

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 8 JUNE 2010

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND CONSERVATION

6. REVIEW OF ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY – PROGRESS WITH ACTION PLAN

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To advise the committee of progress to date with the Action Plan agreed by the Executive on 13 October 2009, following a review by a Task and Finish Group.

RECOMMENDATION FOR ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

<u>RECOMMENDATION FOR ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:</u>	
(A)	That the progress with the action plan to date be noted.

1.0 Background

1.1 At Environment Scrutiny Committee on 2 December 2008, it was agreed to set up a task and finish group to undertake a review of local environmental quality.

1.2 Severe weather delayed the first meeting of the task and finish group which lead to the Chairman having to table the scoping report at the Environment Scrutiny Committee on 3 March 2009.

1.3 In summary, the review considered:

- Current environmental quality performance/standards within the district from a residents' perspective and from wider information sources.
- Council's approach to maintaining and improving environmental quality within the context of legislation, powers and duties and limited financial resources.
- Measuring and monitoring progress against/using ENCAMS Matrix model (LEQSE).
- Best practice approaches taken by similar rural district councils

- Opportunities for partnership working with local and national agencies – including public, private and voluntary bodies.
- 1.4 Reports were also submitted to the Highways Joint Member Panel to gain support and commitment to the project.
 - 1.5 The review highlighted that although residents often believe that ‘the council’ is responsible for all local environmental issues, in fact these are spread across a range of local and national organisations with specific and limited responsibilities placed upon them by Government. These organisations need to work together to address the overall impression that residents have of environmental quality, in particular issues such as litter, graffiti, fly posting, highways maintenance, landscape maintenance (hard and soft), rivers and canals, street furniture.
 - 1.6 It was also recognised that private landowners of both residential and commercial property have a role to play in keeping their land and assets clean, tidy and free from graffiti and litter.
 - 1.7 In summary the review highlighted the need to work more closely with partners and private landowners to raise and maintain standards.
 - 1.8 The report and action plan were endorsed by Environment Scrutiny Committee on 15 September 2008 and by the Executive on 13 October 2009.
- 2.0 Report
 - 2.1 At the meeting held on 15 September 2009, Members requested that a progress report be brought back to the Committee after 6 Months.
 - 2.2 Progress against the action plan to date is detailed in **Essential Reference Paper B**. Although some good progress has been made, officers have necessarily prioritised the implementation of ARC and the design and procurement of a new refuse, recycling and street cleansing contract. There is more to do to develop the partnership elements of the action plan.
 - 2.3 Members are asked to note that many public bodies, including local authorities are facing difficult financial challenges and these may impact on their ability to maintain environmental quality standards. By way of example, Hertfordshire County Council reported to the last meeting of the East Herts Highways Joint

Member Panel that it had made changes to its road maintenance programme and the way it prioritises works. This included a decision to reduce the frequency of grass cutting on A roads to twice a year. While it is understood that such changes are necessary to meet the financial challenges, they will necessarily impact upon the number of complaints received by East Herts Council, residents' perceptions of environmental quality and potentially public satisfaction.

- 2.4 Consequently, it will become more important to raise the profile and reputation of the Council by publicising the good performance and successes of partnership initiatives.

Background Papers:

Report to Environment Scrutiny Committee – Environmental Quality – Scoping Report - 2 December 2008.

Report to Environment Scrutiny Committee – Update on Environmental Quality Review - 3 March 2009.

Report to Executive – Report from Environmental Quality Task and Finish Group - 13 October 2009.

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ESSENTIAL REFERENCE PAPER 'A'

<p>Contribution to the Council's Corporate Priorities/ Objectives <i>(delete as appropriate):</i></p>	<p>Pride in East Herts <i>Improve standards of the neighbourhood and environmental management in our towns and villages.</i></p> <p>Caring about what's built and where <i>Care for and improve our natural and built environment.</i></p> <p>Leading the way, working together <i>Deliver responsible community leadership that engages with our partners and the public.</i></p>
<p>Consultation:</p>	<p>During the Review conducted by the Task and Finish Group consultation was conducted with key partners through a Partners Conference held on 16 June 2009.</p> <p>Officers consulted with Parish and Town Councils at the Rural Parish Conference on 8 May 2009</p> <p>Feedback from these meetings were incorporated into the action plan.</p>
<p>Legal:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Financial:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Human Resource:</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Risk Management:</p>	<p>Environmental quality is an important attribute in residents perceptions of public satisfaction with the Council and East Herts as a place to live.</p>