

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 7 APRIL 2009

REPORT BY CHIEF EXECUTIVE

11. SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2008/09 and COMMUNITY SCRUTINY
WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10

WARD(S) AFFECTED: all

'D' RECOMMENDATION – that (A) Members review the draft version of the Scrutiny Annual Report 2008/09 and recommend any changes as necessary and before Council;

(B) that the proposed work programme for 2009/10 be considered and agreed, and any additional items for inclusion be discussed, including scheduling

1.0 Purpose/Summary of Report

1.1 This report is intended to support the Community Scrutiny Committee in reviewing its work programme of 2008/09 and planning the future work programme for 2009/10.

2.0 Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/Objectives

2.1 In monitoring the performance of the council's services and action plans, the Committee is monitoring the Council's achievement of all of its corporate objectives.

2.2 Any additional issues identified for scrutiny will relate to at least one of the Council's corporate objectives.

2.3 Effective use of the scrutiny process contributes to the Council's ability to meet two core objectives:

Fit for purpose, services fit for you

Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.

Leading the way, working together

Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.

3.0 Background

3.1 A report on the scrutiny function within East Herts Council is written each year. This annual report contains a summary of the work of each scrutiny committee, an evaluation based on feedback from Members and outline plans for the year ahead.

3.2 This year, two workshops were held on 20 January and 24 February 2009 which allowed Members the opportunity to contribute to the evaluation exercise and help identify potential scrutiny topics for 2009/10. Written submissions could also be made if Members were not able to attend the interactive sessions.

3.3 Outcomes from the workshops and submissions have been incorporated into the draft version of the East Herts Scrutiny Annual Report 2008/09 being considered at this meeting. The final version of the Report will be submitted to Annual Council on 13 May 2009.

4.0 Report

4.1 The draft Annual Report 2008/09 is attached as Appendix A (pages 11.7 – 11.33). Areas of text which are show **as shaded** are still to be completed and/or checked. Members of Community Scrutiny are asked to give feedback on the accuracy, tone and general content of this version of the document.

4.2 Items previously required, identified and agreed for the Community Scrutiny work programme for the 2009/10 civic year are set out in Appendix B (pages 11.34 – 11.35). New items requested but not yet agreed by this Committee are shown in italics.

4.3 The local criteria for selecting topics to scrutinise within East Herts are included in Appendix C (page 11.36) . These six criteria were reviewed during the recent evaluation workshops and members decided they were still valid and agreed to keep them in place for the coming year.

4.4 During the workshops a number of items were suggested for inclusion and the following 'allocations' were proposed for those topics relevant to Community Scrutiny Committee remit:

Item/topic	How this might be 'allocated'
CCTV Partnership	Already have a CCTV Joint Committee and the CBS 'Shared Services' task and finish group is currently looking at this relationship as part of its scope.
Community Safety	East Herts Community Safety Partnership (Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership) is in place and members already have access to their Strategic Assessment 2009/10 at http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=7372 Request to bring a plan for the next phase of public consultation on this issue for scrutiny to the 21 July meeting.
Impact of 'credit crunch' on homelessness prevention, housing and benefits services	A report came to Community Scrutiny Committee in January 2009 (Affordable Housing Options in the current economic climate). Reports already programmed into committee meetings for 2009/10 at the request of members.
Empty Homes Strategy – is it robust enough?	Request to bring a draft of the new Empty Homes Strategy and action plan for scrutiny to the 27 October meeting in response to members' interest voiced at an earlier meeting.
Review improvements to leisure provision and meet SLM one year on.	Performance indicators relating to leisure will be reported to committee within the 'Healthcheck' item at each meeting. A meeting with SLM has been provisionally scheduled for 26 January 2010.
Play Strategy	If this is of interest, the timing of a review of the strategy and action plan would be most appropriate for 26 January 2010.
Youth Services (including more activities for teenagers)	This service is due to be reviewed by County during 2009/10 and districts will be invited to contribute to a Joint Scrutiny activity.
Castle Hall	A report from the Castle Hall 'way forward' group has been submitted to this meeting. A decision on future reviews/monitoring can be made in the light of those discussions.
Community Meals – monitoring service	From July 2009, it is planned that HCC will assume responsibility for the contract

<p>delivery following change in provider</p>	<p>to provide community meals in the district. This service needs to be allowed to run for long enough to gain sufficient data and time for analysis. Any monitoring would need to be 'long arm' as East Herts is not managing the contract – so, if the topic is of interest, then a decision on timing and methodology needs to be made.</p>
<p>Markets in East Herts</p>	<p>This promoted significant interest. Although the topic could sit with CBS (income from fees/charges) or Environment Scrutiny (economic development), it was felt that the 'community' aspect was the most important one to explore in the current retail environment. Members were very keen on the idea of a task and finish group being set up to scope and scrutinise this topic in more detail.</p>
<p>Community Voice</p>	<p>An extensive scrutiny review was undertaken on this topic during 2006 and a report published in January 2007. Members may feel it is timely to check whether the 17 recommendations contained in that report are all achieving the planned outcomes/results. A report in 2010, would give data for 3 years operation under the new set-up.</p>
<p>Police – front desk enquiry offices and opening hours</p>	<p>In the January 2009 edition of Herts Horizons, the local Police Authority advertised that it was rationalising the opening hours of police station enquiry offices and had “asked the Constabulary to explore opportunities for local authorities to host enquiry offices ...” They claimed the new arrangements will provide guaranteed opening hours, which will be publicised widely, and provide a reliable service to the public. Members are asked whether this topic is of interest/meets the local selection criteria and, if so, what aspect would be open to district authority scrutiny.</p>

5.0 Consultation

5.1 Potential topics for scrutiny are always invited from members of the public, the Executive and all Members.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 According to the Council's constitution, the scrutiny committees are responsible for the setting of their own work programme in consultation with the Executive and in doing so they shall take into account wishes of members on that committee who are not members of the largest political group on the Council.

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 Any additional meetings and every task and finish group has resource needs linked to officer support activity and time for officers from the services to make the required input.

8.0 Human Resource Implications

8.1 none

9.0 Risk Management Implications

9.1 Matters which may benefit from scrutiny may be overlooked. The selection of inappropriate topics for review would risk inefficient use of resources. Where this involved partners, it could risk damaging the reputation of the council and relations with partners.

Background Papers: summary attached as Appendix C

Four principles of good public scrutiny published by CfPS (Centre for Public Scrutiny)
East Herts Council own current guidelines for selecting issues for review.

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