

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 17 FEBRUARY 2015

REPORT BY CHAIRMAN OF ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY

EVALUATION OF SCRUTINY 2014/15 AND WORK PROGRAMME
PLANNING FOR 2015/16

WARD(S) AFFECTED: *none*

Purpose/Summary of Report

- To review 2014/15 and determine Environment Scrutiny Committee's future work programme

RECOMMENDATION FOR ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY

That:

(A)	the comments given as part of the evaluation exercise are collated and used to frame the draft 2014/15 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report; and
(B)	the work programme shown in this report be agreed (subject to confirmation by the new 2015/16 committee)

1.0 Background

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

2.0 Evaluation

2.1 During last year's scrutiny evaluation process, Members identified a number of areas of practice where they wanted to improve and these were included in the 2014/15 Action Plan. This document is included here as **Essential Reference Paper C**.

2.2 Reflecting back on the past year, Members are asked to:

- comment on progress against this action plan
- describe specific examples of successful practice from the work of this scrutiny committee

- identify any challenges or barriers which they have met during this time.
- 2.3 Members are asked to recommend which (if any) of the actions should be carried forward to the 2015/16 Action Plan and what additions or changes might be needed to strengthen the role of scrutiny in the coming year.
- 2.4 As part of the wider evaluation discussion, Members are asked to identify what they are most pleased to have achieved through scrutiny during the past year and what has been the most interesting or useful thing they have learned during the year.
- 2.5 Evaluation feedback from all the scrutiny committees and the Health and Wellbeing Panel will be collated and used to frame the draft 2014/15 Overview and Scrutiny annual report. This draft will be reviewed and approved by the scrutiny chairmen and presented to Council on 29 July 2015.
- 2.6 Any suggestions on how the function of scrutiny might be changed or improved will be considered by the new (2015/16) scrutiny chairmen and officers at their first meeting of the new civic year.
- 3.0 Work Programme Planning
- 3.1 A draft work programme for 2015/16 meetings of Environment Scrutiny Committee is shown in **Essential Reference Paper B** (subject to confirmation). The timing of some items shown may have to change depending on availability of essential data (eg from central government).
- 3.2 Delays in the publication and availability of some key information (external to this authority) have already resulted in two scheduled reports being moved into the 2015/16 civic year and some coming to committee later in the year than shown on previous copies of the work programme. **Essential Reference Paper B** attached shows a draft work programme which takes account of the expected external delays (based on current information).
- 3.3 Members are asked whether they wish to extend an invitation to one or more of the Executive/portfolio holders to attend a particular meeting or for a specific agenda item listed in the draft work programme.
- 3.4 A request has been received inviting Environment Scrutiny Committee to play a new role in the monitoring of progress against

management plans arising from the **Conservation Area Appraisals**.

- 3.5 The ward councillor is seen as central to the success of these plans by being a 'conservation champion' and the 'eyes on the ground' to support the work of the specialist officer(s) of the authority.
- 3.6 It is suggested that Councillors would be set up in groups, as the plans are ready and approved – to meet together under the guidance of lead officers to discuss progress on the management plans. The groups could look at balancing progress of quick/easy 'wins' against investing resources into large/complex 'problem' sites. Councillors would be encouraged and supported to work with local householders/landowners and relevant agencies (eg town/parish councils) to progress items on the management plan.
- 3.7 Councillors would be acting in their role of community leaders/activist to bring people together to find practical and pragmatic ways forward (including identifying possible sources of grants etc).
- 3.8 Working in these reference groups will give councillors the chance to be supported by specialist officers, learn from each other and identify successes and any areas of challenge or common problems. It will also give experienced ward councillors and newly elected councillors the chance to work together on an important project.
- 3.9 The groups' experiences could then be reported annually to Environment Scrutiny – to record progress against the management plans but, more importantly, to make the committee aware of any common barriers or challenges. This will allow scrutiny to consider the issues and make recommendations to the Executive Member (or other agencies) as to how progress might be achieved.
- 3.10 If the current Environment Scrutiny Members are in agreement, a more detailed version of how this might work and the make-up of the proposed reference groups would come to the first meeting of the new Environment Scrutiny committee (9 June 2015) with a view to the first 'annual report' on the Conservation Areas being presented to the committee at their final meeting of 2015/16 (23 Feb 2016).

- 3.11 Members are asked whether there is any additional topic they wish to put forward for consideration by scrutiny in 2015/16 (subject to confirmation by the new committee at their first meeting in June 2015).
- 3.12 In suggesting topics, Members should have in mind the council's agreed corporate priorities for the coming year (shown below) and be able to identify what tangible outcome(s) and benefits they would want to achieve through undertaking this piece of work.

PEOPLE: fair and accessible services for those that use them and opportunities for everyone to contribute
This priority focuses on enhancing the quality of life, health and wellbeing of individuals, families and communities, particularly those who are vulnerable.
PLACE: safe and clean
This priority focuses on the standard of the built environment and our neighbourhoods and ensuring our towns and villages are safe and clean.
PROSPERITY: improving the economic and social opportunities available to our communities
This priority focuses on safeguarding and enhancing our unique mix of rural and urban communities, promoting sustainable, economic and social opportunities.

4.0 Implications/Consultations

- 4.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers: none

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