

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 MARCH 2010

REPORT BY CHAIRMAN OF ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE

9. SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2010/11

WARD(S) AFFECTED: None

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report is intended to support the Environment Scrutiny Committee in reviewing and planning its work programme for 2010/11.

<u>RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</u>	
(A)	The work programme detailed in this report be reviewed and agreed;
(B)	The scrutiny officer be asked to make any changes, additions or arrangements as might be discussed in the meeting; and
(C)	Members express their views on the options presented for approaching aspects of budget scrutiny so these can be taken into account when preparing the Integrated Financial and Service Planning timetable for the coming year.

1.0 Background

1.1 Items previously required, identified or suggested for the work programme are set out in **Essential Reference Paper B**.

2.0 Report

2.1 At their recent meeting, Corporate Business Scrutiny (CBS) agreed that the first part of the CBS meeting on 1 June 2010 should be formally held as a Joint Scrutiny meeting for the two agenda items:

- 2009/10 Out-turns and Targets.
- Service Plans October 2009 – March 2010 monitoring report.

- 2.2 This important data will be freshly available and a Joint session will give all scrutiny members opportunity of reviewing the reports in a timely manner. Although Environment Scrutiny committee does have a meeting scheduled in June, Community Scrutiny members would have had to wait until the very end of July before having an opportunity to discuss this data. This delay would have limited the impact and influence of scrutiny if the latter did wish to make any recommendations.
- 2.3 Members of Environment Scrutiny are therefore invited to join the Joint session on 1 June 2010 at 7:30pm in the Council Chamber. After these two items, the evening will revert to a CBS-only meeting for their remaining agenda items.
- 2.4 Members are also reminded that they are invited to the April CBS meeting where the report setting out the business case for Castle Hall redevelopment is due to be presented. The project contains plans for alternative, low carbon energy provision on the site and members of Environment Scrutiny committee could bring a useful perspective to the debate.
- 2.5 This CBS meeting is scheduled for 13 April 2010 but election 'purdah' may necessitate a change. Members are asked to note any alteration to meeting dates which will be communicated formally through Democratic Services.
- 2.6 Looking forward to the 2010/11 programme for this committee, members are invited to consider whether they would like to approach the scrutiny of budget issues as a stepped process – rather than tackling everything at once.
- 2.7 As the Medium Term Financial Plan and proposed savings are already set out for the next 4 years, it would be possible to identify specific aspects (with priority being focused on 2011/12 plans) to review in more detail early in the civic year.
- 2.8 Identifying projects to scrutinise in the 2011/12 Capital Programme would also be possible as these proposals are already published.
- 2.9 After 1 June 2010, when the two reports listed above in paragraph 2.1 are available and presented at CBS, then it will also be possible to identify:

- Services which are performing considerably over or under target
 - Services which are significantly over or under spent on budget.
- 2.10 Members would then have data available to review the performance/cost balance of services and make informed recommendations on new targets or reallocation of budgets.
- 2.11 Members are asked to consider how they would prefer the discussions on identified aspects of the MTFP, Capital Programme and the performance/cost balance of specific services to take place. Members' views will be taken into account when the Integrated Financial and Service Planning timetable is drawn up for the coming year.
- 2.12 One option would be to have the discussions as an agenda item for all committee members during a main scheduled scrutiny meeting.
- 2.13 A second option would be for a cross-committee task and finish group to be set up specifically to hear evidence on identified items for budget scrutiny coming from the three committees.
- 2.14 Is it worth clarifying here that regardless of which option is pursued, the findings will be fed back to a proposed joint scrutiny meeting in late Autumn 2010, so they can be considered alongside all existing options for 2011/12 – 2013/14 and any new options for 2014/15. The recommendations from this meeting will be taken into account when the main budget reports are presented in early 2011 (for financial year 2011/12).

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'**.

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's own guidelines for selecting issues for review. A summary of this information is detailed 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>