

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT,
ENVIRONMENT & HIGHWAYS POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD ON 30 AUGUST 2012**

Present:

Councillor S Walsh (Chairman)	Councillor G McEwen
Councillor B Aspinell	Councillor C Pond
Councillor R Callender	Councillor D Robinson
Councillor A Durcan	Councillor S Robinson
Councillor I Grundy	Councillor M Skeels
Councillor A Hedley	

Councillors G Butland, R Howard and R Madden were also present for parts of the meeting.

1. Membership

The Committee noted a change to the membership with Councillor S Robinson replacing Councillor M Mackrory.

The Chairman expressed the Committee's thanks to Councillor Mackrory for his active participation in its activities. It was noted that he would continue as a Member of the Recycling Centres Task and Finish Group until its work was complete.

Councillor S Robinson was welcomed to his first meeting of the Committee.

The Committee noted that Councillor R Bass had joined the Country Parks Task and Finish Group.

2. Apologies

The Committee Officer reported apologies for absence from Councillors R Bass, D Kendall, E Johnson, L Mead, G Mitchinson, J Roberts, and J Schofield.

3. Minutes

The Minutes of the Committee meeting held on 24 May 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Declarations of Interest

With reference to Minute 6, Councillor S Walsh – membership of professional bodies with an interest in country park matters.

With reference to Minute 9, Councillor C Pond – membership of local historical societies.

5. Interim Scrutiny Report on Financial Inclusion

Councillor I Grundy, Lead Member for the Financial Inclusion Task and Finish Group, submitted its Scoping Document and Interim Report for the Committee's approval (report EDEH/16/12). He confirmed that Financial Inclusion was a wide ranging subject, and therefore it was necessary for the Group to focus upon those aspects where it could add value through scrutiny activity to the way the Council tackled the issue and support was provided in practice in Essex.

The Group had already collated a lot of evidence and account was being taken of the effects that changes in welfare reform could have. It was emphasised that the scrutiny review was on-going with further witness sessions and visits being planned. The recommendations set out in the interim report were framed to take into consideration the fact that financial inclusion and exclusion issues have implications for Cabinet portfolios and directorates across the whole County Council.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- With reference to Recommendation 2, Members expressed general support for the Citizens Advice Bureaux, and the important work they do. It was also suggested that the Council should look at the support it provides eg by providing access to Council venues.

In response to the points made, it was confirmed that the Citizens Advice Bureau was seen as a key organisation being considered as part of the review.

- With reference to Recommendation 4 a Member expressed concern that working to ensure that financial literacy plays a greater role in the school curriculum may come across as a criticism that currently teachers do not do this well. It was suggested that it may assist local schools if they could be supplied with details of organisations who could provide external speakers on this topic.

In response it was explained that a representative from Schools had provided evidence at a witness session and had given the impression that there was not much financial literacy taught in schools at the present time and it was not on the curriculum. The Group would be considering this matter further as part of its final report.

It was emphasised that the report now submitted was an interim report, and the Group hoped to produce a final report by the end of the year. Overall the Group was keen to ensure that positive outcomes could be achieved as part of the review and that those organisations engaged in promoting financial inclusion could be encouraged to work together more closely.

The Committee Agreed that:

- A. The Scoping Document for this scrutiny review on Financial Inclusion attached at Appendix A to report EDEH/16/12 be approved; and**
- B. The Interim Report of the Financial Inclusion Task and Finish Group attached at Appendix B to report EDEH/16/12 and the following recommendations be approved:**

Recommendation 1:

That it be recommended to the Cabinet that its portfolios and the Council's Directorates should consider how their services and commissioning activity can better promote financial inclusion, recognising that the issue affects a wide range of citizens.

Recommendation 2:

That it be recommended to the Cabinet that Essex County Council should review its support for Citizens Advice Bureaux and consider how this Council can work with these organisations to ensure they are capable of providing appropriate guidance and financial training.

Recommendation 3:

That it be recommended to the Cabinet that the Committee considers credit unions have the potential to provide a valuable service to local residents and businesses. Public bodies across Essex should do more to raise awareness of the credit union movement and Essex County Council should work with credit unions to develop stronger, more sustainable operating models.

Recommendation 4:

That it be recommended to the Cabinet that Essex County Council and local schools should work together to see that training in financial literacy plays a greater role in the school curriculum.

Recommendation 5:

That the Cabinet's interim response to recommendations 1 to 4 be reported to the Task and Finish Group in October 2012 so that its comments may be taken into consideration as part of its final scrutiny report on Financial Inclusion.

6. Scrutiny Report on Country Parks (Minute 11/May 2012)

The Final Scrutiny Report of the Country Parks Task & Finish Group (report EDEH/17/12) was submitted to the Committee for its approval.

The Chairman confirmed that the review had focussed on Phase 1 of the project looking at the future of Crossing Temple and Marsh Farm. The Committee had visited the sites in March 2012, and the Group had considered the opportunities for these sites in the future. The Committee was asked to endorse the conclusions set out in the scrutiny report, and it was confirmed that the Group would reconvene to input into Phase 2 of the Council's project covering the other Country Parks.

The Committee Agreed that:

That, the Cabinet Member for Environment and Culture be advised:

- 1. That Phase One of the Country Parks Project as now reported is supported by the Committee, and**
- 2. That the Group be engaged at any early stage in the development of Phase 2 of that Project.**

7. Scrutiny Report on School Crossing Patrol Service Policy (Minute 6/May 2012)

Further to the Final Scrutiny Report on School Crossing Patrol (SCP) Service Policy approved by the Committee in May 2012 (Minute 6) the original Task and Finish Group had been asked to consider further amendments proposed by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation to the draft policy. The Group's latest findings were set out in report EDEH/18/12.

The Chairman advised that the adoption of a local policy would provide greater transparency around the Essex SCP Service albeit the existing service is provided in line with national policy and guidelines.

During the discussion the following points were made:

- Concern was expressed that the reference in the draft recommendation to a 'named individual' needed to be further clarified to ensure that a 'responsible officer' role was identified.
- Questions were raised on the reasons for not permitting a SCP at push button traffic crossings. The Chairman quoted a section from the report explaining that the signal controls have more significance under legislation than a crossing patrol. Members requested clarification be provided to

them on this matter to enable them to answer residents' queries, and examples of case law where available.

The Committee Agreed that it be recommended to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation:

That further consideration be given to emphasise the fact that the establishment of new school crossing patrols will be dependent upon meeting the criteria set out in the policy for instance by highlighting this fact in its Foreword, and clarification of the named individual (including reference to their organisation and post holder status) to be identified as the point of contact in any contract for a community funded site.

8. Scrutiny Report on A Board Policy on the publicly maintainable highway (Minute 5/May 2012)

The Committee received the response from the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation to its recommendations on A Board Policy as set out in minute 5/Mat 2012. Given the late receipt of the response it was circulated at the meeting (having been emailed to the Committee the previous afternoon).

The Cabinet Member's response to the Committee's recommendation (that amended the original recommendation of a Task and Finish Group to adopt a Tolerance Policy) was as follows:

' 1. That the Essex County Council as the Local Highways Authority adopt a policy of No Tolerance of Advertising Boards on the publicly maintainable highway but that the District/Borough/City Councils be empowered and encouraged to adopt the Tolerance Policy approach as set out in this report for the management of such boards.

Response: Following the meeting on 24 May, additional consultation with Districts, Boroughs, City Council and the business community was undertaken in relation to the amended recommendation agreed by the Committee. Following the receipt of these responses, it became apparent that a policy of zero tolerance would not be appropriate because ECC would be adopting a policy which it would then immediately encourage District, Borough and City authorities to contravene. Responses received to this consultation suggested a preference for a tolerant approach which once adopted would enable local flexibility for district/city/borough councils.

Therefore, the recommendation made by the Committee on 24 May is not accepted and ECC will be implementing a tolerant policy for A Boards. By allowing other Councils to implement either a tolerant or zero-tolerance approach, this will enable local areas to implement

decisions that are responsive to local needs. It will also balance the needs of highways users and maintain support for local businesses through economically difficult times. Where an authority does not adopt either a tolerant or zero-tolerance approach, ECC will enforce a tolerant approach in that area. It is also important to note that it is expected that adoption of either a tolerant or zero-tolerance approach will be within clear parameters to protect users of the highway.

2. That positive steps be taken to promote the new Policy to District Councils and businesses across Essex to encourage compliance with its provision.

Response: Agreed

3. That the introduction of a sticker scheme similar to the scheme operated in Kent be considered as a way of developing the regulation of Advertising boards in Essex.

Response: This recommendation is supported dependant on the findings of full cost implications. This will be complete by the end of October.'

During the discussion the following points were raised:

- A Member suggested that the proposed policy should be described as a 'regulation' rather than 'tolerance' policy as the siting of A Boards would be regulated and enforcement action taken.
- Some concern was expressed that local flexibility could lead to different approaches being adopted across the County, and there was uncertainty as to how this would work in practice. Also it was felt that some District Councils may not have the funding for enforcement.
- On the other hand there was confirmation from other Members that some local district councils' welcomed the Cabinet Member's decision, and that by having an opportunity to enforce the policy on publicly maintainable highway would open up a new revenue stream.

The Committee noted the Cabinet Member's response.

9. Essex Heritage (Minute 8/May 2012)

The Committee noted further advice provided by the Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Environment and Culture, as set out in report EDEH/20/12, on his response to recommendations arising from a scrutiny review on Essex Heritage. No further action was proposed to be taken in this matter.

10. Scrutiny Review On The Exercise Of Planning Control On The Use Of Inert Waste For Recreational Development (Minute 24/ May 2012)

The Committee noted report EDEH/21/12 setting out the response of the Cabinet Member for Communities and Planning to the recommendations and outcomes arising from this Scrutiny Report. No further action was proposed to be taken in this matter.

11. Park and Ride (Minute 49/ November 2011)

The Committee noted report EDEH/22/12 setting out the response of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation as part of monitoring the outcomes of this Scrutiny Report. The response confirmed on-going work and proposed that an update on the options be presented to the Committee in Spring 2013.

The Committee noted the response and welcomed further discussion on the options in due course.

12. Scrutiny Review On The Relationship With Statutory Undertakers In The Way Works Are Undertaken In The Highway (Minute 7/ February 2012)

The Committee noted report EDEH/23/12 setting out the preliminary response of the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation to four recommendations set out in this scrutiny report, and his confirmation that he accepted all of them. A further update report would be submitted to a meeting in early 2013.

13. Forward Look (Minute 11/May 2012)

The Committee noted report EDEH/24/12 concerning its Forward Look.

The Governance Officer gave an update on the planned Task and Finish Group activities, and future Committee briefings.

The next meeting of the Committee would be an informal Highways and Transportation Briefing. Members also requested that further information be sought on the following issues:

- Mis-use of bridleways by 4x4 vehicles
- Obstructions on the highway
- Part-night street lighting roll-out

14. Dates of Future Meetings

The Committee noted that the next activity day was scheduled for Thursday 20 September 2012 at 10am and would be in the form of a Committee Briefing.

There being no urgent business the meeting closed at 2.50pm.

Chairman