

# EPPING FOREST DISTRICT LOCAL COUNCILS' LIAISON COMMITTEE MINUTES

**Date:** Thursday 21 September 2023      **Time:** 7.00 - 8.00 pm

**Place:** Council Chamber - Civic  
Offices

**Members  
Present:**

**Representing Epping Forest District Council:**

Councillors D Sunger (Chairman), H Kane, J Lea, R Morgan and  
J H Whitehouse

**Other Councillors:**

Councillors D Wixley and L Paine

**Representing Essex County Council:**

County Councillors J McIvor and S Kane

**Representing Local Councils:**

Matching Parish Clerk, Nazeing Parish Clerk,  
North Weald Baseett Parish Clerk, Sheering Parish Clerk,  
Stanford Rivers Parish Clerk, Stapleford Abbots Parish Clerk,  
Waltham Abbey Town Clerk.

**Apologies:**

**Epping Forest District Council –**

Councillors R Bassett

**Essex County Council –**

Councillors L Scott, H Whitbread, C Whitbread, Chris Pond and  
M Vance

**Parish/Town Councils: -**

None.

**Officers  
Present:**

N Richardson (Service Director (Planning Development)),  
G Woodhall (Team Manager - Democratic & Electoral Services) and  
R Moreton (Corporate Communications Officer)

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## 1. WEBCASTING INTRODUCTION

The Democratic & Electoral Services Team Manager reminded everyone present that the meeting would be broadcast live to the Internet, and that the Council had adopted a protocol for the webcasting of its meetings.

## 2. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN & VICE-CHAIRMAN

### Resolved:

(1) That District Cllr D Sunger, in his capacity as the Chairman of the District Council, be appointed as Chairman of the Local Councils Liaison Committee for the 2023/24 municipal year; and

(2) That Town Cllr C Burgess, in her capacity as the Chairman of the Epping Forest branch of the Essex Association of Local Councils, be appointed as Vice-Chairman of the Local Councils Liaison Committee for the 2023/24 municipal year.

## 3. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

### RESOLVED:

(1) That the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 28 March 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

## 4. EPPING FOREST LOCAL HIGHWAYS PANEL - NEW STRUCTURE

Cllr S Kane, the Chairman of the Epping Forest Local Highways Panel, informed the Liaison Committee of the new arrangements for the Epping Forest Local Highways Panel. The rules concerning the Local Highways Panels had changed at Essex County Council and a discussion had taken place on how the Epping Forest Local Highways Panel should operate in the future. A number of options had been considered and it was decided that no Town or Parish Council representative should be invited to future meetings, and that any representations from Town or Parish Councils should be directed through their Essex County Councillor.

Cllr S Kane added that a new Panel had been set up, consisting of the Chairmen from each of the Local Panels across the County. This new Panel had their own budget for approving schemes, and each of the Local Panels could refer schemes to this new Panel for consideration.

The Local Councils enquired about the procedure that the Panel used to make decisions. Cllr S Kane stated that the Epping Forest Panel had a budget of £174,000 available to fund schemes across the District, but there were schemes totalling £700,000 on the work programme. Therefore, the Panel members had to review the proposed schemes with a critical eye and make a balanced decision for each scheme proposed. Schemes relating to safety issues took priority. It was accepted that the rural areas might have less schemes approved, and the advice to the Local Councils was to lobby their County Councillor.

### Actions:

(1) Cllr S Kane to ascertain whether the Local Councils could talk directly to the Highways Officers at the County Council; and

(2) Democratic & Electoral Services Team Manager, G Woodhall, to add the link to the Panel's agenda and minutes on the County Council website to the minutes of this meeting:

<https://www.essexhighways.org/epping-forest-lhp>.

**5. ECC CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS MAINTENANCE AND SUSTAINABLE TRANSPORT - CLLR LEE SCOTT**

Cllr S Kane reported that County Cllr L Scott was unavailable for tonight's meeting, and therefore could not provide an update on his plans for the future of highways in the County nor address any concerns that the Local Councils might have.

In relation to the four specific points raised by the Local Councils, Cllr S Kane had received the following responses from Essex Highways Officers:

(i) The efficacy of the Local Highways Panel and the adequacy of the budgets provided to them:

"Where there is a solution then the Local Highways Panel will provide one, however it's not always practical or in some cases legal to commit to every proposal. The scheme list for each panel is generally in excess of the amount of funding available, therefore schemes are prioritised based upon the returned benefit."

(ii) The prime remit of Local Highways Panels:

"Information on the Panels remit can be found at the following link <https://www.essexhighways.org/local-highway-panels>."

(iii) What (if any) options are available for introducing traffic calming measures on rural country roads:

"Traffic calming measures are subject to the classification of the highways network. Where sections of the network allow traffic calming measures to be installed they are dependent upon the constraints at the intended location, rural roads are often subject to national speed limits making them inappropriate locations. Where rural roads pass through villages which are subject to 30mph and there are no constraints then traffic calming measures can be considered."

(iv) The contract with Ringway Jacobs, how long this is in place for, when it is due for renewal, and whether or not they offer value for taxpayers money:

"The Ringway Jacobs contract runs until April 2027. An exercise is underway within ECC to determine the contract type that will follow on from the Ringway Jacobs contract, so it will not be 'renewed' as such. It is difficult to respond to the 'value for money' part of question, however when the contract was originally bid, it was competitively tendered, so it is expected it provided value for money. In addition, over the last couple of years, RJ has been working closely with ECC to successfully identify significant savings and efficiencies and this will continue until the end of the contract."

Cllr S Kane also highlighted that every scheme cost a considerable amount of money as there was validation and survey work that needed to be undertaken.

**Actions:**

(3) Cllr S Kane to enquire of Highways Officers when better quality 'Road Closed' signs would be available.

**6. ISSUES RAISED BY LOCAL COUNCILS**

(a) **Copies of the Local Plan**

The Local Councils had requested the District Council to provide each of the 24 Town and Parish Councils within the District with a hard copy of Part 1, Part 2 and the Policies Map of the Local Plan.

The Service Director for Planning, N Richardson, informed the Local Councils that it cost approximately £120 to print a copy of the Local Plan, and the District Council simply did not have a budget to provide the Local Councils with a copy as requested. The documents were freely available on the District Council's website and individual Local Councils could print off their own copy.

The Local Councils felt that the District Council should be more sympathetic over this issue as £120 was a lot of money for some of the smaller Local Councils, and there were concerns about the lack of access to a printed copy of the Local Plan.

Some suggestions were made at the meeting by District Councillors to reduce the cost for Local Councils, such as sharing a printed copy or contacting a number of different printing companies to find the best price. North Weald Bassett Parish Council offered a copy for any of the Local Councils that required one.

#### **(b) Planning Policy & Implementation Team Officers**

The Local Councils had requested an update on the Officers and roles within the Planning Policy and Implementation Team.

N Richardson displayed a structure chart showing the current composition of the Team (attached as an Appendix to these minutes). There were a considerable number of interim posts within the Team, and there were a variety of reasons for this, including:

- The proximity of London and the salaries offered by the borough Councils;
- Private sector competition;
- Insufficient Planning Officers coming through the system; and
- The increasing complexity of the planning system.

N Richardson stated that other authorities in Essex had similar issues, and the Council was looking at the possibility of shared services with neighbouring authorities.

#### **(c) Arcos Planning System**

(i) N Richardson stated that the system did not allow you to identify which properties had been consulted on a particular planning application. The Council was in discussions with the provider to add this feature.

(ii) To search for the history of a particular property using the 'file number', N Richardson stated that users should select the 'Advanced Search' function to achieve this. The Chairman, Cllr D Sunger, explained that Planning Officers had demonstrated how he could search for all previous planning applications submitted from a particular road within the District.

(iii) In respect of a possible two-hour tutorial on the system for Town and Parish Councils, N Richardson requested that if the Local Councils informed him of their issues with the system, then Officers would consider the viability of running such a session. The Local Councils felt that a two-hour tutorial would be of value, even if it would not solve all the issues with using the system, and it could be held on Microsoft teams and recorded so that it could be re-watched. The Local Councils also stated that they had provided a list of issues to the previous Planning Service Manager a year ago but had had no response. N Richardson requested that this list be sent to him, and Officers would respond to the Local Councils.

**(d) The Weekly Planning List**

The Local Councils had highlighted that the weekly planning list was not sometimes distributed on a Friday afternoon due to staff leave or sickness and could not another remember of staff distribute the list on these occasions. N Richardson stated that this was a business support function and Officers were aware of the issue, and they would look at increasing the resilience for this function.

**(e) Qualis**

The Local Councils had requested that the new Chairman of the Qualis Group attend the meeting to provide an update on the Qualis organisation. G Woodhall reported that the new Chairman of Qualis had been invited but was unavailable. However, he would attend the Committee's next meeting in early 2024.

**7. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

The Committee noted that its next meeting would be held on 1 February 2024 at 7.00pm.

**CHAIRMAN**

