

REPORT TO: HIGHWAYS LOCALISM PANEL
DATE: 24 JANUARY 2011
TITLE: REVIEW OF THE PRINCIPLES, SCOPE & OPERATION
OF THE PANEL
AUTHORS: CATH SHAW (01279) 446428
JOE MCGILL (01279) 446800

SUMMARY

1. The report covers a draft report to Environment Policy Working Group reviewing the principles, scope and operation of the Highways Localism Panel, as agreed when the panel was established.

RECOMMENDED that:

- A. The Panel endorses the report to Environment Policy Working Group at Appendix 1.

BACKGROUND

2. On 15 September 2009, the Environment & Community Committee agreed a report establishing the Highways Localism Panel, and setting its Terms of Reference and mode of operation. At that meeting the Committee also resolved to receive at a future meeting a report reviewing the principles, operation and scope of the Panel. A copy of the September 2009 report is attached at Appendix 2.
3. Since that meeting, the Council has amended its decision making structure. There is now one Policy Committee, the Executive Committee, supported by a number of Policy Working Groups. It is proposed that the report at Appendix 1 is submitted to Environment Policy Working Group for reference on to the Executive Committee.
4. The report suggests a number of changes to the way the Panel operates. These are set out in the attached report, and include:
 - Abolishing the “Community Forum” and instituting an open part of the meeting, at which representative groups and individuals may make suggestions for the Panel to consider
 - Maintaining the Terms of reference as they are, but considering in early 2012 whether they should be broadened to other areas of Council business, such as unadopted highways.
5. The Panel is asked to endorse the attached report.

REPORT TO: ENVIRONMENT POLICY WORKING GROUP
DATE: 25 JANUARY 2011
TITLE: REVIEW OF THE PRINCIPLES, SCOPE & OPERATION
OF THE PANEL
AUTHORS: CATH SHAW (01279) 446428
JOE MCGILL (01279) 446800

SUMMARY

1. The report reviews the principles, scope and operation of the Highways Localism Panel, and suggests some changes to the way the Panel operates.

RECOMMENDED that the Environment Policy Working Group

- (a) endorses the changes set out in the report, specifically:
 - i. To maintain the Panel's Terms of Reference unchanged
 - ii. The abolition of the 'Community Forum'
 - iii. The introduction of an 'open' section of the Panel meeting, during which representative organisations and members of the public can raise issues for consideration by the Panel
 - iv. To consider in early 2012 whether to broaden the scope of the Panel's work to other areas of activity, such as oversight of Harlow Council functions in relation to unadopted highways.
- (b) considers the recommendations (if any) made by the Localism Panel on 24 January 2011;
- (c) **RECOMMENDS** to the Executive Committee that the changes outlined in (ii) and arising from (iii) above, be adopted.

BACKGROUND

2. On 15 September 2009, the Environment & Community Committee agreed a report establishing the Highways Localism Panel, and setting its Terms of Reference and mode of operation. At that meeting the Committee also resolved to receive at a future meeting a report reviewing the principles, operation and scope of the Panel. The Committee recommended that the Review should include consideration of the added benefits derived from the partnership, and whether the Panel should expand its remit to include other Harlow Council functions such as unadopted highways, footpaths, bus shelters, flood alleviation and street cleansing.

The aims and role of the Panel

3. Localism Panels were established to provide local input to the development of Essex County Council's programmes for Highways management and maintenance. The Terms of reference of the Panel are as follows:

The Highways Localism Panel will

Make recommendations to Essex County Council regarding the content of programmes for Highways Maintenance, Traffic Management and Casualty Reduction as they apply to Harlow

In carrying out this role, have regard to the views of the Community Highways Forum, and advice from Essex County Council officers on relevant statutory requirements

Monitor the delivery of the agreed programmes, and raise any concerns with Essex County Council through the agreed procedures

Make recommendations to the Essex County Council Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation to amend targets or discretionary policies and/or switch between budgets if this is necessary to meet local priorities

4. The Panel has been largely successful in meeting these aims. In its early meetings it was hampered by delays in finalizing the size of the relevant ECC programmes, but latterly the Panel has been influential in deciding which projects should be prioritized for implementation using underspends from other projects. The Panel's monitoring role has only been underway for a relatively short period of time, and thus far it has not had to address any "problems"; but the early signs are that this will be a useful way of maintaining oversight of progress with local highways schemes.

The processes and operation of the Panel

5. In some districts localism panels have been formed from representatives of parish and town councils. However, no such structures exist in Harlow and it was therefore proposed that the Localism Panel should draw its Membership from District Councillors, but with input from an open and inclusive Community Forum. The intention was that this model would allow clear governance and accountability, but also an inclusive community-based approach.

6. The first meeting of the Community Forum was held on 15 January 2010, and was not thought to be particularly successful. In part this was because the purpose of the meeting had not been sufficiently well communicated in advance, but more fundamentally there were concerns that a large forum, many of whose members had an interest in only a small part of the town, was not the most effective way for the Panel to gather thoughts from the wider community.
7. Based on information provided by Essex County Council about what works in other Districts, we therefore proposing abandoning the idea of a Community Forum, and inserting a section in Panel meetings (which are anyway open to the public) during which representatives of community groups and individual members of the public are able to make the case for particular schemes or improvements.

Extending the scope of the Panel

8. The Environment & Community Committee report suggests that consideration should be given to extending the scope of the Panel's work. Given the delays in formalising the ECC 09/10 programme budgets, the Panel has yet to complete a full annual cycle in 'normal' conditions. Given this, and the proposed changes to the way the Panel gathers ideas from the wider community, it is recommended that no changes are made to the scope of the Panel's work at this stage. However, there is no inherent reason why the scope should not be broadened in due course, and this should be reviewed in early 2012.
9. The Localism Panel met on 24 January 2011 and any further recommendations it makes for changes will be reported verbally at the Policy Working Group meeting for consideration.

IMPLICATIONS

Social Inclusion

None specific (Author: Lynn Seward).

Equal Opportunities

In the work of the Localism Panel, consideration must continue to be given to the need to respond to the needs of any specific groups that could be particularly affected by policies/services, for example people with disabilities (Author: Lynn Seward).

Finance

None (Author: Simon Freeman).

Human Resources

None (Author: Nigel Delbarre).

IT

None (Author: Declan White).

Legal

There are no legal implications at this point (Author: Amanda Julian).

Sustainability

None specific (Author: Graeme Bloomer).

BACKGROUND PAPERS: None.