in pairs but do so outside schools, when they are training or when there are safety concerns. On street parking can often be the cause of traffic flow problems, and the NEPP works with ECC to develop appropriate TROs.

Q - Do the district authorities advise the NEPP about changes to off street parking arrangement, for example during the recent works at the Lower street Stansted car park?

A - Yes, this information is passed to the NEPP although, the recent arrangement at the Lower Street Car park had been particularly confusing.

Q - Is there relevant data/ information available to assist with the setting of parking tariffs?

A - Yes the new meters uses SMART technology which can provide detailed usage information.

Q - Is there a heat map for the district?

A - Yes, the system can produce a detailed map of where the CEOs have visited and where tickets have been issued. This information can be overlaid to plan working patterns.

Q - Is there a problem with issuing visitor permits?

A - The NEPP is trying to encourage digital usage, although paper tickets are still available.

Q - Can action be taken to prevent people parking on the kerb?

A - The NEPP cannot enforce where there are no restrictions (ie yellow lines). If the parking causes an obstruction this is a matter for the police. However, before any restrictions are put in place, thought should be given to the knock on effect on surrounding areas. In cases where there is a wide pavement this does not necessarily cause a problem and can assist with speed reduction.

Q - We are not aware of who we should contact at the NEPP to report local issues?

A - Feedback from councillors with local knowledge is very important. I will circulate a who's who and contact numbers of relevant officers.

Q - Why have Epping decided to opt out of the partnership for off- street parking

A - Epping DC they think they can provide this service cheaper themselves.

Q - Who produces the accounts for the NEPP?

A - The Group Manager produces the accounts together with the accountant. The accounts are independently audited and are publically available.

Q - Should the accounts be presented to the UDC Audit Committee?

A - The partnership produces small bodies accounts which include a lot of detail. However, The Joint Committee has a detailed scrutiny of the accounts at its budget meeting.

Q - How much does UDC pay to NEPP for the off street service?

A - £154K to cover services required such as enforcement, machine maintenance, cash collection. The largest costs are staffing and fuel. This SLA is long standing and will need to be reviewed at some stage.

Q - If we leave the partnership, why would we have no influence on the on-street parking function?

A - On street parking is an ECC highway function.

Councillor G Barker thanked the officers for an interesting and informative presentation. Lisa Hinman asked she was keen to build up a relationship with district members and asked members to contact her with any questions or issues.

Richard Walker and Lisa Hinman then left the meeting.

Discussion

The committee considered a report by the Director of Public Services, which contained information to assist with making the decision on whether to recommend that UDC signs up to the four year extension to the joint agreement.

It was noted that UDC currently paid NEPP £154,000 a year for services in respect of off street car park management. It made no financial contribution to on - street parking enforcement, although there were costs associated with the participation of members and officers in the partnership.

The report set out the advice from NEPP on the level of resource that UDC would require to manage its off street car parks itself. It concluded that there would be no financial savings, it was likely to increase revenue expenditure on this function without achieving any advantage.

The Chairman asked if anyone had put a case that it would be better for the Council to leave the Partnership.

Members of the group said that if there was currently a problem with recruiting CEOs, there was little realistic chance of UDC doing any better without the expertise and manpower. There would also be the additional start-up costs as well as the annual running costs. Officers advised that it would be possible for the council to take on this role but it would be a huge challenge and it would have to engage the help of consultants. Members agreed that it would be difficult for UDC to provide the service cheaper itself and therefore it would be ill-advised to leave the partnership.

However, there was some concern about whether the partnership was giving Uttlesford value for money, when it assigned only 1 or 2 CEO's to patrol the district. The committee thought there should be some improvements to the quality of service provided. One suggestion was whether Uttlesford could negotiate/pay for additional enforcement hours.

The Director of Public Services said the Cabinet would consider its initial response at its meeting on 12 October but the final decision would be made by the NEPP Joint Committee on 15 December 2016.

RESOLVED

- 1 To recommend that the Cabinet agree in principle that UDC commit to the NEPP for a further four years.
- 2 The Chairman to liaise with Cllr Asker and discuss with officers possible areas for improvement to the service and bring these back to the November meeting.

The meeting ended at 10pm.