

SSC/ 07 /09

Policy & Scrutiny Committee Safer and Stronger Communities

Date of meeting 18 September 2009

Scrutiny of Street lighting at night

Report by: Graham Redgwell, Governance Officer

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Background

In 2007, the then Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation agreed that a pilot scheme should be undertaken whereby:-

- (a) from 20 February 2007 certain street lights in the Maldon District owned and operated by the County Council should be switched off between midnight and 5 am GMT; and
- (b) from 2 April 2007 certain street lights in the Uttlesford district (excluding the Saffron Walden town area) should be switched off between midnight and 5 am GMT, with some other street lights being switched off between 1 am and 5 am GMT.

Full details are set out in Annexes A and B to this item. These annexes show the pilot schemes in detail; the consultation process undertaken before the pilot schemes commenced; exception criteria regarding street lights which should not be turned off; and a risk assessment of the proposed changes.

The current Cabinet Member with responsibility for street lighting (Councillor Norman Hume. Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation) proposes to review the outcomes of the pilot schemes. As part of that review, this Committee has been asked to scrutinise the subject and present its findings to Councillor Hume.

One other County Council which has also undertaken a review of its street lighting at night is Gloucestershire. A copy of the criteria it has used is set out in annex C. That County Council applies the criteria to parishes and does not apply it in the two main conurbations of Cheltenham and Gloucester.

Other Councils are also considering this issue, primarily as a cost saving and environmental issue.

Scrutiny process

As the first part of the scrutiny process, the Committee agreed a scoping document (set out in Annex D).

Comments have been sought from:

- all County Councillors
- all Borough and District Councils in Essex
- all parish councils in Essex
- the Institute of Lighting Engineers
- Essex Police
- Essex Fire and Rescue Service
- Council for Preservation of Rural England
- Rural Community Council for Essex
- Royal Automobile Club
- Friends of the Earth
- Essex Blind Charity

In addition, the Essex Chronicle ran a major feature on this issue in all its various editions across the county. The Governance Officer was quoted on a number of occasions in the feature and his contact details were provided. This has led to a great deal of public interest. Finally, a number of individuals had already spoken with the Governance Officer previously, knowing that a scrutiny was to take place, and they were all contacted again.

The Chairman and Deputy Chairman of the Committee have agreed that the scrutiny process should be as follows:-

18 September

Consider annexes A to E; question witnesses; and consider written representations.

16 October

Consider any further evidence received; interview Cabinet Member and supporting Officers; and reach conclusions to put to Cabinet Member.

All Members have been reminded of the importance of attending both meetings. Where a Member is unable to do so they have agreed that a substitute should attend. As the Chairman has a previous involvement with this subject he has stood down from both meetings, which will be chaired by the Deputy Chairman, Councillor Christopher Pond.

Evidence

At the time of preparation of this item (8 September) 69 comments had been received, comprising:

- County Councillors 10
- District Councils 2
- Parish Councils 17
- Organisations 6
- Individuals 34

It has been made clear that comments will be welcomed throughout the scrutiny process and a summary of any further comments received since 8 September will be tabled today. Those making comments have been encouraged to back up their stance with evidence.

A number of organisations and/or individuals have expressed a wish to attend today and give oral evidence. A timetable of speakers is set out below:-

1000 -1015 introductions, etc

1015 - 1145 Witnesses speaking in favour of having street lights turned on

Mrs J Swatton

Mr M Heard

Mr K Rogers (speaking on behalf of Wivenhoe Community Safety Neighbourhood Watch)

Mr A Baggott (District Councillor)

Mr and Mrs S Leverett (speaking on behalf of UBR Neighbourhood Group)

1145 - 1245: Witnesses speaking in favour of having street lights turned off

Mr J Abbott (District Councillor but speaking as individual)

Mr D Paul

Lunch break

1330 – 1530

Councillor R Bass (speaking as individual but was Cabinet Member at the time the pilot schemes were agreed)

Chief Inspector J Wrigley, Essex Police

Mr N Parry, Technical Services Manager, Institute of Lighting Engineers.

Consideration of written evidence in annex E

Agree process to be followed at next meeting.