

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD ON 21 OCTOBER 2010

Membership

Councillors:

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

* Present

49. Apologies and Substitution Notices

The Committee Officer reported that apologies had been received from Councillors Howard and Schofield.

50. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 23 September 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

51. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Aspinell declared a personal and non prejudicial interest in Minute 52 as a close relative works for a statutory undertaker.

52. Scrutiny Review on the relationship with Statutory Undertakers in the way works are undertaken on the highway (Minute 20/April 2010)

The Committee considered report EDE/23/10 concerning the proposed approach to this scrutiny review, and enclosing a background briefing paper on the way that works are undertaken in the highway. The Chairman welcomed Liz Saville, the Council's ITS and Congestion Manager, to the meeting.

Ms Saville informed the Committee that:

- Although road works may be a more visible reason for road congestion, in fact they only contribute to around 10% of such congestion, far less than road capacity and accidents. Nevertheless, it is vital that all road works are managed effectively.
- The New Roads and Streets Works Act requires the County Council to work closely with the utility companies to manage the road network.

- The Highways Service aim is to minimise disruption to the general public caused by road works undertaken by both the statutory undertakers and its own contractors.
- Positive working relationships with the utility companies are being established. However, if necessary, the Council does have statutory powers to require those companies to comply with the relevant regulations.

In response to specific questions raised concerning works undertaken by the utility companies in the highway, Members were informed that:

- Three months notice has to be given by a utility company for any work it wishes to carry out, except where emergency works may be necessary.
- Essex uses the Atlas database for recording, co-ordinating and monitoring road works. While the utility companies may enter their own notices into the database, they cannot view all the works being proposed. Nevertheless the Council makes every effort to co-ordinate all proposed road works. It was indicated that the various companies have different requirements and ways of working that may make it difficult for them to work at the same site at any one time.
- Regulations require the re-instatement of any road repairs of a poor standard.
- Forward work plans are requested from the utility companies.
- Diversionary routes have to be made on roads suitable for all traffic, including heavy goods vehicles. However, it was anticipated that local people would be familiar with other suitable alternative routes.
- Utility companies can be requested to temporarily reinstate open trenches if there is no valid reason for them remaining open.

The Committee learned that as a part of the Highways Service Transformation Programme, a new staffing structure would be put into place and a Street Works Manager would be appointed to work specifically with the utility companies.

Members were also informed that:

- There are two types of highways inspector: New Roads and Street Works Inspectors, and Safety Inspectors. They have various powers including the power to have defects put right within two hours, to stop works, and require temporary reinstatement of a trench to enable a road to be re-opened.
- Inspection costs are recharged to the utility companies. Penalty charges are set down in legislation. While the Council may seek to cover the costs of the service, it may not make a profit.
- It is the responsibility of the utility companies to ensure adequate barriers, lights and signage are in place.
- The Atlas system can provide a variety of activity reports and is managed by the Council's contractor.

- There are between 75,000 and 85,000 highway openings made across Essex every year.

Finally, the Committee was informed that a pilot scheme has highlighted a number of areas where improvements are under review including:

- The use of financial processes with legislation being used to its maximum potential e.g. penalty charges.
- The improved use of technology for instance ATLAS is a 'live' system. However, there may be delays in updating information on the system as inspectors are not currently able to input information into it using hand held devices from a road works site.
- Relevant performance indicators need to be embedded to monitor the service over time, and ensure compliance with the regulations.

Ms Saville also drew attention to the potential for new 'Permit Schemes' that allow the relevant local authorities to charge utility companies for a permit to work, but not to derive a profit. Essex County Council is part of an Eastern Region Group that has been investigating the possibility of a common regional permit scheme.

The Chairman thanked Ms Saville for her contribution to the scrutiny review, and invited her to the following meeting when representatives from the utility companies would be invited to present their evidence to the Committee.

53. Scrutiny Review: Performance Indicator on Jobs Created and Saved as a Result of Foreign Direct Investment (LI 015)

The Committee considered report EDE/24/10 setting out some background on the County Council's involvement in Inward Investment and commentary on the specific performance indicator in question. The Chairman welcomed David Adlington, Head of Inward Investment, to the meeting.

Mr Adlington gave the Committee a powerpoint presentation on the work of INVEST Essex, and highlighted the three ways in which the local economy can be supported to grow:

- Attracting new investment
- Helping existing businesses grow
- Helping new businesses start

He confirmed that INVEST Essex is the County Council's inward investment service that promotes Essex as an outstanding business destination and provides confidential advice and practical support to companies wanting to establish a presence or expand in the UK.

Members noted details on:

- Why Essex is a great place to do business

- Marketing and promotion
- Successful case studies
- The number of enquiries, propositions and support given in 2009/10
- Jobs created and saved

Finally Mr Adlington outlined the current work priorities of INVEST Essex which are:

- Continue to raise the profile of Essex with potential investors
- Develop and strengthen the project pipeline
- Attract more foreign investment
- Strengthen partnerships
- Target high value businesses and sectors
- Development and retention of existing investors

In response to questions, Members were informed that:

- INVEST Essex is working pro-actively to attract businesses to Essex by attending European conferences.
- Strong relationships exist with District Councils
- 20% of enquiries become successful inward investment projects
- The marketing budget for 2010/11 is around £100,000 and there are seven employees on the team
- Banking on Essex has focussed on smaller Essex based companies.

With particular reference to the performance indicator 'Jobs Created and Saved as a Result of Foreign Direct Investment (LI 015)', Mr Adlington confirmed that the creation of such jobs was not something that could be controlled rather it was something that INVEST Essex used its best efforts to encourage businesses to locate in the county, and projects tended to be longer term from an initial enquiry to any practical fruition as well as varying in size and impact.

The Chairman thanked Mr Adlington for his presentation and for the on-going work of INVEST Essex.

While the Committee did not propose any further action to be taken on this scorecard referral, Members emphasised that in view of their local knowledge they could be of assistance to INVEST Essex in the work it undertakes eg identifying vacant property that may be suitable for business projects.

54. Scrutiny Review on the Local Transport Plan

The Committee considered report EDE/25/10 concerning proposals for a joint Task and Finish Group with the Safer and Stronger Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee to undertake a scrutiny review on the new Local Transport Plan. A scoping document was attached to the report.

The Committee noted the draft scoping document, and Councillors S Barker, M Mackrory, G McEwen, and L Mead volunteered to serve on the Task and Finish Group.

55. Forward Look

The Committee considered report EDE/26/10 setting out its latest work programme.

At the meeting the Committee **agreed** that the date for its meeting in February be changed to Thursday, 24 February 2011 to enable Councillor Martin, the leader of the Council, to attend the meeting in order to advise Members on two of its scrutiny reviews: Banking on Essex, and Post Offices.

The Chairman also advised Members that a joint briefing was being organised with the Safer and Stronger Communities Policy and Scrutiny Committee on the afternoon of Tuesday, 14 December 2010 to learn more about the Highways Service Transformation Programme.

56. Date of Future Meeting

The Committee noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled for Thursday, 18 November 2010.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 12.10pm

Chairman