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**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
Town Hall, Main Road, Romford
7 November 2013 (7.30 - 9.00 pm)**

Present:

Councillors Jeffrey Brace (Chairman), John Mylod (Vice-Chair), Barbara Matthews, David Durant, Lynden Thorpe and Keith Wells

15 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 October 2013 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

16 OPERATION AUGUSTA

The Committee received a presentation on Operation Augusta, the fake golf club conspiracy. The Committee were informed that there had been a 10-strong gang, who had been operating within the Rainham and Romford areas. The main focus was primarily on the sale and distribution of counterfeit golf clubs, clothing and accessories but also Quantas Complimentary Lounge Invitation Cards.

The case concerned was on a global scale with contacts based in the UK, Thailand, Australia, Germany, Singapore, the USA, Hong Kong and China. Officers stated that it was thought that the fake goods had been distributed globally via Ebay to countries including Australia, Italy, France, Canada, the Netherlands, Brazil and New Zealand. Whilst the value of the conspiracy was difficult to determine, due to its sheer size, the PayPal account of the Ebay account alone received over \$3 million during the five years (2003-2008)

Seven of the original defendants stood trial in 2009 and were convicted. The other three defendants had been resident in Thailand for a period of years prior to the start of the case. After the conviction of the seven, Havering Council started proceedings to extradite the remaining members of the gang. One of the gang voluntarily surrendered himself to the Court, and the other two were extradited from Thailand. In July 2013, at Basildon Crown Court, the final three were found guilty for their part in the conspiracy and were sentenced.

The Committee felt that the sentences given were insufficient for the crime committed. Officers stated that if the final three had not been extradited, they would have kept the money they had made from the conspiracy, as they all had residency in Thailand.

The officer explained that the Courts have to agree to the extradition, and the charges are then paid by the government. It was explained that Mr Bellchambers, the gang leader had served two years over his two year sentence, his assets abroad could be frozen. However this would be carried out by the Thai authorities, who the British Government have a reciprocal arrangement with, but they would then keep the assets.

The Committee noted that the case was now coming to an end; however the Council continued to receive money associated with the case. The Officer explained that the costs to the gang for manufacturing and delivering was between \$5 - \$10, however the charge to customers was around £100, which was over 1000% profit.

Members asked what would happen to the counterfeit golf clubs. Officers explained that there were a couple of tonnes of golf clubs which would have to be destroyed, possibly with the hope of recovering some scrap metal costs.

The Committee suggested that officers should approach the large brand companies stated that they had pursued the counterfeiters and see if they could contribute to the fees paid by the local authority. Officers stated that the companies involved had given witness support in the case. The case had raised the profile of Havering and that Trading Standards had won prizes for the case.

The Committee asked that its thanks be passed on to all officers involved for their persistence in this case.

17 **BRIDGE STRUCTURES**

The Committee received a briefing note on the maintenance of bridge structures in Havering. The Committee noted that there were 150 highway structures in the borough, of which the majority were owned by, and the responsibility of, the Council. These structures were bridges (including footbridges), subways, culverts and retaining walls. In the case of bridges associated with Trunk Roads (A12, A127 and A13) and Motorways (M25) these were owned and maintained by the Highways Agency.

Railway bridges were generally owned by the company that they serve i.e. either Network Rail or London Underground, however in the case of "road over rail" bridges, the Borough had the responsibility to maintain the footway and carriageway surfaces. Examples of these around the borough were discussed.

The officer stated that more effort had been made in the last few years to maintain bridge structures in the borough. All structure for which the Council were responsible for, were visually inspected every two years (General Inspection) to assess their overall condition, and once every six

years a more detailed survey is undertaken (Principal Inspection) which involved the inspector actually being close enough to touch all visible areas of the structure and tests were carried out to accurately determine the condition of each structure.

Reports were compiled following inspections which indicated the condition of all elements of the structure, identified any defects and recommended any necessary remedial works together with providing an estimate of the cost involved. Those reports would then be used to prioritise subsequent works. Where it was possible to make minor repairs to rectify the situation, these were carried out. However, where more extensive repairs may be necessary, structures would need to be assessed to confirm their load carrying capabilities and if necessary, restrictions were put in place to avoid further damage. This was necessary for the “road over rail” bridge in Victoria Road/ Heath Park Road, where a width restriction was put in to restrict the load capacity; however this also included the re-routing of buses and consultation with the railway companies.

Applications for Assessment funding were made to TfL via the London Bridge Engineering Group (LoBEG) bidding process. The officer stated that funding for major repairs were made this way; however the bidding was up against all other London Boroughs. The estimated bids for the coming years were:

£	Year
700 k	2014/15
1.1m	2015/16
1m	2016/17
600 k	2017/18
600 k	2018/19
500 k	2019/20

Members asked if there were specific officers who dealt with the bridge maintenance. The officer stated that there was one specialist engineer for bridge structures. He monitored the bridges, but there was also a sub-contractor, Jacobs, who also carried out inspection and maintenance. The findings from Jacobs fed into the LoBEG which assisted with the estimated bids each year. Any immediate action/ major repairs could be carried out, as there was a small budget available for emergency repairs.

The Committee discussed the various bridge structures in the borough, with the officer outlining the different areas where bridges were in the pipeline for repair.

18 **FUTURE AGENDAS**

The Committee reviewed its work programme for the coming year and agreed that they would wish the following items to be included at future meetings:

Blue Badge Renewals update – agreed for March meeting
Scope for Variable Speed Limits – agreed for January meeting

The updated work programme would be circulated.

19 **ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Councillor Thorpe informed the Committee that she had accompanied a Health Inspector on a Food Safety Inspection following the meeting of the Food Safety Topic Group. She stated that she had found the visit very interesting and had learned a lot of tips in keeping food safe.

It was agreed to circulate the notes of the visit to all members of the Committee.

Chairman