

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
ENVIRONMENT & HIGHWAYS POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD ON 21 MARCH 2013**

Present:

Councillor S Walsh (Chairman)	Councillor D Kendall
Councillor B Aspinell	Councillor G McEwen
Councillor R Callender	Councillor G Mitchinson
Councillor A Durcan	Councillor C Pond
Councillor I Grundy	Councillor D Robinson
Councillor A Hedley	Councillor J Schofield
Councillor E Johnson	Councillor M Skeels

1. Apologies and Substitution Notices

The Committee Officer reported apologies for absence from Councillors R Bass and J Roberts.

2. Minutes

The Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 21 February 2013 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of personal interest.

4. Scrutiny Review on the Future of Recycling Centres for Household Waste Service in Essex

The Committee considered the response from the Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Waste set out in report EDEH/07/13 to the scrutiny report on this matter.

The Committee noted the response that accepted Recommendation 1 and welcomed a further in depth review on the future of Recycling Centres for Household Waste Service in Recommendation 2.

5. Scrutiny Report on the Relationship with Statutory Undertakers in the way works are undertaken in the Highway

The Committee considered the response from the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation (report EDEH/08/13) to the four recommendations set out in the scrutiny report on this matter.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- An update on when 'service information' website will be up and running, referred to in the response to recommendation 2, was requested.

- Members were interested to get some feedback from the initial work undertaken to look at the feasibility of introducing a permit scheme (response to recommendation 4).
- The experience of Members within their own divisions was that there were still some concerns regarding joined up working between the County Council and utility companies, and there was still a lack of information in some cases regarding who was undertaking the works.
- It was suggested that the relationship between the County Council, Statutory Undertakers, and the Parking Partnerships could be investigated in the future.

The Committee **Agreed** that further information be sought from the Cabinet Member regarding the establishment of the 'service information' website and the feasibility work for the introduction of a permit scheme.

The Committee noted the response from the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation

6. Scrutiny Review on Country Parks

The Committee considered report EDEH/09/13 on the Task and Finish Group's recent engagement in Phase 2 of the Country Parks Project.

It was intended that Members would continue to input into this Project during the early stages of the Project, and the Committee's successor would take its scrutiny involvement forward.

The Committee noted the report on the Task and Finish Group's activities.

7. Forward Look: Committee's Overview and Scrutiny Successes

The Committee considered report EDEH/10/13 by the Scrutiny Officer on its overview and scrutiny experience.

The purpose of the report was to identify a number of messages to pass onto the new Committee after the May 2013 County Council elections, and to influence how overview and scrutiny is taken forward in the future. The report reflected Members' views expressed at a workshop in February and general feedback gleaned from a questionnaire and general discussions. It was highlighted that there had been some successful outcomes from the Committee's scrutiny activities, and reference was made to the positive feedback received already to the scrutiny report on COMAH endorsed at the previous meeting.

The Committee's 'messages' would be fed into the generic review being undertaken on the Council's overview and scrutiny function, and further feedback was invited from Members. Members confirmed their support for the report, and felt it was a well written report.

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- Some Members considered that there was a distinct difference between the roles of scrutiny and policy and development.
- There was strong feeling that the actual timing of reviews was essential for successful scrutiny to be conducted. Examples of less successful scrutiny were in some cases related to reviews taking place too late in the decision making process. Early input provided a much greater opportunity to influence outcomes.
- There was suggestion that there was a lack of outside impartial analysis, and there should be a budget to commission outside research similar to the Parliamentary Select Committee structure.
- It was recognised that scrutiny work could be compromised by conflicts with a Cabinet Member, and where issues went to full Council political group voting could mitigate against the findings of a scrutiny report.
- Members noted that it was important to invest time and resources into areas of work where it was possible to influence outcomes and make a difference.
- It was suggested that the Committee's work programme should be able to take account of the Cabinet's Forward Plan of activity over the longer period. The Chairman advised that he had been considering how this could be done in the future, and had been having discussions with Cabinet Members to get a better idea of forthcoming issues and decisions.
- There was a view that Tasks and finish Groups had worked well, and engaged more positively those Members with an interest in the specific issues being reviewed. However, it was pointed out that when a group reported its findings and recommendations back to the main committee for endorsement, that committee as a whole had to take account of the fact that those colleagues who undertook the review had based their proposals on their proper consideration of evidence collated. Therefore if the committee was minded to vary a group's findings as set out in its report then there should be proper justification and evidence for doing so. Once a group's report was endorsed, that report would be adopted as the committee's report.
- It was noted that this had been the first Committee to reflect upon its successes and its views would be fed into the broader review being undertaken on the future of overview and scrutiny. The other Policy and Scrutiny Committees were being encouraged to produce similar reports.
- It was noted that the report would be taken into consideration as part of a handover of work to the successor Committee.

8. Dates of Future Meetings

The Committee noted that due to there being no business planned for the next activity day scheduled for 18 April, it would be cancelled.

As this would be the last meeting of the Committee prior to the County Council May elections, the Chairman expressed his thanks to Members for their contributions. The Chairman also thanked officers for their work in support of the Committee.

Councillor McEwen, Vice Chairman, on behalf of the Committee thanked the Chairman for his work and for leading a successful Policy and Scrutiny Committee.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 10.40am.

Chairman