

NORTH ESSEX PARKING PARTNERSHIP JOINT COMMITTEE FOR ON-STREET PARKING

**19 June 2025 at 1.00pm
Grand Jury Room, Town Hall, High Street, Colchester CO1 1PJ**

Members Present:

Councillor Mick Barry (Tendring District Council)
Councillor Graham Butland (Braintree District Council)
Councillor Martin Goss (Colchester City Council)
Councillor Neil Hargreaves (Uttlesford District Council)
Councillor Paul Honeywood (Essex County Council)
Councillor Nicky Purse (Harlow District Council)

Substitutions:

None

Apologies:

Councillor Ken Williamson (Epping Forest District Council).

Also Present:

Paul Atkinson (Colchester City Council) via Zoom
Trevor Degville (Parking Partnership)
Matt Evans (Colchester City Council)
Jake England (Parking Partnership)
Jo Haynes (Essex County Council)
Amelia Hoke (Epping Forest District Council)
Owen Howell (Colchester City Council)
Dean James (Harlow District Council)
Sarah Lewin (Uttlesford District Council)
Esme McCambridge (Braintree District Council)
Hayley McGrath (Colchester City Council)
Andrew Nepean (Tendring District Council)
Richard Walker (Colchester City Council)
Danielle Wood (Parking Partnership)

203. Appointment of Chairman

Councillor Goss raised concerns as to how a number of parking schemes had been pushed through earlier in 2025, which would likely need to return to the Joint Committee for further decision. Councillor Goss ventured that the Chairman's decision to let these proceed represented a judgement issue, and over 100 comments had been received through the subsequent consultation. There was a concern that this was harmful to the NEPP, and Councillor Goss hoped that this would not happen again, should Councillor Honeywood be re-elected to the chairmanship.

RESOLVED that Councillor Paul Honeywood be elected as Chairman of the Joint Committee for 2025-26.

204. Appointment of Deputy Chairman

RESOLVED that Councillor Neil Hargreaves be elected as Deputy Chairman of the Joint Committee for 2025-26.

205. Have Your Say

Mr Nick Chilvers attended and, with permission of the Chairman, addressed the Joint Committee to say that he had submitted a statement which was read to the Joint Committee at its meeting held on 23 January 2025, raising issues and suggestions regarding options being consulted on for on-street paid parking in parts of Colchester. These included concerns about the governance process. Mr Chilvers was unhappy that no response had been given at the meeting, and that he had not received any written response following the meeting. Mr Chilvers asked if this was because the NEPP did not like to be challenged publicly and why the Chairman, Joint Committee and officers had not responded. The reason for this was requested.

The Chairman stated that he had not been in attendance at the meeting on 23 January 2025 [this was clarified as an error; the Chairman had been in the chair for that meeting but had not been able to attend the subsequent meeting on 20 March 2025]. Jake England, Interim Head of NEPP, committed to provide a written response to Mr Chilvers' original statement but explained that it would be up to Joint Committee members to explain why they had not responded.

The Clerk, with permission from the Chairman, read out four statements from members of the public who were unable to attend.

Mr Bob Bloomfield wrote regarding the proposed Traffic Regulation Order [TRO] for red lines at the President Road/Oaklands Avenue junction, and to query the process whereby this had been brought forward for consultation. Mr Bloomfield stated that there was little parking experienced at that junction, with little need for a TRO of this type, and gave his concerns that he had been listed as a supporter of the scheme by Councillor Sue Lissimore when he had not been asked his view on this, having only been asked his views on the proposed TRO relating to the junction at Dugard Avenue. Mr Bloomfield informed the Joint Committee that the

Chairman had not named the County Councillor who had brought forward the potential TRO, and urged that the proposals be dropped as, in his view, they were based on inaccurate information regarding levels of support.

Mr Stuart Spindler wrote to formally state his objection, and that of A. Spindler to the proposed TRO for President Road/Oaklands Avenue, stating that Oaklands Avenue was a quiet residential road with no signage or traffic calming measures, no central lines or parking restrictions. The road was described as quiet, except during peak times, and Mr Spindler gave his view that no red route or junction restrictions were needed. The road was described as having no known accident black spots, with accident data not supporting the TRO application. Mr Spindler put forward that data on stationary road traffic accidents [RTCs] would not have any bearing on a red route TRO, and noted that the Council's scoring matrix did not support the application. It was suggested that restrictions instead be looked at for King Harold Road (by the community building, or on Ambrose Avenue around the GP surgery there. Mr Spindler described the proposal as having been enacted via the Chairman's authority and made an accusation that this was a party-political action, and that Councillor Lissimore had proposed the TRO without considering all reasonable options. A further accusation was stated that local residents' support was either lacking or had been falsified, and Mr Spindler requested that the Joint Committee acted according to its processes and the spirit of democracy.

Ms Laura Newman wrote regarding the Oaklands Avenue TRO proposals, laying out her objections and concerns regarding how the proposals had been brought forward. Ms Newman gave the timeline that she had pieced together from minutes, conversations and Freedom of Information [FoI] requests. Councillor Lissimore had submitted the two TRO applications without petitions of residents, leading to the NEPP rejecting the proposals and stating that they would not be scored if unaccompanied by petitions from local residents.

Councillor Lissimore, with permission from the Chairman, addressed the Joint Committee to say that she had received concerns from residents for years, and had surveyed, leafleted and door knocked across the area, sharing an email and telephone number for residents to use to contact her about their views. Street surgeries were stated to have been held, and Cllr Lissimore described her meeting with a group of Oaklands Avenue residents. The information collected had been provided to the NEPP, after which Councillor Lissimore noted that no response came from the NEPP for a year, and that she was then told that the lack of petition meant that the TRO proposals would go no further. Councillor Lissimore then raised this with the Chairman, explained the issue with the policy wording and the confusion it caused. Councillor Lissimore acknowledged that restrictions could have knock on effects and stated that she had listened to residents and explained the process, just wanting the area to be as safe as possible.

The Chairman thanked all for their views and explained the reasons for his adding the two TROs in question on to the list of TROs previously put to the Joint Committee when approval was sought to move to formal consultation. Councillor Lissimore had approached him with concerns regarding the TRO Policy, its wording and processes. Councillor Honeywood gave a brief timeline of the matter,

noting that Councillor Lissimore had been informed in October 2024 that the two applications she had proposed could be recorded, but were not likely to be approved by the Joint Committee to go to consultation, as they did not include petitions as evidence of support. Councillor Lissimore had stated that the TRO Policy had asked for evidence of local support, giving petitions as an example but not stating them as a requirement. This had led to confusion about the scoring criteria for TROs and the Chairman stated that this confusion had led to his decision to seek clarification of the Policy, so that the wording matched the intention to require a petition to show local support for any applications. This had now been done. In an effort to find a fair way to address the proposals from Councillor Lissimore, the Chairman explained that he had proposed that the two TRO applications be put to the Joint Committee, to decide whether they should go forward to formal consultation. The Joint Committee had then agreed that they should go to formal consultation. The Chairman gave assurances that there had been no use of loopholes in this matter, and that he had not been politically motivated in his actions and would have done the same for any elected member or member of the public who had raised a similar issue.

Jake England, Interim Head of NEPP, added that the policy had been extant for some time, developed over a number of years. Following discussions between the Chairman and Officers, the proposal had been made to amend the policy wording to be clear and consistent, and that the two TRO applications from Councillor Lissimore be put to the Joint Committee for decision as to whether to go to consultation, sponsored by Councillor Honeywood and Essex County Council.

The responses received from the consultees had now been received and the Interim Head of NEPP would now need to go through the report and decide whether to halt one or both TROs, or to approve them or bring back to the Joint Committee for decision. The report would be reviewed in the coming week and an approach decided. This would be communicated to all, including the Chairman and County Council member, Councillor Lissimore.

206. Minutes

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 20 March 2025 be approved as an accurate record.

207. NEPP Financial Update and 2024-25 outturn

Paul Atkinson, Deputy Section 151 Officer [Colchester City Council], presented the financial position of the NEPP as at the end of 2024-25. Outturn showed a £118k surplus, in excess of the projected £106k expected. The reserve balance had moved from a £39k deficit to a £79k reserve.

An overspend of £127k was detailed, with an overspend of £168k on data-led services, where no budget had been set for the year. The restructure of NEPP and consultation exercise had entailed some costs. The bad debt provision for the year was £117,200 higher than planned, and this was explained. There had been an underspend on Civil Enforcement Officers [CEOs] and their management, but an overspend on back office operations, mostly prior to the restructure. An increase in

the level of charges, approved by the Joint Committee previously, had led to an increase in income. There had been some issues with fee income, where some sites had been out of operation at periods.

The Deputy Section 151 Officer emphasised that there was a robust and achievable budget in place for the organisation, and paid tribute to the work done to achieve this by the Finance Team at Colchester City Council.

Councillor Michael Barry, Tendring District Council, explained that his Council had last year been budgeting to potentially leave the NEPP, but that over the year and with meetings of Section 151 Officers and improved transparency, the situation had improved. Councillor Barry welcomed the improved reporting and reserve position.

Another member of the Joint Committee ventured that the overspend and reserve position indicated that there was some fragility still. The vacancy factor for empty positions for CEOs and their management was detailed in the report, and officers were asked if there were plans to stabilise the frontline staffing and when this stability would be delivered.

The Interim Head of NEPP explained that the vacancy factor was an average for the full 2024-25 year, with peaks and troughs. Staffing levels had peaked near year end, and that level was being maintained. The Colchester City Council pay award had been made near the end of 2024-25 and then backdated. This had attracted more applicants to fill vacancies, and a campaign was ongoing to boost their work and numbers. The recruitment drive had brought CEO numbers almost back to pre-Covid levels. Staffing levels were now stable.

Thanks were given to officers for their work in taking difficult decisions. Praise was given to the CEOs for the work that they did.

RESOLVED that the JOINT COMMITTEE notes the outturn for 2024/25 and the impact of the Parking Reserve balance.

208. Annual Governance Review and Internal Audit

Hayley McGrath, Corporate Governance Manager [Colchester City Council], explained her role and the audit process. An annual governance review was not a statutory requirement but was conducted as it was best practice to do so. Items set out in the report were ones already raised at this meeting, such as TROs and finance matters.

With the NEPP reserve not yet having recovered to the required £400k level, this meant that some members of the Joint Committee had raised concerns that work on TROs had continued, even though the NEPP Agreement stated that such work should only go ahead if at least £400k was held in NEPP reserves. The Joint Committee had chosen to permit such work to continue in order to provide the best possible service in the NEPP area. There was no governance issue in this approach being taken, but a Joint Committee member welcomed the issue being

shown in the governance review.

The audit undertaken in December 2022 had resulted in a 'Reasonable' grade being given, and the results of the 2025 audit shown. Recommendations included those relating to the cash collection processes. There was an ongoing contract for this, so this should go out to tender but few organisations had the ability to do this work, so a tender process was unlikely to garner much interest. One option was to go to cashless charging.

Officers were asked what percentage of PCNs [Penalty Charge Notices] went unpaid and were passed to bailiffs, and whether the level of recovery (£13k of £124k passed to bailiffs) was an expected level.

The Interim Head of NEPP responded that he did not have the percentage to hand but could calculate this for the Joint Committee. Benchmarking was possible, and the NEPP could compare its collection rate to South Essex Parking Partnership [SEPP] and to Suffolk. As the PCN collection process went through its stages, there were diminishing returns to be had as the NEPP went through the recovery process. There were alternative options, and a business case for these was being prepared for consideration, looking at potential additional actions both before and after the bailiff stage.

The Corporate Governance Manager was asked how the NEPP ensured and monitored independence in its audit process, and what formal feedback processes there were for partners to feed into the formal audit process. This included a question as to whether Joint Committee members had the opportunity to challenge anything that concerned them.

The Corporate Governance Manager highlighted that Colchester City Council's internal audits were done by the independent company Tier. There was the opportunity for all partners' audit managers to raise any concerns. This opportunity had been taken at certain points in the past, and regular meetings were held with them. The Corporate Governance Manager emphasised that she was available to contact with any concerns that Joint Committee members or partner officers might have. Her meetings with Client Officers included bringing the governance review and audit report to the formal Client Officer Meeting prior to this Committee meeting, and it was underlined that the Joint Committee was not required to accept the report's findings if it disagreed with them. The Annual Governance Statement of Colchester City Council covered the NEPP, and any concerns could be included in that Statement. Other partners in the NEPP could do likewise if they felt this to be appropriate.

RESOLVED that the JOINT COMMITTEE has: -

- a) Noted the Annual Governance Review of the North Essex Parking Partnership (NEPP), and;
- b) Considered the progress made on implementing Internal Audit recommendations for the North Essex Parking Partnership

209. Annual Review of Risk Management

Hayley McGrath, Corporate Governance Manager [Colchester City Council], explained the identification of risks looking forward. The Joint Committee had ownership of its risk register, so could make changes to the draft proposed. Recommendations for updates had been made, having been considered already at the latest Client Officer Meeting. Operational risks were not included, as these were handled within service areas. The register showed strategic risks regarding issues that could harm the overall ability of the NEPP to carry out its services. No significant changes were being recommended, and the register had been reviewed by Tier, as part of their internal audit work.

Risk 1.3 was recommended for a lowering of its impact rating as a result of previous conversations and discussions on the NEPP Agreement. Risk 1.21 was recommended for an increase in its probability rating, given that advancements in technology were continuing apace. Risk 1.23 was raised and Joint Committee asked to consider replacing it with new risk 1.29, which gave more specific details as to possible economic and wider environment impacts which might hamper service delivery, investment and financial position. Risk 1.27 was recommended for a reduction in its probability rating, as a result of the successful recruitment campaign. New risk 1.28 related to Local Government Reorganisation [LGR], and the danger that a lack of clarity on this could impact on the NEPP's ability to deliver above the baseline of service provision.

A Joint Committee member welcomed the work being done to anticipate LGR, and to highlight the constant change. The Corporate Governance Manager was asked whether control measures and lessons could be learned from local authorities which had already undergone LGR, and whether there were any which carried out parking services in the same way that these were done in Essex. The Corporate Governance Manager explained that she could provide a specific briefing on the risks of LGR, if the Joint Committee wanted one. This could be potentially scheduled at the half year point in 2025-26. The Interim Head of NEPP gave his understanding that the set up used by NEPP and SEPP was unique. Richard Walker, Colchester Client Officer (and current President of the British Parking Association), described the Essex approach as pioneering, devolving County Council functions to districts. There were enforcement partnerships operating in Nottinghamshire/Derbyshire and in Leicestershire, but these were not the same as NEPP and did not provide a service covering all parking matters.

In answer to questions, the Corporate Governance Manager stated that there were no current contingency plans regarding mitigation of the risk relating to LGR. Much work was being carried out by all NEPP partners to examine potential risks and what might happen. The Corporate Governance Manager would be working with the Interim Head of NEPP and Client Officers going forward, and reporting back to the Joint Committee.

A Joint Committee member asked if there was any budget provision for risk 1.21. The Interim Head of NEPP described the increase in budget for certain business-critical areas, including the purchase of new equipment. CEOs had been using handheld devices which were past their given operational lifespans which could no

longer be repaired, so new equipment had been needed. AI was being used more widely and effectively in the parking sector. Significant investments could be made in machine learning, and the longer this was delayed, the further behind the organisation would become. Technological advances needed to be incorporated into the NEPP so that it would be ready for the outcomes of LGR, but the Joint Committee was told that there would be prioritisation, as the NEPP could not afford all potential options for improved use of technology.

The Joint Committee discussed whether a lowering of the probability rating of risk 1.25 was premature. The Corporate Governance Manager explained that the current elevated rating had been agreed last year, due to work carried out, and that this was a return to the previous rating, with a recommendation to retain the risk on the register for consideration going forward. The elevated risk rating could be retained, if the Joint Committee thought it to be too early to reduce it.

A Joint Committee member asked whether a risk relating to cyber-attacks should be added at the next review. Attacks which might bring down online systems were of concern, alongside the desirability of having a mitigation plan for alternative ways to operate, should this be needed. The Corporate Governance Manager confirmed that this was a key strategic risk for Colchester City Council, alongside LGR. This fell within the City Council's business continuity plans, with all service areas having their own continuity plans, including the NEPP. These looked at likely things which might happen, their probability of happening and the impact if they did occur. This could be considered for inclusion in the Joint Committee's Risk Register, if the Joint Committee wished to add it in the future.

RESOLVED that the JOINT COMMITTEE: -

- a) Endorses the Risk Management Strategy for 2025/26, and;
- b) Agrees the Strategic Risk Register.

210. Traffic Regulation Order Application Decision Report – Tendring District

Danielle Wood, Group Development Manager, introduced the decisions to be made, which had been deferred from the Joint Committee meeting in January 2025. It was confirmed that the recommendations from Tendring District Council, as shown in the amended Appendix A, were for three of the schemes to be approved to go to formal consultation, and for one to be rejected. Andy Nepean, Tendring Client Officer, confirmed that consultation had been carried out with residents, local and neighbouring councillors, and that petitions had been received and the proposals formally published.

RESOLVED that the JOINT COMMITTEE: -

- a) APPROVES proposed Traffic Regulation Orders T19536977, T216727411 and T18562659;
- b) REJECTS proposed Traffic Regulation Order T18572871

- c) Notes that any applications that are “Approved” may not become sealed Traffic Regulation Orders. Any proposal will need to be formally advertised as set out in the relevant legislation and any objections made during the formal consultation process considered before a Traffic Regulation Order is made.

211. NEPP Joint Committee Agreement 2022 (as amended Draft v4)

Jake England, Interim Head of NEPP, gave a summary of the scrutiny that had been made of the NEPP Agreement over several years, originating in large part from concerns stemming from the organisation’s financial provisions and how the related content within the Agreement oversaw these and directed how the organisation should act in various situations. In January 2025 the Joint Committee had not approved proposals for wording changes to be worked out by Client Officers, with some partners then continuing to lead on working on these in the background. Feedback and concerns raised by other partners at the Joint Committee’s meeting on 23 January 2025 had then been addressed by the partners working on the proposals.

If the Joint Committee were to approve today’s recommended decisions, the draft amended NEPP Agreement would be sent to Essex County Council’s Legal Team. Should the Legal Team then give their agreement in principle, then the executives of each NEPP partner would then need to approve the changes in order for them to be enacted. The Interim Head of NEPP underlined that all partners would need to agree at that stage, or the proposals would fall and could not be implemented.

The Joint Committee discussed the proposals and their ramifications and implications. A member described the process as being complex and certain to take a long time, with LGR in the near future. It was suggested that this work would not be a priority for the County Council’s Legal Team, given the amount of work that LGR would mean for them. The process would be costly, could be vetoed by any one NEPP partner, and LGR could be instigated before anything is finalised. A member raised the possibility that the County Council might have to incur costs to instruct outside counsel and experts. Another Joint Committee member gave assurance that he had spoken with Paul Turner, Head of the County Council’s Legal Team, who had told him that his team would deal with the agreement if instructed to do so.

A Joint Committee member laid out their aims in amending the Agreement, seeking to make it LGR-compliant. Currently it contained no clauses to govern what would happen to NEPP resources if it were to be broken up in LGR. There was also currently no content to stipulate specifically what was within the remit of the NEPP, which it was argued had caused difficulties when member of the Joint Committee and Client Officers had not known what duties were retained by Essex County Council [ECC]. Concerns had also been raised that the NEPP was working contrary to the Agreement, such as in carrying out TRO work whilst reserve levels were under £400k. It was argued by the Joint Committee member that the changes would rectify this situation, tidy up the appendices issues and addresses wording confusion which had led to issues.

Some Joint Committees member expressed unease that the changes did not appear to be simple, and that the possibly disproportionate cost of officer time in dealing with this matter needed to be weighed up. The Joint Committee discussed the suggestion that it should consider whether, instead of looking at Agreement changes, the NEPP was able to continue to operate up to LGR as it currently was. Views were expressed that the new unitary councils were unlikely to cover the same areas as the NEPP and SEPP.

The review of legal agreements was argued to not be the role of councillors, but should be left to trained and qualified officers, who should have been asked to look at this at the start of the process. The Joint Committee discussed members' views as to when councillor involvement was appropriate, and when it might be necessary. There was agreement around the need for qualified officers to examine the proposals which, it was argued by a Joint Committee member, was why the request was being made to send the draft amendments to ECC Legal for consideration.

A suggestion was made that perhaps the draft amended Agreement could be sent to ECC Legal, and their work on it be timeboxed in order to constrain how much officer time was expended. Some Joint Committee members expressed hopes that the changes could be adopted quickly.

Jo Heynes, ECC Client Officer, explained that the proposed changes would need to go through the full ECC governance process, including extra approvals and at a minimum requiring approval by the relevant Cabinet Member and Director. The Client Officer gave a commitment to check as to whether full Cabinet approval would be needed.

A motion was moved by Councillor Butland [seconded by Councillor Purse] to propose that the Joint Committee take no further action on the subject of this item. On being put to the vote, the motion was LOST [TWO voted FOR, THREE voted AGAINST and ONE ABSTENTION].

RESOLVED [THREE voted FOR, TWO voted AGAINST, ONE ABSTENTION] that the JOINT COMMITTEE: -

- a) Notes The North Essex Parking Partnership Joint Committee Agreement 2022 (as amended Draft v4).
- b) Agrees to send The North Essex Parking Partnership Joint Committee Agreement 2022 (as amended Draft v4) to ECC's Legal Department for consideration.

212. Forward Plan 2024-2025

Owen Howell, Clerk to the Joint Committee, confirmed that a six-month update on the LGR-related risks and risk management for the NEPP would be scheduled in, as requested by the Joint Committee.

RESOLVED that the JOINT COMMITTEE approves the North Essex Parking Partnership Forward Plan for 2025-26, subject to the addition of a half-year update on LGR risk management.