

EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE MINUTES

Date: Thursday, 7 November 2013 **Time:** 7.30 - 9.30 pm

Place: Council Chamber, Civic
Offices, High Street, Epping

**Members
Present:**

Representing Epping Forest District Council:

Councillor(s): Mrs M Sartin (Chairman), K Angold-Stephens, A Boyce
and Mrs J H Whitehouse

Other Councillors:

Councillor(s): R Bassett, Ms S Stavrou and C Whitbread

Representing Essex County Council:

County Councillor(s): J Knapman, Mrs M McEwen and
J M Whitehouse

Representing Local Councils:

R Balcombe (Fyfield Parish Council), Mrs D Borton (Nazeing Parish
Council), Councillor E Borton (Nazeing Parish Council),
Councillor Mrs J Bowerman (Matching Parish Council), Mrs G Castle
(Nazeing Parish Council), Mrs V Evans (Epping Upland Parish
Council), J Glover (Stanford Rivers Parish Council), A Hanch
(Lambourne Parish Council), Mrs S Jackman (Ongar Town Council)
(Vice Chairman), Councillor B Miller (Epping Upland Parish Council),
R Northwood (Sheering Parish Council), C Portou (Lambourne
Parish Council), R E Russell (Stapleford Abbots Parish Council),
Mrs P Smith (Epping Upland Parish Council), B Surtees (Ongar
Town Council), R Morgan (Matching Parish Council), Mrs E K Walsh
(Loughton Town Council) and Councillor Ms N Wilkinson (Roydon
Parish Council)

Apologies:

Epping Forest District Council –

Councillor(s): A Watts

Essex County Council –

Councillor(s): Mrs V Metcalfe and C Pond

Parish/Town Councils: -

Ms A Busch (Moreton Bobbingworth & The Lavers Parish Council),
Mrs A Jones (Moreton, Bobbingworth & The Lavers Parish Council),
Mrs S De Luca (North Weald Bassett Parish Council),
Mrs S De Luca (Stanford Rivers Parish Council), N Moore
(Buckhurst Hill Parish Council), Cllr S Weston (Loughton TC), Pond
and Mrs K Canning (Chigwell Parish Council)

Officers Present: R Palmer (Director of Finance and ICT), J Preston (Director of Planning and Economic Development), I Willett (Assistant to the Chief Executive), K Durrani (Assistant Director (Technical)), A Mitchell (Assistant Director (Legal)), P Millward (Business Manager), M Jenkins (Democratic Services Assistant) and G J Woodhall (Democratic Services Officer)

By Invitation:

9. MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the last meeting of the committee be agreed subject to an amendment under "Apologies" "Parish/Town Councils" – Mrs K Canning (Chigwell Parish Council) had been incorrectly entered as "Channing."

10. ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL HIGHWAYS

On two occasions, the committee had invited County Councillor R Bass, Portfolio Holder for Transportation and Highways, to attend its meetings on 4 July and this one to discuss the general condition of the highways particularly potholes. However the councillor had sent his apologies. An invitation had been extended to his deputy, County Councillor E Johnson, who had also tendered his apologies. The Committee expressed their disappointment that neither councillor could attend and requested that invitations be promptly passed to them for the next Committee meeting on 6 March 2014.

RESOLVED:

That the Essex County Councillor Portfolio Holder for Transportation and Highways, or their deputy, be invited to the next meeting of the committee.

11. NORTH ESSEX PARKING PARTNERSHIP

At the last meeting of the committee, in conjunction with the invitation to the County Councillor for Transportation and Highways, members had asked for a representative to attend from the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP). Officers had arranged for Mr R Walker, Parking Partnership Group Manager to attend. However a couple of days before this meeting, Mr R Walker had tendered his apologies. Members requested that a representative from the NEPP should be invited to the next committee meeting. In attendance to outline the NEPP's role and responsibilities, the Assistant Director of Environment and Street Scene (Technical) gave a presentation.

- (a) Before April 2012 there were 12 Enforcement Agencies controlled by Essex County Council;
- (b) After April 2012, this arrangement was changed to form two new lead authorities, with attached savings; and
- (c) New central website.

There was concern about the cost of the current parking operations. The Assistant Director advised that it was expensive attempting to enforce parking rules.

Members asked about requests for highways' improvements being misplaced in the system. Officers said that older requests or schemes could be made available, there were 500 such schemes. The best solution was to allocate 10 schemes per district from the best scoring lists.

The Chairman asked that a link to the NEPP website was entered onto the minutes: <http://www.parkingpartnership.org/policies/NEPP%20agenda%20-%20meeting%2010-Apr-13.pdf> page 75 of the link referred to Epping Forest District..

Members discussed the deficit operated by NEPP, the prices had increased 25% over the part few years, however the number of parking tickets issued had halved. Officers suggested that a balance should be struck between an over zealous enforcement stance and being too lax.

The committee were concerned about the limited benefit the District Council received from the NEPP. It was felt that other authorities were being subsidised whilst a surplus was made here. It was suggested that the District Council could administer its own scheme.

The committee were informed that the County Council had created a Task and Finish Panel examining parking. The County Council representatives from Epping should lobby this Panel.

The Chairman suggested that a representative from NEPP could be invited to a meeting of the Safer Cleaner and Greener Scrutiny Standing Panel. She asked for a date to be made available to the Parish and Town Councils.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That a representative from the North Essex Parking Partnership be invited to attend the next committee meeting.

12. ISSUES RAISED BY LOCAL COUNCILS

(a) Road Closures

The Assistant Director of Corporate Support Services (Legal) presented a report to the committee regarding Road Closures. This committee, at its meeting on 4 July, had made a recommendation asking that the District Council consider taking on the powers under the Town Police Clauses Act 1847 for providing local means of road closures for temporary events. The Licensing Committee considered this in October 2013. A town Council had made an application for a temporary road closure to Essex County Council but had been referred to the District Council. This council did not have the ability to make such orders.

Officers were negotiating with the County Council to continue this service for a few more months until the District Council were able to take over this role. The committee requested information on the number of applications for road closures received by the County Council. It was advised that this was not known.

(b) Parish Support Grant

The committee received a report from the Director of Finance regarding Local Support for Council Tax. It was advised that there would be significant grant reductions for 2014/15 and 2015/16 for parish and town councils of 13.6% and 14.1% respectively.

At the start of this financial year Council Tax benefit was replaced by Local Support for Council Tax, under the new local council tax reduction scheme, the council tax base was affected by whether persons living in a dwelling were in receipt of a council tax reduction awarded under the scheme.

For the 2013/14 financial year the District Council decided to pay town and parish councils an amount of support grant compensating them for the reduction in their tax bases. In total, the value of the grants paid out was £320,272 which was £7,460 more than the Department of communities and local Government (DCLG) stated as being the allocation for local councils.

It was not possible to confirm the amount of support grant until the DCLG provided the final settlement figures for the year. Consequently this had delayed the budget setting process for many authorities. However the district council had determined all precepts in time and had set the district wide charges. Out of the 24 local councils, only 5 increased their band D charge by more than 3.4%.

The reductions indicated earlier of 13.6% and 14.1% had been considered by a Cabinet Committee in September, members felt the amount given to local councils in support grant should reduce by the same percentage as the Council's overall funding reduced.

The final settlement figures were unlikely to be available until late December or possibly January, it was advised that it was prudent for budgets to be based on a reduction in support grant of at least 13.6% in 2014/15.

(c) Local Plan

The Director of Planning and Economic Development updated the committee on progress with the Local Plan. The latest public workshop considering population and housing issues had taken place. The Cabinet in December was examining evidence from Edge Analytics for population forecasting. The Portfolio Holder for Planning had recently met with East Hertfordshire local authority, the Corporation of London and English Nature.

(d) Planning Consultations

The local councils had requested an update on the methodology used for consultation on planning applications. The Director of Planning and Economic Development advised that the District Council's Weekly List informed local councils of upcoming planning applications.

(e) Planning Enforcement

The local councils requested that District Councillors were permitted to call-in decisions made by planning officers on enforcement. The Director of Planning and Economic Development advised that enforcement notices were placed in the Bulletin, and members were informed if action was not being taken. Any concerns in this area should be passed to the Enforcement Team. Further Member training on enforcement could be provided.

Members advised that some Parish and Town Councils had not received copies of the Weekly List. The Director of Planning and Economic Development confirmed that he would investigate.

13. INDIVIDUAL ELECTOR REGISTRATION (IER)

The Returning Officer of the district reported on the changes to the canvass procedures. All persons in a household would need registering on their own form. The council's success rate in the past had been 98%, however this was likely to drop as the 48,000 forms used would balloon to 98,000 forms. A publicity leaflet had been produced although the Returning Officer advised that intelligence was needed from local councils on people moving into the area or out. He advised that the costs of these changes were being met by the Government for the first three years.

Members thanked the Elections staff for their work.

14. REVIEW OF CODE OF CONDUCT/COMPLAINTS PROCESS AND PLANNING PROTOCOL

The Monitoring Officer reported to the committee regarding the Review of Code of Conduct/Complaints Process and Planning Protocol. There was an all day training course being held at the Civic Offices regarding the Code of Conduct, Complaints Process and the Planning Protocol on 15 November. He advised that members wishing to attend should contact Democratic Services, training material used would be circulated.

15. PLANNING AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT PARISH COUNCIL LIAISON

The Business Manager of the Planning and Economic Development Directorate presented a report to the committee regarding Parish Council Liaison. The iPlan User Group had met on 16 July which found that steady progress was being made regarding a number of areas of iPlan and planning information on the council's website. There was a need to promote a greater degree of partnership working between the directorate and Parish/Town councils to further improve the use of electronic planning records to achieve the long term objective of reducing the circulation of paper records and plans to all Parish/Town councils.

The District Council currently received 40% of all Planning applications electronically via the Planning Portal and nationally this figure was closer to 60% for all councils across the country. It was advised that every planning application received electronically required printing by the directorate for distribution to parish and Town councils. The average cost of this was £7.50 per application, with an average of 2,500 applications per year had resulted in an additional cost of at least £7,500 per year. This was not sustainable in the long run.

At the User Group meeting in July, it was agreed that further work to identify those Parish and Town Councils that could consider moving towards full electronic use of planning applications and that a small working party should identify that parish councils that were under resourced who needed assistance,

The User Group was also concerned about the quality of some plans which were not always clear. It was felt that there should be a minimum criteria in image quality as a step towards meeting acceptable viewing standards on the Council website.

It was felt that the User Group composition and terms of reference should remain. The Business Manager indicated that Planning and Economic Development was particularly interested in encouraging local Parish/Town councillors and clerks regularly visiting the directorate's offices as part of an improvement process to familiarise them with planning service operations.

RESOLVED:

- (1). That the progress of the Parish Council iPlan User Group meetings and its minutes be noted;
- (2). That the online placement of electronic planning information is an integral part of the Council's strategy in promoting availability and transparency of planning records be noted; and
- (3). That due to the increasing amount of electronic planning applications being made via the National Planning Portal, the distribution and circulation of paper plans to Parish/Town Councils may no longer be sustainable in the future be noted.

16. LOCAL HIGHWAYS PANEL

The Chairman of the Local Highways Panel, County Councillor J Knapman updated the committee on the panel's recent work. He expressed his disappointment at the Panel's project management. He advised that the Panel had spent £2,000 from a budget of £700,000 which had led to the County Portfolio Holder for Transportation and Highways deducting most of the budget for improvements in the county. Next year, nearly £900,000 would be allocated to the Panel. He indicated that he would keep parish and town councils informed of schemes in their area, they could inform him of white lines they would like. He also said he would send Panel minutes to every parish and Town council.

17. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Members were advised that Essex County Council were currently consulting on youth services. Participation in the consultation was encouraged as there had been a reduction in youth service provision.

18. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The next scheduled meeting of the committee is on Thursday 7 March 2014 at 7.30p.m. in the Council Chamber.

CHAIRMAN