

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 27 OCTOBER 2009

REPORT BY: CHAIRMAN OF COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

12 WORK PROGRAMME 2009/10

WARD(S) AFFECTED: none

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report is intended to support the Community Scrutiny Committee in reviewing and planning its work programme for 2009/10.

<u>RECOMMENDATION FOR : COMMUNITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u>	
(A)	that the work programme shown in this report be reviewed and agreed; and
(B)	that the scrutiny officer be asked to make any changes, additions or arrangements as might be discussed in the meeting.

1.0 Background

1.1 Items previously required, identified or suggested for the work programme are set out in Essential Reference Paper 'B' (Pages 12.6 - 12.8).

2.0 Report

2.1 The report 'East Herts Empty Homes – Strategy and Action Plan' originally scheduled for this meeting, has been delayed to allow for more extensive external consultation to be completed. With Members' agreement, this item will be added to the agenda for the next meeting on 26 January 2010.

- 2.2 Members will have noticed the addition to this agenda of the report on 'Better Ways of Working with Parish Councils'. This was a late request from the Community and Cultural Services team and agreed to by the committee chairman.
- 2.3 Since the last meeting of this committee, the scrutiny officer has been contacted by a resident who has drawn attention to the closing down of "public services" in Bishop's Stortford. He particularly named Jobcentre Plus, but said that this was just one example of how residents in this major town in the district were being disadvantaged. He asked if Community Scrutiny could "investigate and do something about it".
- 2.4 East Herts has no control over the decisions made by government agencies (in this case, the Department of Work and Pensions) and members may feel the topic falls outside the selection criteria/remit of this committee – see back page of Essential Reference Paper 'B' (Pages 12.6 - 12.8). However, there may be a particular perspective on the issue raised by this resident which members do feel is relevant to explore. Discussion is invited to identify if there is any scope or support for a scrutiny review or whether another approach would be seen as more appropriate.
- 2.5 On 6 October, East Herts Council was notified that Hertfordshire County Council overview and scrutiny committee had set up a Youth Connexions Topic Group (equivalent to our task and finish group). All District/Borough councils are being invited to give evidence to the group on 14 December 2009. An extract of their initial communication is given at the top of Essential Reference Paper 'C' (Page 12.9) and this invitation has been passed on to the appropriate portfolio holder and Head of Service.
- 2.6 Members of Community Scrutiny Committee may have particular points on the topic of 'Youth Connexions' which they would like the Executive Member to consider when she prepares her evidence. We have been promised a more detailed briefing document to clarify the scope of the review and the questions they plan to address with witnesses. Given the short timeframe, Members are asked to pass any comments to the Scrutiny Officer who will work with the Chairman of Community Scrutiny Committee to compile a summary for the Executive member.
- 2.7 Along similar lines, the County Council has also set up a Crime and Disorder Topic Group looking at community safety with a specific focus on the role and effectiveness of PCSOs. A copy of

their letter is given at the bottom of Essential Reference Paper 'C' (Page 12.9) and the appropriate portfolio holder and Head of Service have been alerted to the invitation.

- 2.8 The timeframe for this review is a little longer and it could be possible for Members to discuss their views on the topic with the Executive member at the next meeting of Community Scrutiny Committee on 26 January 2010 – if Members are minded to extend him an invitation and make time on that agenda (subject to his availability). Again, the Council has been promised a more detailed briefing document to clarify the scope of the review and the questions they plan to address with witnesses.
- 2.9 Following notification through a recent Members' Information Bulletin (MIB), Community Scrutiny Committee is reminded that the start of the Corporate Business Scrutiny meetings on 19 January 2010 and 16 February 2010 will be run as formal Joint Scrutiny meetings. This is to allow members of the other scrutiny committees have a full debate on the budget setting (Jan) and service plans (Feb) reports. There will be a separate agenda and a Chairman will be elected at the start of each Joint session.
- 2.10 Members are reminded that the next meeting of this committee on 26 January 2010 is scheduled to take place in the Waytemore Room at the Causeway in Bishop's Stortford.
- 2.11 Members are asked to note the dates for the 'scrutiny evaluation' and 'topic planning' workshops scheduled for early in the new year. These workshops are planned to take place prior to the start of Joint Scrutiny/CBS on 19 January and 16 February 2010 (resp). These sessions offer members an opportunity to shape the face of scrutiny in East Herts during the 2010/11 civic year. All scrutiny members are encouraged to come and contribute to the debate, although written evaluation forms will be available for those who are unable to attend on the evening.
- 3.0 Implications/Consultations
- 3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within Essential Reference Paper 'A' (Page 12.5).

Background Papers

Four principles of good public scrutiny published by CfPS (Centre for Public Scrutiny) [click here for link to CfPS external site](#)

East Herts Council own current guidelines for selecting issues for review. A summary of this information is printed at the back of Essential Reference Paper 'B'.

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ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

<p>Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives</p>	<p>Effective use of the scrutiny process contributes to the Council's ability to meet two core objectives:</p> <p>Fit for purpose, services fit for you <i>Deliver customer focused services by maintaining and developing a well managed and publicly accountable organisation.</i></p> <p>Leading the way, working together <i>Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.</i></p> <p>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.</p> <p>Any additional issues identified for scrutiny will relate to at least one of the Council's corporate objectives.</p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>Potential topics for scrutiny are always invited from members of the public, the Executive and all Members.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Financial:</p>	<p>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.</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>none</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>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.</p>