

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT & ENVIRONMENT POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD ON 18 NOVEMBER 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

**57. Apologies and Substitution Notices**

The Committee Officer reported that apologies had been received from Councillors A Brown, R Howard and J Schofield.

**58. Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 21 October 2010 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

**59. Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations made.

**60. Scrutiny Review on the Relationship with Statutory Undertakers**  
(Minute 20/April 2010)

The Committee considered report EDE/26/10 setting out background on this scrutiny review together with an outline for the cross examination of witnesses from the Utility Companies.

The Chairman welcomed Eddie Owen (Veolia Water Central), Keith Childs (Open Reach) and Kevin Lowdell (Essex & Suffolk Water) to the meeting and invited them to give a brief outline on their areas of work.

Mr Owen, Veolia Water, informed Members that:

- He is the Network Technical Manager for Veolia Water Central and Chairman of Essex HAUC (Highways Authority and Utilities Committee)
- Veolia is a French owned water company that is the largest in the UK.
- It supplies 829 million litres of water per day.

- It maintains 14,500 kilometres of pipe work and repairs approximately 30,000 leakages per year.
- Approximately 125 kilometres of pipe will be renewed per annum over the next five years.

Mr Childs, Open Reach, informed Members that:

- He is a Street Works consultant for East Anglia and is responsible for the network outside the exchanges up to the customer's premises including maintenance on the highways.
- He is Chairman of Herts HAUC.

Mr Lowdell, Essex and Suffolk Water, informed Members that:

- He was mainly concerned with the repair and maintenance activities of the company.
- A major challenge in this area is to reduce the number of leakages per annum.
- Leakages have been reduced by 35% since the 1990's.
- Weather is an important factor in the occurrence of leakages. In freezing conditions pipes burst, and in Essex the underlying clay means that when there is hot weather there may be ground movement causing pipe fractures.
- Over £50 million is being invested to replace ageing pipes.

Liz Saville, ITS and Congestion Manager, was also in attendance at the meeting on behalf of the Highways Authority.

The Committee asked a series of questions concerning co-ordination between the utility companies and the Highways Authority, public information, monitoring of sub-contractors, road closures and road re-instatements.

In response Members were informed by the witnesses that:

- For the past five years the co-ordination of all major works (ie those lasting more than 10 working days) has been managed by the Highways Authority with the Utility Companies being required to give three months notice and submit detailed plans. All the Companies have access to the information, which is recorded on ELGIN (a Road Works Information Service). The regular co-ordination meetings between the Highways Authority and the Utility Companies are seen as very important.
- Utility companies do try to co-ordinate their work and they are aware of what major works are taking place. However, it may not be possible for them to be present on site at the same time because of health and safety reasons. They also have different techniques and priorities to consider on site for instance the water companies have to ensure water hygiene whereas as gas companies have to take precautions to avoid explosions. It was noted that the different utility

apparatus may lie at different levels under the road surface with water pipes being underneath the others.

- While there is no statutory requirement for standard work (1 to 9 working days) to be co-ordinated, Mr Owen confirmed that the Essex HAUC is interested in such an approach being adopted.
- It was pointed out that as private companies, the Utilities' are very aware of the costs associated with highways works. Therefore they try to minimise the length of time for works to be completed, and aim for successful first time highway reinstatements.
- Theft of materials, particularly cabling and other metallic items, has a major impact on the type and frequency of work.
- Aside from their own direct labour, the Utility Companies use a mixture of contractors and sub-contractors to carry out works, but ultimately they are responsible for the site, its safety and for the standard of work carried out. However, on the larger sites a Utility Company will have one of its own representatives on site.
- Utility Companies have up to six months to carry out permanent repair and re-instatement, which is a statutory requirement. There is a code of practice that governs re-instatement work, which was upgraded in April 2010 and all companies undertaking excavations on the highway have to comply.
- There is a legal requirement that stock highways materials are retained by the Highways Authorities for a period of two years. However the sourcing of suitable materials to carry-out re-instatement works is sometimes problematic for instance some local authorities have used special materials like distinct stone and marble eg York Stone, and coloured tarmac. In practice there may be delays in completing permanent reinstatements, and additional costs have to be borne.
- Roads are only closed for safety reasons. This is particularly relevant when telegraph poles are being replaced or access is restricted. It was further noted that traffic management is key for all activities undertaken on the highway and it is not in the interests of the Utility Companies to close roads. No road closures take place without referral to the Highways Inspector.
- Whilst there has been a restructuring within the Highways Department, it was confirmed that there is to be no reduction in the number Highways Inspectors. The New Roads and Street Works Inspectors will be based across the four area offices.
- The Utility Companies are required to post notices one week prior to work being undertaken and, in many cases, letter drops are made.

Given the nature of the services provided, there are variations in the methods used to inform residents/ customers for instance a telecommunications cable may affect several thousand people, whereas a water main may affect a more limited number of properties in the immediate vicinity of works.

- Liz Saville, ITS and Congestion Manager, added that local County Councillors are informed through the Council's own internal processes. It was noted, however, that these procedures are under review.
- It was confirmed that 'emergency works' may be interpreted differently depending on the nature of the utility service concerned and the potential damage that may arise. In the case of a water leak it was pointed out that water can cause a lot of damage, and the water companies do try to respond to reports within two hours depending upon available resources. There are also Government targets that the Water Companies have to be mindful of. The safety of operatives is also a key consideration in every decision that is made to close or not to close a road.
- The operation and profits of the Utility Companies is closely monitored by the respective regulatory authorities eg Ofwat and Ofcom.
- Mr Owen indicated that the National Joint Utilities Group (NJUG) is proposing to the Department for Transport that the Utility Companies should give the Highways Authorities a longer lead in time for notifying major works eg at least twelve months. In the case of Vieola Water, the Company is considering a new system to give more precise information to the Highways Authority and a longer lead in time to enable more discussion to take place at an earlier stage, and to raise customer awareness.

The Chairman thanked the representatives from the Utility Companies for their contribution to the Scrutiny Review, and confirmed that at the next meeting a number of representatives from Road User Groups were being invited to address the Committee.

## **61. Forward Look**

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

## **62. Dates of Future Meetings**

The Committee noted that the next meeting of the Committee was scheduled for Thursday, 16 December 2010.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 11.53am

Chairman