

**HIGHWAYS NETWORK MANAGEMENT BEST VALUE REVIEW**

**EXPLANATORY NOTE – LIAISON WITH ELECTED MEMBERS  
ON HIGHWAY MATTERS**

**Introduction**

Following discussions at the seminar for elected members held on 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2002, the purpose of this note is to explain the approach taken by the Review Panel to consultation on highway matters at elected member level.

**Background**

The Review had identified measures which would provide for support and services to elected members on matters relating to their electoral divisions/wards. It has also considered the wider involvement of members on a more collective basis given the interest local communities and their elected representatives have in Highways Network Management services, especially road safety, traffic management and the development of small improvement schemes.

The Review Panel has also acknowledged the value of contributions made by District Councils to standards in terms of funding.

**Present Arrangements (Harborough Highways Partnership)**

The present arrangements for consultation between the County Council and District Councils on highways and associated matters take the form of annual meetings between County Cabinet Lead Members and District Council Members, together with the appropriate officers. In addition, more specific joint member meetings are held as necessary (for example on LTP development). Only in the case of Market Harborough District Council is there any wider form of consultation.

The arrangements for the Harborough Highways Partnership involves a member forum known as the Partnership Management Group. This comprises 12 members 6 each from the District and County Councils respectively. The County Council representation is made up of those members representing the 6 electoral divisions in the Harborough District area. The County Council's Cabinet is not represented. The main features of the Group are:-

- It is an advisory body - it has no executive powers;
- Meetings are held quarterly and minutes are produced;
- Meetings usually last from one to three hours each dealing with 10 to 12 items of business - mainly concerning written reports on highway maintenance, minor improvements, traffic management and safety related matters as well as district matters with highway implications;

- The Group operates on the basis of consensus;
- The Chairmanship rotates between a County and a District Member, meeting by meeting;
- The vast majority of decisions are taken under delegated powers of Chief Officers;
- Where decisions are required at elected member level these are taken by the appropriate bodies within the respective Councils.

The Review Panel is aware that the elected members concerned with the Harborough Highways Partnership, both County and District, value having such a forum at which local issues can be raised, being part of a body which can act as an advocate for local people and having access to officers who can address their concerns and those of their electors.

### **The Panel's Proposals**

The Panel decided to confine its comments to the main points of principle. This was on the basis that the details would be addressed through the implementation plan, assuming that the Panel's recommendation was accepted.

The Panel believes that:-

- (a) District based Local Highways Forum for members of County and District Councils (similar to the present Harborough Highways Partnership) should be established to contribute in the following ways:-
  - contribute collective local knowledge and experience
  - advise on priorities for services and schemes
  - advise on local perception of highway service performance in the area
  - advise on local implications and design considerations of significant or particularly sensitive schemes
  - facilitate joint working and funding of local projects and schemes
- (b) Forums should be advisory bodies as is the Harborough Partnership. The establishment of an arrangement in which one authority in effect agrees to share its statutory functions with one or more other authorities who do not possess those same functions is not considered to be appropriate. Indeed, such an arrangement would not meet the test of accountability outlined in the Government's guidelines on new Council Constitutions.
- (c) The Forums should be supported by officers of both the County and District Council operating through a working group, along the lines of the existing Harborough Highway Partnership arrangements.

**Issues remaining**

If this approach is supported the details of the arrangement are matters for the Cabinet to determine in consultation with each District Council concerned. This will involve addressing the following issues:-

**Links with Cabinet**

For example, would it be appropriate for the relevant Lead Cabinet member to be an ex officio member of each of the bodies, given that the body would be advising on the exercise of “executive functions” of the County Council?

**Representation**

The Forums could comprise the local County Councillors representing the particular area concerned. They could also include District Council representation, as is presently the case in respect of the Harborough Highway Partnership, where representation of six County Councillors is matched by six District Council members.

District Councils could not be obliged to participate but where there is interest in the matter, and perhaps a wish to continue to provide support to enhance provision in their areas, it is believed that Districts will want to do so.

Other stakeholders could be invited to attend, for example representatives of public transport, the Police and special interest groups, as appropriate.

The following table shows the number of County Councillors who represent each District area which will presumably be the starting point for discussions regarding the membership.

<b>DISTRICT</b>	<b>COUNTY COUNCILLORS</b>
Blaby	8
Charnwood	14
Harborough	6
Hinckley and Bosworth	9
Melton	4
North West Leicestershire	8
Oadby and Wigston	5

The question of Chairmanship of the Forums will also need to be addressed.

**Terms of Reference**

In addition to consultation on County Council highway issues, where District Council representation is present on the body, the terms of reference could also include discussion of appropriate district functions such as car parking,

street cleaning, grass cutting and district funded enhancement of local highway services.

### **Frequency of Meetings**

The Harborough Highway Partnership meets on a quarterly basis. Meetings of any new bodies could be flexible having regard to the particular circumstances within the District at the time.

### **Administration of Meetings**

Meetings will need to have appropriate officer support. Not just in relation to immediate servicing arrangements, but also the resources which would be involved in the production of reports and attendance at meetings.

### **Conclusion**

This paper is intended

- (a) to outline the views of the Review Panel on consultation on highways matters at elected member level and
- (b) to set out the detailed issues which will need to be addressed in establishing Local Member Forums assuming that the recommendation of the Review Panel is accepted.

### **Officer to Contact**

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