

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD ON 16 DECEMBER 2010

Membership

Councillors:

* S Barker (Chairman)	R Howard
* B Aspinell	* D Kendall
* A Brown	* M Mackrory
* R Callender	* G McEwen
* P Channer	* L Mead
J Dornan	* G Mitchinson
* A Hedley (substituting for J Schofield)	* J Roberts

* Present

62. Apologies and Substitution Notices

The Committee Officer reported that apologies had been received from Councillors John Schofield and Ray Howard, and a notice of substitution as set out in the above membership.

63. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

64. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations made.

65. Scrutiny Review on the Relationship with Statutory Undertakers in the way works are undertaken on the highway (Minutes 52/October and 60/November 2010)

The Committee considered report EDE/28/10 setting out some background on the above review and confirming that the purpose of the meeting was to focus upon taking evidence from Road User Groups.

The Chairman welcomed Steve Nelson (Chairman of the Essex Confederation of Passenger Transport (CPT)), Alan Pilbeam (First Bus Group East England) and Adam Pipe (Crash Reduction Unit, Essex Police) to the meeting, and invited each of the witnesses to give a brief overview of their work and, specifically, how road works and other issues impact on their day to day business and the relationship they have with the County Council.

Steve Nelson, CPT Essex and Managing Director of NIBS Buses, Wickford, provided the Committee with a written submission and informed Members that:

- The imperative for public transport providers is to serve the public as they are the customers.
- Although passenger expectations may sometimes be unrealistic, buses are expected to run on time. Road congestion can lead to a decline in customers, who may revert to other modes of transport rather than alternative public transport providers.
- The Traffic Commissioner (bus regulator) requires all bus companies to run services in a window of one minute early to five minutes late when possible and within the company's control.
- If bus companies know about planned road works, then customers are informed of disruption to the road network and any changes that may have to be made to a bus service. However, in many cases the bus company is not aware of road works or closures.
- Mr Nelson drew attention to a problem that occurs where planned road works are identified and communicated as taking place within a published time period, but do not actually start on the date quoted and in fact start at a later date. A bus company may have taken action to re-route a service and communicate that information to customers, only to find that the works do not take place and further disruption is caused.
- Mr Nelson had not been aware of the ELGIN system until researching for his submission to the Committee as part of this review.
- Details of road closures are received from a variety of sources: local bus team, local press and local Council but in many cases the information is unclear.
- Where bus companies are aware of a road closure they will consider what is the best available alternative route for a bus service based upon the type of vehicle used and local conditions.

Alan Pilbeam (First East England Buses) informed Members that:

- The ELGIN system is not user friendly to road user groups. It is difficult to interrogate because of the way that the information it is provided and the huge volume of works that are on the system at any one time.
- The introduction of a clear protocol concerning communications with road user groups would be a practical and beneficial way forward to manage expectations and identify responsibilities of the utility companies and contractors in terms of road works. He acknowledged that a protocol would have to be based on what could work in practice.
- The Punctuality Improvement Partnership is seeking to identify what is achievable to improve services.
- Poor communication does lead to increases in customer complaints.
- While recognising that the review was focussed upon the issues associated with highway works undertaken by the utility companies, he emphasised that road users are affected by all road works. Where there was good communication with road user groups, then the impact of road

works may be minimised. He referred to the goof relationship that existed with the Council's South Area Office. However, where information was not exchanged then there could be a lot of problems and the first knowledge of works could be when a bus driver first encounters them on a service route.

- Contractors are required to ensure temporary bus stops are adequately signed and safe.
- A fully functioning real time passenger information system is a useful tool where road works are causing congestion, because timely information may be relayed to potential bus passengers.

Adam Pipe (Essex Police) informed Members that:

- The relationship with the Highways Authority is good, and the Police Traffic Management officers are involved in the planning stages for larger road works.
- The Police does have daily contact with the Highways Authority's Area Offices, and takes part in the regular meetings that take place with Utility Companies on road works.
- The main concerns it has are based on health and safety eg protection of road workers, and road safety hazards connected to inadequate signing, lighting and guarding of works. Mr Pipe highlighted several examples where individuals had been hurt because of inadequate safety measures had been put in place by highway contractors. All Traffic Officers have been issued with a copy of the roads and street works guide.

Liz Saville, ITS and Congestion Manager, was also in attendance at the meeting and answered a number of questions raised by the Committee:

- There are formal traffic regulations concerning the signing, lighting and guarding of road works. However, while those regulations may stipulate the distances required for warning signs, it does rely on the contractor carrying this out. Highways Inspectors do undertake checks of works but it is not possible to carryout these prior to all works commencing. Roads works can be closed down if they do not meet the traffic management standards.
- Un-notified and unsafe road works will be closed down by Inspectors which does lead to delays in the completion of the works.
- All information issued through the Essex Traffic Control Centre goes to the Police, media, bus companies and other interested parties.

In response to a series of general questions raised, Members learned that:

- Farmers carrying hedge cutting are responsible for their actions whilst on the public highway.
- Unless parking restrictions are in place there is little that can be done to control traffic flows around building sites, where contractors' vehicles may be parked.

- Waste collection vehicles can cause considerable road disruption particularly when they operate on major roads at peak times. It was agreed this should be taken up with District/Borough Councils.
- Unmanaged hedges and trees can be a safety issue particularly for bus companies.

In conclusion the Chairman thanked the witnesses for their contribution to the meeting and Members acknowledged that they had provided some ideas for improving the way that information on road works is communicated such as the introduction of a Protocol.

During the course of discussion on this review of statutory undertakers, the Committee referred to proposals for one new contract to replace existing arrangements for the delivery of the Highways Service in Essex as a part of the Transformation of Highways Service Programme. Consequently Members identified the following types of question that they would like to ask as part of a separate scrutiny review:

1. What are the current arrangements with existing contractors, and why is it proposed to move a one contractor situation?
2. How will the contract be drawn up and by whom? Members have indicated that they would wish to see a draft outline of the proposed contract in advance in order to develop their lines of questioning.
3. What are the likely costs associated with the new contract?
4. How would that contractor be held to account?
5. How will any sub contractors be held to account?
6. What has been taken into account as a part of any risk management assessment that has been carried out? How will risk be managed?
7. How will issues like the management of works undertaken by the Statutory Utilities be undertaken under the proposed new arrangements?
8. The Committee would like to receive in advance a copy of the advert that has been published inviting potential tenders for the new contract.

In conclusion the Committee **agreed** that the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation and Senior Highways Officers be invited to its meeting in January to answer Members' questions on this issue.

66. Forward Look

The Committee noted report EDE/27/10 setting out its latest work programme.

Aside from the inclusion of the review on the Transformation of the Highways Service referred to in Minute 65 above, the Chairman agreed to approach the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation seeking the timetable for the decision on bus telematics and an explanation of the business case for Automatic Vehicle Location.

The Chairman confirmed that the Councillor Martin, the Leader, will be attending the Committee's meeting on 24 February 2011 to answer questions on two of the County Council's initiatives: Banking on Essex and Post Offices. Councillor Mitchinson referred to the scoping document and indicated that he would be seeking clarification on the creation of a Bank of Essex.

It was agreed that membership of the new Task and Finish Group on Carbon Reduction would comprise Councillors McEwen (Lead Member), Aspinell, Kendall, Mead, and Roberts.

Cllr McEwen reported on progress made by the Local Transport Plan Task and Finish Group as he had chaired its last meeting. He confirmed that a presentation would be given at the next round of Area Forum meetings in January 2011, encouraged Members to attend those meetings.

It was requested that, in future, task and finish groups could be arranged to co-incide with the same dates as Committee meetings wherever possible.

67. Dates of Future Meetings

The Committee noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled for Thursday, 20 January 2011.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 11.33am

Chairman