

Crouch Harbour Authority

Chairman's Year-End Report – December 2025

It was unexpected to return to the role of Chairman of the Crouch Harbour Authority (CHA) in May 2025 following the resignation of my predecessor. Since then, it has been a demanding and productive period for the Authority and its Trustees. This report provides an overview of the CHA's role, activities, and the challenges and priorities ahead.

The Role of the Crouch Harbour Authority

The Crouch Harbour Authority is the Statutory Harbour and Navigation Authority for the Rivers Crouch and Roach in South Essex. It operates as a not-for-profit Trust Port under the Crouch Harbour Act 1974, holding its assets and exercising its powers for the benefit of all stakeholders.

The CHA is responsible for ensuring marine safety and overseeing all maritime activity within the harbour area. Its core functions include:

Marine Safety and Navigation

Managing and directing the movement of regulated vessels. Providing and authorising pilots and delivering all required pilotage services. Surveying fairways and channels and issuing navigational information. Conducting dredging works. Maintaining buoyage and channel marking. Removing hazards, wrecks, and obstructions

Licensing and Regulation

Licensing boat moorings. Licensing marine works and dredging operations. Enforcing speed limits and regulating waterskiing and Personal Watercraft (PWC) activity.

Environmental and Operational Management

Oil spill prevention, response, and clean-up capability. Managing waste from vessels and collecting harbour dues and charges.

In delivering these responsibilities, the CHA must comply with a wide range of statutory requirements. Chief among these is the Port and Marine Facilities Safety Code, which requires that marine risks be managed to remain as low as reasonably practicable. The Authority also operates within an increasingly complex regulatory framework for environmental and water quality.

Governance and Financial Management

Like many small ports and harbours, the CHA continues to face financial pressures. Good governance requires the Authority not only to break even but to generate a modest operational surplus to remain sustainable. While this remains a priority for the Trustees, it inevitably increases user fees.

Trustees and stakeholders must understand that the Authority can act only within the powers granted by legislation, regulations, and Codes of Practice. The Trustees continue to work toward a structured, formal framework to anticipate and manage future change.

I am pleased to welcome Robert Coyle as Chair of the Finance and Estates Committee. Working with a small but dedicated committee, he oversees budgets, accounts, leases, and the vital task of ensuring timely payment of charges.

Operational Activity

Commercial berth activity at Baltic Wharf has remained steady during the year, with some changes to the regular vessels calling at the port. It is encouraging to see consistent cargo volumes entering this small but essential harbour.

The Authority's working boats have continued to provide reliable and professional service. *Watchful* delivers valuable weekend patrol coverage. *Crouch Trident*, our pilot cutter, continues to support pilotage operations for commercial shipping.

Staff and Acknowledgements

I would like to extend my sincere thanks to the Harbour Master and all CHA staff. Since taking office, I have been supported with exceptional dedication and professionalism. The Harbour Master, in particular, has worked extensively through periods of change, ensuring continuity, addressing unresolved matters, and maintaining practical cooperation with local authorities and emergency services.

Key Challenges Ahead

The CHA faces several ongoing and emerging challenges, including: Implementation of potential changes to shellfishery activity and Several Orders. Preparedness for tidal flooding, emergency response, and resilience planning. Maintaining and improving river water quality in line with evolving environmental legislation. Ensuring ongoing training for staff, Trustees, and committee members, with a strong focus on succession planning. Managing rising operational costs, including fleet maintenance, buoyage upkeep, and salvage responsibilities.

Priorities for 2026

Looking ahead, the Authority will place increased emphasis on developing "Stay Safe" initiatives with local schools and community organisations. Generating sustainable income to support long-term financial stability. Continued maintenance of navigational aids, patrol vessels, and harbour infrastructure. Modernisation of the CHA website. Effective management of salvage obligations and the removal of abandoned craft.

The Trustees remain committed to ensuring that the Crouch Harbour Authority continues to operate safely, responsibly, and sustainably for the benefit of all who use and depend upon the Rivers Crouch and Roach.

This period between Christmas and New Year's gives us time to reflect on the year that has ended and conjecture on the year that is beginning. Enjoy the river and the surrounding nature in 2026

Edwin Buckley