

Minutes

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 11th July 2018



Present

Councillors	Present	Councillors	Present
P Barlow (Chairman)	Yes	D Mann	Yes
Mrs. M Cunningham (Vice Chairman)	Yes	Mrs. I Parker	Yes
Mrs. D Garrod	Yes	R Ramage	Apologies
J Goodman	Apologies	B Rose	Apologies
A Hensman	Yes	P Schwier	Yes
P Horner	Apologies	C Siddall	Apologies
D Hume	Apologies	Vacancy	
G Maclure	Yes		

Councillor R Mitchell (in his capacity as an Elected Member for Essex County Council) and Councillor Mrs W Schmitt were also in attendance.

13 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

INFORMATION: The following interest was declared:

Councillor Mrs Cunningham declared a Non-Pecuniary Interest in Agenda Item 6, 'Third Evidence Gathering Session for the Scrutiny Review into the Role of the Highway Authority in the Braintree District,' as she was the Director of a company which carried out contracts for Essex Highways.

14 **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

INFORMATION: There were no questions asked, or statements made.

15 **MINUTES**

DECISION: That the Minutes of the meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 10th May 2018 and 6th June 2018 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16 **ANNUAL REPORT OF THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP 2017-18**

INFORMATION: Members were advised that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee was required to review the work of the Braintree District Community Safety Partnership (CSP) on an annual basis as part of its statutory duties.

Councillor Mrs W Schmitt, Chairman of the CSP, was in attendance with Mrs T Parry, Community Services Manager, to advise on this matter.

Members were reminded that the CSP involved representatives from BDC, Essex Police, Essex Fire & Rescue Service, Essex Community Rehabilitation Company, National Probation Service, Essex County Council (Primary & Secondary Education), Community 360 and Greenfields Community Housing, who provided early intervention and prevention work. The CSP now had an assigned Analyst who interpreted the data collected from the work of the partnership and, from this, helped to compile the annual strategic assessment which was a statutory requirement for the CSP to provide, as per legislation in the Crime & Disorder Act Revised 2006.

Funding for Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) across the County came from the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner. Although BDC had been granted LIS funding last year, a decision had been made prior to this to decrease funding for all CSPs by 12% in order to generate a central fund that could be utilised during times of Domestic Homicide Reviews.

Some of the key achievements of the CSP during the period 2017/18 included work around the Hidden Harm Agenda, Gangs Prevention in Secondary Schools, Gangs Crimes Guide for Parents and the “Live Well, Keep Safe” partnership event. Members were also informed that a new action plan for the CSP had been implemented for the period 2018/19.

In response to questions raised by Members, the following information was provided:

- A key issue was children and young people being recruited into drug-based gangs; the issue was less prevalent in the Braintree District but it was recognised that there was potential for this to change in future. Prevention tactics were essential if the issue was to be combated, and an example of this was professionals training in secondary schools whereby staff were familiarised with the issue and encouraged to report any intelligence to BDC and Essex Police.
- BDC had access to professional services that worked with groups of young people to help prevent gangs and an example of such a group was at New Rickstones Academy, Witham.
- Members were informed that Essex Police had a number of specialist teams whose function was to tackle the issue of Essex/County Lines. It was stressed that the success of Essex Police divisions in combating Essex Lines relied largely upon intelligence due to the shifting nature of the criminality. Essex Police were also liaising closely with colleagues within the Metropolitan Police and with Suffolk, Norfolk and other surrounding counties in order to maximise shared resources.
- There was improved liaison between Essex Police and the Community Services Team at BDC despite depleted police numbers and a rise in crime. The provision of the Community Safety Hub and the two weekly meetings of the Community Safety Hub Operational Group (which was comprised of statutory, community and voluntary sector services such as Social Care and Greenfields Community Housing) helped to ensure that information was shared regularly and to unburden the workload of Essex Police.
- The most effective method for reporting suspicious activity to Essex Police was through online channels. An alternative organisation that such activities could be

reported to was “Crime Stoppers” which was an independent charity, or the Community Safety Team at BDC.

- Phone lines such as the 101 Service were often inundated; therefore, it was emphasised to Members that the most effectual method for residents to report a crime was through the Essex Police website as this allowed data regarding crime rates to become more accessible to the Police and easily collated.
- Homelessness in the District was a difficult issue to combat in instances where individuals had declined assistance from BDC services as people had the right to do so. Public perception of BDC with regards to homelessness was often negative and based on assumptions. Members had a vital role to play in changing public opinion by communicating with residents and informing them about the reality of the situation.
- On the subject of liaison between CSPs and central government, Members were advised that this was primarily the role of the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioners, each of who maintained and collected data relating to their County’s individual CSPs.
- Members were informed that the Police, Fire and Crime Commissioner was aiming to provide more Special Constables across Essex, but they were often required to attend more urgent matters across the County as opposed to being designated to one area only. The public perception was that there was a lack of police presence in local towns and it was again a key role of Members to communicate with residents and shift such opinions, as well as encourage them to become more involved with their own communities (i.e. neighbourhood watches).
- Drop-in Sessions tended to take place in areas where there were larger numbers of people, rather than in local parishes.

DECISION: That the Braintree District Community Safety Partnership’s Annual Report 2017-18 be noted and that no recommendations be made to Cabinet.

REASON FOR DECISION: To consider the Braintree District Community Safety Partnership’s Annual Report 2017-18 and to highlight any issues for Cabinet to consider.

17 **THIRD EVIDENCE GATHERING SESSION FOR THE SCRUTINY REVIEW INTO THE ROLE OF THE HIGHWAY AUTHORITY IN THE BRAINTREE DISTRICT**

INFORMATION: This was the third evidence gathering session of the work programme for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee’s Scrutiny Review into the Role of the Highway Authority in the Braintree District.

Councillor R Mitchell, Essex County Council (ECC) Deputy Cabinet Member for Essex Highways, had been invited to share his insight with Members regarding the issues highlighted during the evidence gathering session on 6th June 2018, as well as to answer any new questions Members wished to raise. Councillor Mrs W Schmitt was also in attendance (in her capacity as an Elected Member at ECC) to advise on this matter.

In response to questions raised by Members at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6th June 2018, the following information was provided:

- On the issue of maintenance and the perception of inconsistency, Members were advised of a presentation provided by Officers from Essex Highways (EH) that

would assist them with their understanding of the ways in which maintenance was delivered throughout the County from an EH perspective.

- All maintenance issues were managed by EH from a risk-based approach (e.g. use of an impact and probability matrix) and defects were attended to in a consistent manner.
- With regards to Public Rights of Way (PROW), Members were directed to the PROW information network available on the EH website, which allowed users to complete ordnance sheet survey searches and receive answers to queries such as the difference between footpaths and bridleways.
- The Parish Path Partnership (PPP) allowed local parishes to be involved with inspections of routine maintenance of paths.
- Members were informed that ECC had to prioritise signage repairs as ECC were not funded to a sustainable level that enabled them to replace all signs reported as inadequate.
- EH managed 127,000 street lights across Essex; with government loan support, EH had been funded the conversion of approximately 40,000 street lights to LEDs (37%), 32,000 of which had been completed (which included 17,000 all-night lights and 15,000 high wattage lights) and a further 8,000 were to be completed by the end of 2018.
- A presentation had been given by EH at a recent Special Member Evening which included topics such as asset value and annual expenditure on maintenance. A copy of the presentation would be forwarded to Members further to the meeting.
- A solution to the issue of developments along border boundaries with other counties, and whether Section 106 money could be claimed to help resolve this, could not yet be determined but it was acknowledged that this was a shared frustration (e.g. in wards such as Kelvedon and Feering).

In response to new questions raised by Members, the following responses were provided:

- Effective communication between EH and residents who reported issues or repairs online was of paramount importance and it was agreed that the current website was inadequate with regard to this. An automatic e-mail reply function was currently being implemented in order to ensure that reported issues were acknowledged as having been noted on the system and that the public would be notified of any updates relating to their respective matters.
- There was a lack of funding available for the management of issues raised at the Local Highways Panel (LHP); however, a "Gang" was being established who were to be employed directly by EH and not Ringway Jacobs. The "Gang" would attend to matters raised at LHPs that Highways Rangers could not, which would serve to alleviate some of the pressure incurred by EH.
- An additional £2.5million had been allocated to help EH manage issues such as potholes more efficiently, but it was mentioned that repairs would need to be prioritised. It was likely that Councillors, both Parish and District, would be contacted in future by EH to help ascertain how priorities could be established.

- On the subject of the risk assessment process following a report of a highways issue, there were generic criteria available with regard to the maintenance of potholes. Inspectors were available, but each inspector had their own area of the District assigned to them and were often required to categorise the issues reported as “urgent” or “non-urgent.”
- There was a public policy available from ECC which detailed risks and how potholes were managed. It was agreed that the presentation by EH which explained the policy would be circulated to Members for their information.
- Members were advised that the ECC contract with Ringway Jacobs (RJ) was being closely monitored to ensure value for money was being provided. The contract was for 10 years and after this period it would either be re-let to RJ, or put to tender. It was added that the contract with RJ would be brought forward to the Scrutiny Committee at ECC where it was to be reviewed.
- The costs associated with repairs and new installation works by EH (i.e. zebra-crossings) could be extortionate. The costs incorporated increasing levels of pre-installation work, including large design elements, statistics, officer time and a lack of Service Level Agreements (SLAs), such as with UK Power Network. An example of difficulties liaising with a company was during works with Network Rail, who required EH to obtain permission before carrying out service functions on areas of highway such as bridges over railway lines.
- Members were informed that local roads were in a worse state when compared with PR1 and PR2 roads, although this was being managed to the extent that the most regularly used roads were in the best state possible.
- The process of maintaining potholes and implementing repairs in a reasonable period of time was a priority for improvement at ECC, especially with the extra funding available. The advice to Members and residents with concerns relating to potholes and other highway issues was to contact their local ECC Councillor and request that they visit the site in question.
- Due to adverse weather conditions earlier in the year, there had been a number of pre-thaw episodes which had contributed to an increase in the rate of pothole repairs required. The issues associated with weather conditions and potholes was recognised, however, it reported that due to time and financial limitations, only temporary repairs could sometimes be achieved.
- Members were advised that in areas prone to localised flooding, such as in rural areas, gullies would be dug to try and mitigate the damage to roads, but this could be hindered by old pipes that had become blocked with leaves, plants and other debris. There were approximately 300,000 gullies in Essex that needed to be checked, although time was again a constraint. It was added that Highways Rangers and Gangs could carry out work in rural areas such as unblocking gullies.
- “Highways Surgeries” intended to help EH identify issues in the County were available for Members to utilise through contact with their ECC Councillors.
- On the topic of assessing speed signs to ensure their effectiveness, Members were informed that the public often became complacent after new speed signs and

cameras were installed. In some areas, speed signs were moved to different locations to try and combat this issue. New evidential speed cameras were capable of recording vehicle registrations and speeds.

- It was uncertain as to whether recent assessments of speed signs had taken place, although it was apparent that some signs did not operate correctly all the time.
- Members were appraised that with regards to lampposts, replacing sodium lights with solar panels was not a sufficient solution as in the summer they were not necessary and in the winter they did not operate for the required period of time. It was advised that the majority of failed sodium lights were replaced with LEDs.
- There was not the same amount of resource available at EH for the maintenance of footways as there was for carriageways.
- The protocol for residents when reporting repairs to EH's upcoming Gangs (e.g. through the EH website) would be forwarded to the Members of the Committee once finalised.

The Chairman thanked Councillors R Mitchell and Mrs W Schmitt for their attendance and expressed his gratitude for their contribution to the Scrutiny Review.

18 **TASK AND FINISH GROUP UPDATE**

INFORMATION: Members were updated on the work of the Task and Finish Groups.

Further to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 6th June 2018, Members were advised that in respect of the two Task and Finish Groups for the Civic Year 2018-19, the first meetings of both groups had taken place and the Chairmen had been appointed. The individual Lead Officers were working closely with the Governance Team to compile an ongoing work programme for the remainder of the Civic Year.

DECISION: That the report was noted.

19 **DECISION PLANNER**

INFORMATION: The Chairman informed Members the Decision Planner had not been altered for the period 1st August 2018 to 30th November 2018. The I-Construct Item remained and would be addressed at the meeting of Full Council on 23rd July 2018 following a number of recommendations from Cabinet on 9th July 2018.

DECISION: That the Decision Planner for the period 1st August 2018 to 30th November 2018 be noted.

The meeting commenced at 7.15pm and closed at 8.52pm.

Councillor P Barlow
(Chairman)