

		AGENDA ITEM 8
		PSEG/04/15
Committee:	Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	26 March 2015	
WORK PROGRAMME (Minute 8/December 2014)		
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The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress of planned committee activity set out in its work programme, and to advise on work being undertaken to develop the programme going forward.

- **Current Task and Finish Group Activity**

There are separate reports on this agenda relating to the Third Party Responsibilities and Flood Management; and Jobs, Welfare and Skills Task and Finish Groups. Those Groups will submit scrutiny reports to the Committee in the summer.

With reference to other proposed task and finish group projects within the current work programme:

- (a) A review on a recommendation on a Communications Protocol arising from the original COMAH Scrutiny Report has not yet started, and it is suggested that it be considered as part of the topic selection process for the work programme moving forward.
- (b) It was intended originally that a new review on the Recycling Centres for Household Waste (RCHW) Service should begin towards the end of 2014. However, following the cancellation of the Committee's visit to the Courtauld Road Waste facility in September, and then attention being diverted by other matters including two consultations that had not been planned in the Committee's work programme, a delay in this particular review became inevitable. Furthermore there have been several matters relating to the RCHW Service itself where the delay in the start of the scrutiny has been beneficial.

In November 2013 ECC let a new contract for the Service known as the Integrated Waste Handling Contract (IWHC). It not only brings together the previous separate north and south contracts but also passed over full responsibility to the contractor for Environmental Permits and facilities management, as well as incorporating new operations within the contract including the management and operation of the five new Essex Waste

Transfer Stations and the haulage of waste around the County. Due to the delays in the delivery of some key ECC infrastructure, Veolia (the IWHC contractor) has been through a longer than anticipated period of transition from the old arrangements to the new. Whilst this has been taking place it did not seem appropriate to undertake a scrutiny review of the service until a more steady state has been reached.

As waste has started to go into the MBT facility and the majority of the Waste Transfer Stations are now in operation or nearing completion, the timing is appropriate to look at the long term future and options for the RCHW service. Therefore subject to the Committee's review of the work programme moving forward, it is suggested that this review be launched in the summer.

- (c) A review of the Local Highways Panels is scheduled to begin this spring. Therefore more detailed planning of the review will take place in due course, and will be taken into account as part of the future work programme.

- **Parking Partnerships**

Members have expressed some concerns about the two Essex Parking Partnerships, and the Chairman has met with Councillor Eddie Johnson, Cabinet Member, to find out the latest situation on their working. The following briefing note has been provided by Councillor Johnson by way of an update:

Background

In April 2011, following a review and options appraisal by Essex County Council (ECC), two Parking Partnerships - representing North and South Essex - were established through a formal Joint Committee agreement (JCA) for a period of 7 years (taking the partnerships to 31 March 2017), with a possible extension for a further 4 years (to 31 March 2021).

The two Parking Partnerships brought together all parking matters into a single point of contact for six districts in each partnership area of North and South Essex.

The JCA states that a decision to extend or terminate at that point needs to be taken by either the Joint Committee or "the Council" (ECC) not less than 15 months before the end of the operational period. Therefore, ECC and the two Parking Partnerships need to have clarity on the way forward by December 2015.

Progress Overview

An initial review of operational good practice and financial management was commissioned by the Cabinet Member for Highways Maintenance and Small Schemes to assess whether their original objectives have been met. The findings of these reviews are summarised below:

Review of the operational good practice:

- *Partnership members felt decision making was much more effective, localised and less and controlled from ECC and indicate a commitment to maintaining the current arrangements.*
- *Both partnerships display characteristics of good partnership working, and have maintained and improved local service delivery.*
- *Together, at officer level, the two partnerships work well together and have an open approach sharing information and piloting new initiatives.*

- *Review of the financial status of the partnerships*
- *The financial objective for the partners has been achieved i.e. both partnerships have generated a surplus by year 3 of operation Expenditure down by 17% across both partnerships.*
- *Deficit of £740k as at the time of deciding to adopt a partnership mode of delivery has been converted into a surplus of £1.164m when comparing 2009/10 to 2013/14.*
- *Both Partnerships now delivering an annual surplus.*

Next Steps

- *Commission a full review as required under the terms of the JCA, with recommendations being developed by October 2015.*
- *Offer Scrutiny the chance to comment on recommendations before they are published.*

• Utility Contracts and Major Road Schemes

In February Councillor Bass, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation, contacted the Chairman about problems encountered with utility works being provided as a part of a major road scheme in Colchester that caused delays in the opening of a new road. On the basis of what has occurred Councillor Bass suggested that a scrutiny review of the procurement and contract construction process would be helpful.

Having learned more about the contract in question as well as some of the more general difficulties experienced with the utility companies in the delivery of major schemes, it is proposed a scrutiny review of the broader issue be considered for inclusion in the Committee's work programme moving forward. The case at Colchester could be taken into consideration as a part of that review.

• Roll Forward of the Committee's Work Programme

As more experience has been won scrutiny committees have taken a more measured approach to the choice of issues reviewed and the planning of their activity over the longer term. While it is important for the Committee to consider issues of interest to scrutiny members, it has become increasingly important to take a more systematic approach to the selection of topics in order to identify those issues where scrutiny involvement may have a positive impact. It is then necessary to prioritise what may or may not be included in a committee's work programme given the resources available and, most importantly, what may be achieved in reality. Another aim of planning committee activity is to provide scrutiny councillors

with a greater sense of purpose and an opportunity to influence what happens in Essex, and they will be engaged in that process so that consensus may be reached for managing the Committee's priorities.

On behalf of this Committee the Chairman and Scrutiny Officer have been seeking advice from relevant officers on those issues over the next two years where scrutiny engagement would add value to outcomes. The time period is critical not least because of the need to complete reviews before the County Council elections in 2017. It has been pointed out that where consultation and decisions may be envisaged in 2016/17, then it may be more beneficial to consider scrutiny engagement sooner rather than later to contribute to the shape of the Cabinet's final actions. There have been examples where the Committee has been approached with a request for its input very late in the process, but in practice Members have had little scope to actually affect change. This has reinforced some of the underlying concerns that scrutiny councillors have expressed about their relationship with the Executive, and difficulties of trying to forge a positive role for overview and scrutiny within the Council's structure.

The Chairman will also be meeting with those Cabinet Members whose portfolios have matters that co-incide with the Committee's own remit to identify potential issues for consideration.

Once issues have been collated then the Chairman will liaise with Committee Members on development of the work programme moving forward.

In the meantime if Members wish to put forward ideas for inclusion in the work programme, then there is a pro forma for them to do so that is referred to in the Overview and Scrutiny Handbook chapter on 'Selection of Topics' and a copy may be obtained from the Scrutiny Officer.

Members are reminded that scrutiny activity may take various forms and it does not necessarily follow that an issue has to be considered in depth or be submitted to a formal meeting. The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Handbook has been published for reference purposes. It is designed to be an encyclopaedia to be dipped into for information on different aspects of overview and scrutiny activity, and in this instance you may find it useful to refer to the chapters on the 'Selection of Topics' and 'Committee Activity and Meetings'. The link is:

<http://cmis.essexcc.gov.uk/essexcmis5/PublicDocuments.aspx>

Action required by the Committee at this meeting:

To note the content of this report.
