

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SAFER AND STRONGER COMMUNITIES  
POLICY & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD ON  
16 JULY 2010**

**Membership:**

Councillors:	
* S Walsh (Chairman)	J Knapman
K Bentley	* M Miller (substitute for M Fisher)
M Garnett	* C Pond (Vice Chairman)
E Hart	* M Skeels
* R Howard	M Webster
* E Johnson	* J Whitehouse (substitute for J Deakin)

(\* present)

Also present: Councillors N Hume, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation, and T Higgins.

Christine Sharland, Governance Officer, and Janet Mills, Committee Officer were in attendance throughout the meeting.

The meeting commenced at 10.00 am

**35. Apologies and Substitutions**

The Committee Officer reported apologies from Councillors K Bentley, J Deakin, M Fisher, M Garnett and E Hart, and two notices of substitution as set out in the above membership.

**36. Declarations of Interest**

The following declarations of interest were recorded:

	Personal Interest:
Councillor C. Pond	Member Loughton Town Council/Loughton Residents Association
Councillor R. Howard	Member of Canvey Island Town Council
Councillor J. Whitehouse	Member of Epping Forrest District Council

**37. Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 June 2010 were agreed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to minor textual changes.

With reference to Minute 33/June 2010 on COMAH sites, the Chairman confirmed that arrangements were underway to draw up a scoping document to take the new scrutiny review forward.

**38. Scrutiny of Street Lighting at Night** (Minute 47/ October 2009, and 32/June 2010)

The Committee reviewed the outcomes of its original Scrutiny Report (report SSC/12/10) on Street Lighting that contained thirteen recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation. In summary, the Committee's advice to the Cabinet Member was based on the principle that the level of street lighting could and should be reduced and that, wherever possible, new technology should be the means of achieving targets in this field (Minute 47/ October 2010).

Councillor Pond was invited to chair the meeting for this particular item as he had led on the original scrutiny review. Councillor Walsh (the Committee Chairman) had not taken part in that review, because he had expressed his views on the night time street lighting pilot schemes when they were first introduced in Maldon and Uttlesford. However, he took part in the discussion at this meeting as the focus was now upon monitoring the outcomes of the Committee's recommendations rather than the principles of withdrawing some street lighting at night.

Councillor Hume, the Cabinet Member, was present at the meeting to advise the Committee on his response to the recommendations set out in the Scrutiny Report and to answer Members' questions. Lawrence McKeogh, County Roads Manager was also in attendance.

At the outset Councillor Hume advised the Committee that he accepted the thirteen recommendations as set out in its Scrutiny Report without any amendment, and therefore wished to concentrate upon how he proposed to roll out a Central Management System for the control of street lighting throughout Essex.

Councillor Hume informed the Committee that the central spending review in the autumn may affect the funding of the scheme, albeit planning for its implementation will continue with a target date of an April 2011 start. Funding for this project has been submitted under the Government Private Finance Initiative (PFI) programme, and the outcome of this bid was still awaited. In the meantime a full business case was also being prepared as an 'invest to save scheme' by the Council that will incorporate the Committee's recommendations.

In answer to Members' questions the Committee was advised as follows:

- The implementation of the project will be based on the installation of new technology, (similar to the type of technology used by the mobile phone network), and the installation of a central management system designed to manage street lighting throughout Essex.
- The Cabinet Member's target start date for installing new equipment is April 2011 and it will be taken forward on a district by district phased approach, albeit at this stage no decisions had been taken on the actual sequence of districts. Nevertheless, it is intended that Maldon and Uttlesford will be the first areas to be equipped with the new technology. It was noted that the County

Council's Highways Procurement Transformation project may affect the programme for introducing changes to street lighting.

- There will be variation in the way that night time street lighting will be introduced in each district depending on local circumstances especially in terms of different types of urban layout. There will be a full and thorough consultation within each district before implementing the project locally.
- Town and Parish Councils will also be consulted so that those pedestrian routes used after midnight, and main arteries from bus and railway stations may be identified and taken into consideration. It was also noted that some 20,000 lights were owned by other Local Councils in Essex, and it was hoped that these Councils would consider 'buying in' to the new technology.
- There will be a robust process for the consideration of those locations where exceptions might be appropriate for instance where lights may not to be turned off during night time hours. In all cases, Members were reassured that lights would remain on where the Police considered that they were necessary for public safety reasons.
- In the original review the Committee had received some conflicting information as to whether or not crime figures would increase if street lighting was reduced. On further investigation the Police had confirmed that additional crime in one area of the Saffron Walden pilot scheme had not been related to the reduction in night time lighting.
- Initially it will not be possible to vary the lighting levels rather than turn off the street lamps using existing equipment. New equipment would have to be installed, which would be very expensive. While the ability to vary the lighting levels was not a part of the current project it may be possible to introduce additional technology at a later date to enable lighting levels to be varied. Similarly, the use of more energy efficient lamps would be very expensive, and therefore not part of the move to the Central Management System. However, the conversion will be tackled in the longer term.
- A Member questioned whether or not the new technology, once fully installed, would make it was feasible for individual residents to control their own night time street lighting as he had witnessed in Germany. He was advised that a change in legislation relating to charges and tariffs would be required to be able such an approach possible, and therefore it was not envisaged that this facility would be introduced in Essex. The Cabinet Member indicated that while he would consider community based requests for lights to remain on for a local event, he was not in favour of acceding to individual resident requests.
- There are 120, 000 existing lamp columns that will have to be upgraded across Essex as part of the project.
- With regard to the amount of savings that could be achieved, it was recognised that the amount of saving would vary from District to District based upon their individual characteristics. Information had been collected from the original two pilot projects in Maldon and Uttlesford, and was based upon a 70% reduction in night time street lighting. It was predicted that between a

15% and 30% saving could be made in CO2 emissions, and between a 40% and 70% saving could be made in energy consumption. In monetary terms this equated to a countywide, saving of between £600,000 (at lowest energy savings possible) and £2 million (at highest energy savings possible), in year 5 of the project once the new system was fully installed. It was estimated that based on savings, the project will be self financing from between three and seven years. Full details of the savings to be made would be included in the full business case.

- It was acknowledged that it was important to inform residents about the new lighting arrangements as there is some uncertainty on how part time night lighting will be introduced. Press notices outlining the scheme, and articles in the Essex Works publication will be published at the appropriate time.
- Another benefit of the new Central Management System will be the ability to identify immediately via a central control any street lighting faults and therefore enable repair work to be scheduled quickly. This will result in additional savings as the current scouting process would no longer being required.
- It was confirmed that, in addition to the implementation of the new project there was a programme to review the night time street lighting on those roads that have been bypassed by new roads with an aim to reduce consumption.

In conclusion, the Committee welcomed the Cabinet Member's positive response to the recommendations that it had proposed in its Scrutiny Report on Street Lighting and the progress that was being made to introduce a new Central Management System for Street Lighting. While no further action was considered with regard to the original Scrutiny Review, Members indicated that they would like an update on the Project from the Cabinet Member in twelve months time once the business case has been agreed.

### **39. Operation Mermaid**

At the meeting the Chairman circulated a briefing note that he had written on behalf of those Members who had taken part in a site visit that was arranged for the Committee to view Operation Mermaid in action on the morning of 20 May 2010.

Operation Mermaid is a nationwide policing initiative to take dangerous vehicles off the road.

Members met police officers, revenue and customs officers engaged in Operation Mermaid at the Boreham Interchange on the A12 dual carriageway. They received a briefing as to how the process worked, prior to witnessing police officers carrying out vehicle and driver checks, interpreting tachographs, and undertaking follow up action. A video was shown to illustrate why an initiative like Operation Mermaid is important. It was based upon a true case where there were several fatalities including a father and his two young children. It demonstrated in very graphic detail the true costs of a major vehicle collision. The accident was caused by lorry driver who had not slept for many hours and it was proven that he was in significant breach of his driver hours.

Operation Mermaid relies on the cooperation of Lorry Park owners who have given free access to the Police, albeit there is probably a reciprocal benefit by having a police presence on site, sometimes for many hours.

Members were advised that vehicles were selected from the main carriageway based on intelligence, past experience, vehicle condition or loads carried. A police motorcyclist would escort the selected vehicle to the lorry park where it was recorded, and allocated a parking bay. A police officer would then engage with the driver to check the hours driven from the tachograph to establish the travel pattern of that driver. Any discrepancies would be dealt with and, depending on its seriousness, a driver might have to have an enforced stop, a fixed penalty notice or further processing through the legal system. Vehicle condition was examined and again if faults were found they would be dealt with appropriately. These checks were thorough and conducted by experienced traffic officers.

On the day Revenue and Customs Officers were taking part in the exercise as one of the partner agencies involved in Operation Mermaid. These Officers were checking upon trading activities. Other partners include the Border Agency, Trading Standards, and VOSA (Vehicle Operators Service Agency).

With regard to on the spot fines, Members were reassured that police processes for issuing such fines to drivers were very robust. Receipts are issued, fines are fully logged, and stored in a safe for later collection. There is a proper paper trail to ensure against fraud and complaints. It was acknowledged that it would be very hard to stop a rogue person from pretending to be authorised for fine collection, and therefore motorists need to be aware of the importance of the documentation.

Those Members who had taken part in the Operation Mermaid visit concluded that it had been very informative providing them with an important insight as to how measures are in place to ensure our roads are kept safe for all users.

The Committee noted the Chairman's report.

#### **40. Essex Heritage**

The Committee noted that the final draft report would be circulated to Members for their comments over the summer period prior to its formal consideration in September. Councillor Lucas Cabinet Member for Heritage Culture and the Arts would be invited to that meeting.

Councillors Pond and Walsh confirmed that they would be attending a Heritage Conference in London, and would report to the Committee on their findings.

#### **41. A-Boards on the Publicly Maintainable Highway**

The Chairman advised that he had received a request from the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation for the Committee to undertake a review on the regulation of A-Boards on the publicly maintainable highway. Some information on the issue had been circulated to the Committee prior to the meeting.

The Committee agreed that it would undertake a scrutiny review on A Boards on the publicly maintainable highway at its meeting in October (provisional). A scoping document would be drawn up to take the review forward.

**42. Date of Future Meetings**

The Committee noted that its next meeting was scheduled for 17 September 2010

The meeting closed at 11.15 am.

Chairman