



# OVERVIEW and SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15



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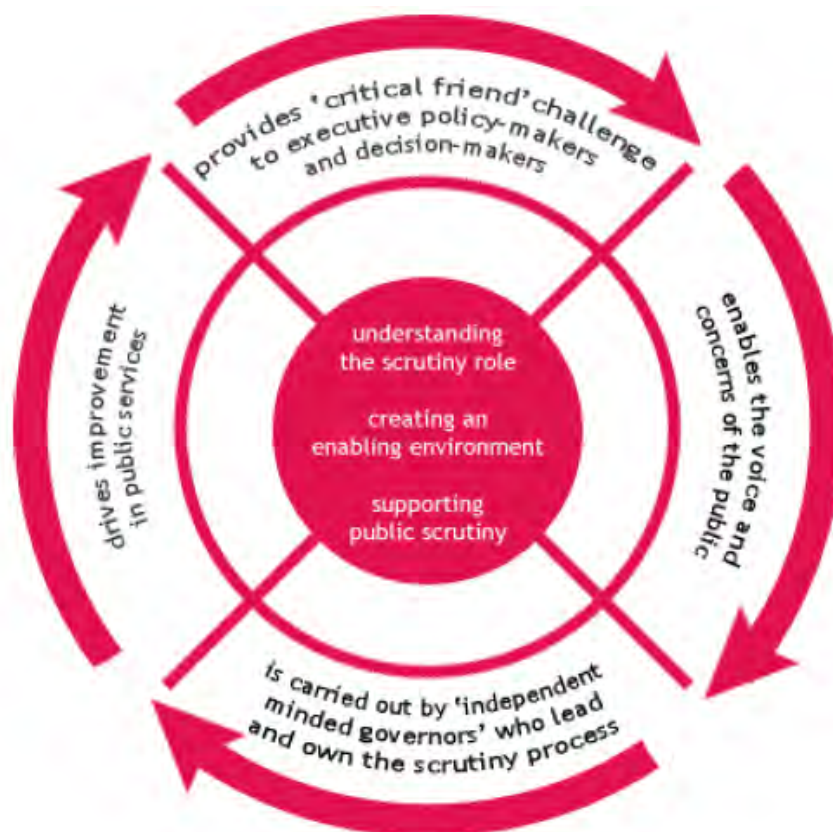
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## 1. SCRUTINY – what is it?

Scrutiny is designed to provide an open and transparent forum in which your elected councillors, sitting in public, can review the work of the council to check that policies and services are meeting the priorities and the needs of local people. Scrutiny committees don't make final decisions themselves, but they have the power of influence. Following a debate, they make recommendations (usually to the Executive – but could be to another committee or partner agency) based on public and partner opinions, performance data, examples of best practice, expert advice and research/evidence.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) sets out the 'four principles of good scrutiny' which should apply in the scrutiny cycle. These are supported and have been adopted by East Herts:




A total of 29 councillors have served on the scrutiny committees and Health Engagement Panel during 2014/15.


This annual report gives an overview of their key activities (it does not attempt to list every discussion or decision) and sets out the hopes and plans we have for the coming year.


## 2. HOW DO WE ORGANISE SCRUTINY AT EAST HERTS.

During 2014/15, scrutiny was supported by two officers working 0.8 FTE between them on this duty. The Scrutiny Officers' role is to provide project management support to the Scrutiny Committees and undertake research and information analysis in relation to reviews set up by the main Committees. Another important strand of the officer's role is to ensure external witnesses, experts, partners and local residents are invited to be involved in the scrutiny activity within East Herts.

East Herts has three 'topic specific' scrutiny committees.


<b>Corporate Business Scrutiny (CBS):</b> meets 6 times per year		
They keep a close eye on .....	Regular performance monitoring	
	Budget setting proposals and strategies	
	Comments, Compliments and Complaints	
	Scrutiny and policy development of the 'business' side of the council including: finance, ICT, facilities, legal, procurement and reviewing plans for shared services	
 <p>Chairman: Councillor Gary Jones</p>	<b>Membership: Councillors</b>	
	S Bull	G Williamson (vice chair)
	J Mayes	J Wing
	W Mortimer	J Wyllie
	T Page	G Cutting (sub)
	M Pope	C Rowley (sub)
	J Ranger	M Wood (sub)

<b>Environment Scrutiny:</b> meets 4 times per year		
Their focus is on .....	Planning Policy and Transport	
	Waste Management and Environmental Quality	
	Conservation and Climate Change	
	Parks and Open Spaces	
 <p>Chairman: Councillor Mark Pope</p>	<b>Membership: Councillors</b>	
	D Abbott	G Williamson
	W Ashley	C Woodward
	P Ballam	B Wrangles
	E Buckmaster	
	A Dearman	R Beeching (sub)
	C Rowley (vice chair)	M Newman (sub)

<b>Community Scrutiny: meets 4 times per year</b>														
They focus on .....	Community Safety and Protection													
	Community Development, Leisure & Culture													
	Health and Housing													
	Ageing Well agenda													
 <p>Chairman: Councillor Diane Hollebon</p>	<b>Membership: Councillors</b>													
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During the year, two **Joint Scrutiny** sessions are held to allow members from all the committees to come together to discuss significant budgetary and cross-cutting issues. It is cost effective and more time efficient to hold a single meeting rather than three separate ones.

During 2014/15 we had an important 'standing' panel operating under Community Scrutiny Committee:

<b>Health and Wellbeing Panel: meets 4 times per year</b>								
This Panel has an outward-facing focus and works closely with local partners across the health, public health and wellbeing agenda .....	Our Public Health strategy and action plan							
	Relationships and partnership working with health and social care agencies important to the district including: Local hospitals and NHS trusts The new Clinical Commissioning Groups of GPs Hertfordshire County Council Health and Community Services The Director of Public Health and our local public health agencies Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board Voluntary and third sector organisations							
 <p>Chairman: Councillor Norma Symonds</p>	<b>Membership: Councillors</b>							
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### 3. How do the Committees decide what to scrutinise?

There are just a few things that local government scrutiny has a statutory duty to look at – such as reviewing at least one Crime and Disorder topic annually and supporting the budget setting process – but after that Councillors can ask to examine any issue that they believe to be:

- Of local public concern
- Linked to the council's vision and priorities
- Capable of being influenced
- Not being scrutinised by another body

At East Herts we think it is important to spend time scrutinising things which allow us to reduce risk (for residents and the council), which might incur significant costs or which could bring substantial savings to the council....and during 2014/15 we have tackled topics under all three of those headings.

Scrutiny uses the council's Corporate Priorities to focus its work. As the economic environment and local issues change these are reviewed annually to keep them relevant. Currently we are working with **PEOPLE, PLACE and PROSPERITY** as our three priorities. For more details, you can go to <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=11550>

### 4. How to get involved

Scrutiny is strengthened by involving partners and residents. They bring expertise, local knowledge, fresh ideas and external challenge.

If you would like to know more, ring the Scrutiny Officer on 01992 531612 or e-mail [scrutiny@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@eastherts.gov.uk)

You can access full details on any item or outcome mentioned in the following pages of this report via our website. Agendas, reports and minutes of every council committee are posted and regularly updated – and meetings are open to the public:

<http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/committees>

If you ever take part in one of our scrutiny reviews and every time you attend as an observer, we would value your feedback to help us improve the process. An on-line feedback form is available at

<http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/scrutinyfeedback>

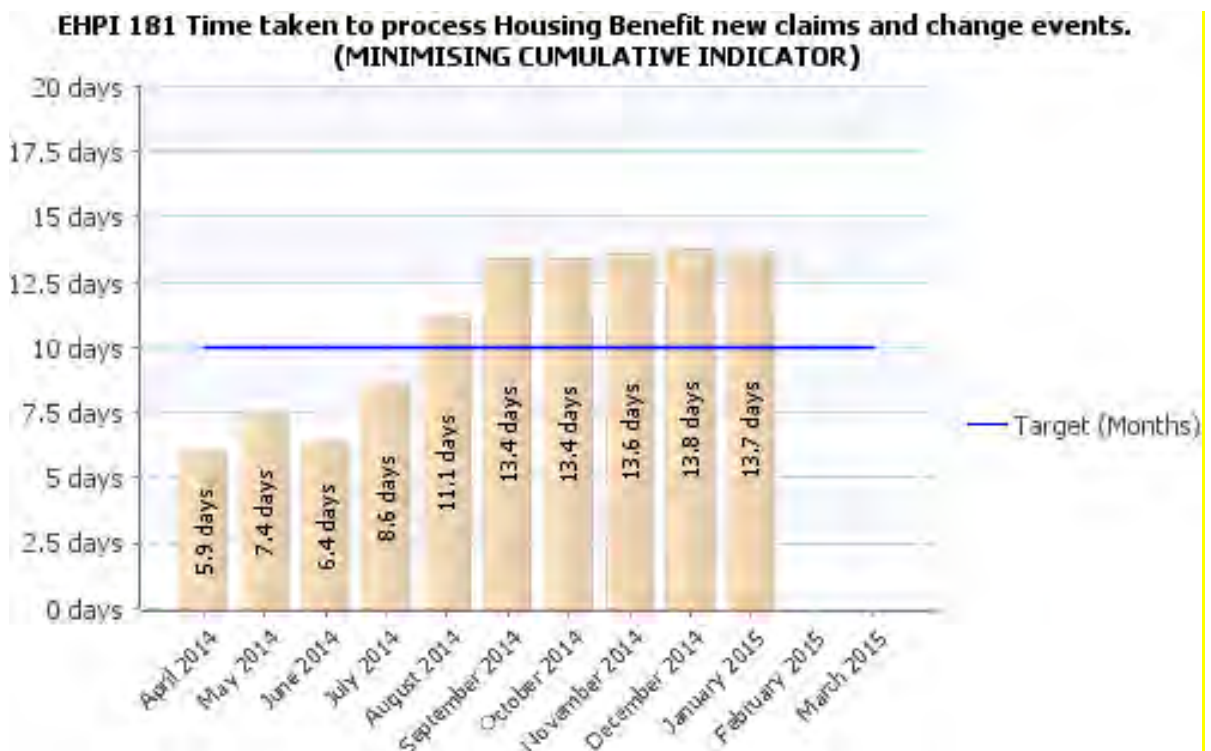
## 5. LOOKING BACK:

Scrutiny forms part of a continuous process of seeking to improve or maintain quality and standards of service delivery for our residents. There is no point setting up something new or changing the way we do things without going back to check that the new ideas or projects are working well and delivering all the benefits to the public (and to the council) that scrutiny members hoped to see. Consequently, some of the work of scrutiny is to review results, performance figures, outcomes and feedback and make those important checks.

### Performance monitoring:

When funding is tight, it is particularly important for the council to make every penny count and make a measurable difference to residents. At every scrutiny meeting (alternate meetings for CBS), councillors receive a report showing how well the services are performing against target levels. The report is known as a 'Healthcheck' for good reasons – it is one way of taking the temperature of the council and checking it is functioning well. For CBS this report also includes financial information so that scrutiny gets an holistic view across the council's business functions.

One example from the Community Scrutiny spring 2015 meeting is copied below. It relates to the average time taken to process Housing Benefit new claims and change events.



The chart shows a growing trend to a longer process time moving above the target of 10 days. Elected members and the authority do not want to keep residents waiting any longer than necessary, so a reason for the increase and a solution is what scrutiny wants to hear.



In this case there has been a considerable increase in complexity of caseload. For example, many more people are now working on a 'zero hours' contract which means they have to notify the Housing Benefit team of a 'change in circumstances' every week/month as their income varies – however small that change is. The team then have to process every notification from every individual - contributing to an increased volume of work.

Scrutiny were assured that additional resources had already been approved in order to cope with the workload however skilled Revenues and Benefits staff are in demand right across the country and it takes time to recruit to these specialist posts. At the time of the spring report, scrutiny was made aware that the team was running with 5.8 full-time equivalent vacancies.

With a great deal of hard work by the existing team, some temporary staff and the new recruits as they joined us, Members were very pleased to hear at a later scrutiny meeting in mid-March that the average process time had already recovered to 10.28 days (from the 13.7 days shown on the chart).

Scrutiny cannot prevent external changes or fluctuations in demand for the council's services, but it is their role to check that measures are in place to identify and rectify any issues and minimise the impact on residents.

As all the 'Healthcheck' reports are available on line, residents (and the press) can act as '**public scrutineers**' at any time by checking up on how well the council is doing against its performance targets. Just click onto East Herts website <http://online.eastherts.gov.uk/moderngov/mqListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

### **Service Plan Monitoring:**

At the start of the year every area of the council sets out the new projects it plans to tackle during the next 12 months. As part of the budget setting process councillors agree (or not) to fund these and every project has a completion date set against it. Halfway through the year the scrutiny committees get a report on the progress of each of the projects that fall under their remit – with another report coming to them at year end.

One mid year report which came to Environment Scrutiny in November 2014 began by stating:

*In total, there are 32 actions in the 2014/15 Service Plans relevant to Environment Scrutiny Committee, of which:*

*16% (5) have already been achieved*

*53% (17) are on target*

*22% (7) have had their completion dates revised*


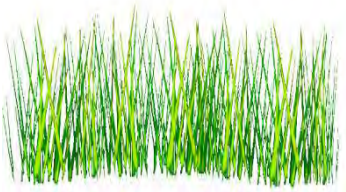
*06% (2) have been suspended*

*03% (1) has been deleted as the action is no longer appropriate*

A good start – but scrutiny is more interested in the 10 projects which have not gone fully to plan as these might lead to problems further down the line. Each hold up is explained and councillors check to see whether they are satisfied that enough is being done to remedy the situation. Sometimes it is another agency outside the council which might be taking longer than expected to act or make a decision – but if it is internal, then we have to find a solution and learn from the situation.

## What else did scrutiny look back over and review during 2014/15?

CBS	
	<p><b>Corporate Annual Report 2013/14.</b> As with any large organisation, East Herts publishes an annual report every year. This document covers the council's key achievements over the previous financial year for each of the corporate priorities, provides an overview of the council's financial position and performance and ends with a statement on contracts. The early draft of the document seen by scrutiny gives an opportunity to comment on and shape the final report. As this document is available to residents, Members commented that there were a couple of places where the statistical information was not as clear as it might be. Changes were made for the final version around data relating to population figures and modes of travel (as reported through the recently published 2011 census returns).</p>
	<p><b>Comments! Compliments! Complaints! 2013/14</b> To put things in perspective, this Council receives over half a million phone calls a year – and no organisation of our size and complexity is going to get everything right every time. The number of formal complaints received in a year is low – but they all need to be taken seriously and investigated. Scrutiny was informed that the total number of complaints between April 2013 and March 2014 had increased slightly to 84 against 69 for the previous year. During the same period, the council received 116 compliments. Members were content to see the corrective action taken in the 18 cases which were upheld at Stage 1 review and no pattern indicating an underlying problem was evident. Every year some residents choose to escalate their case up to the Local Government Ombudsman and during the 2013/14 period, 6 cases were adjudicated on at this level. As in previous years, no cases of maladministration were identified.</p>
	<p><b>Data Protection one-year action plan – progress and closure report.</b> In their Data Protection Governance role, CBS Members considered the final report on the action plan for the council's data protection compliance programme. The progress on integrating data protection into staff training, service delivery and review of IT processes were felt to be robust. The majority of the discussion centred on the Councillors' role in handling sensitive material sent to them by residents, how to store data securely and the importance of safe disposal of information. The scheme of registering with the ICO as an individual 'data controller' was also re-emphasised to Members.</p>
	<p><b>East Herts Improvement Plan – final monitoring report.</b> In 2013/14 the council invited in a team of external 'inspectors' to undertake a Peer Review. The opening paragraph of their report said: "<i>East Hertfordshire District Council ... is a sound council, delivering good services with a high level of satisfaction from residents and underpinned by a healthy financial base. It is well focused on the residents and communities it serves</i>" but there is always room for improvement and a plan was agreed by the Executive in June 2013. CBS was asked to check on progress for the next 12 months and this monitoring report</p>

	<p>brought that process to an end. Scrutiny was pleased to see that 21/28 actions were fully completed/achieved and those that were still underway would be added to the relevant service action plan so the desired improvements were not 'lost'.</p>
<p><a href="#">Ctrl + CLICK HERE</a> for more information on Housing and Council Tax Support benefits at East Herts</p>	<p><b>Revenues and Benefits Shared Service – two years on.</b> Members were reminded that the Shared Revenues and Benefits Service is a partnership that operates for both East Herts Council and Stevenage Borough Council. It has been formally operating since 1 August 2011 with a shared operating model but a full shared service commenced in April 2012. This was one of the first Shared Services that East Herts entered into, and remains one of only two Shared Revenues and Benefits services in Hertfordshire.</p> <p>Members were interested to hear how each of the 4 core functions operated as a shared service:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) <i>Benefits (Housing Benefit and Council Tax Support)</i></li> <li>b) <i>Revenues (Includes Council Tax and Business Rates)</i></li> <li>c) <i>Systems and Support</i></li> <li>d) <i>Control and Fraud</i></li> </ul> <p>- but the main discussion was around the increase in workload arising from the raft of central government welfare reforms. The impact of both the reforms themselves and the resulting delays in receiving a service from the authority caused by the increased workload did concern Members. Scrutiny supported the shared service but asked the Executive to lobby central government through appropriate channels to review the burden caused by the frequency of recalculation of benefits entitlement when changes were minimal.</p>
<p><b>ENVIRONMENT</b></p>	
<p><b>Did you know? - each year</b></p>  <p>we clean 37,000 km of streets + cut 3 million square metres of grass!</p> 	<p><b>2013/14 Contract Performance:</b></p> <p>With a combined value of £5.4 million the refuse &amp; recycling, street cleansing and grounds' maintenance contracts cover the largest area of service expenditure across the council – so residents should rightly expect both performance and value for money to be closely monitored and scrutinised. As well as receiving performance data for every month, an annual report is brought to scrutiny for each financial year.</p> <p>Members were very pleased with the performance of both contractors with a minimal number of warnings, rectification notices and default notices generated compared to the high volume of work undertaken:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>residual waste collected from households had dropped by 4kg per household – saving on waste disposal costs</i></li> <li><i>there was a decrease of 10% in the number of complaints about litter - and validated complaints in connection with grounds' maintenance halved compared to the previous year when adverse weather caused problems for the contractor despite a 17.3% increase in the number of fly tipping incidents, the average time taken to clear them reduced to 1.41 days (from 1.47 days)</i></li> <li><i>out of 170 abandoned vehicles inspected only 3 were not seen within the 24 hour target – a performance figure of 98.2%</i></li> </ul> <p>The major new initiative from 2013/14 was the change from a kerbside sorting of dry recyclables using boxes to a dual stream comingled system, with paper being kept separate in a box and all other dry recyclables placed in a new blue bin. This project</p>

	<p>(called SPARC) necessitated the delivery of 49,000 new wheeled bins and 28,000 inner paper boxes and a change in collection days for 90% of households.</p> <p>During the year scrutiny was kept up to date on the implementation of the new scheme and was aware of the increase in workload at the call centre and the number of 'missed bins' when the new collection routes first started in November 2014. Both responses were expected and well managed and incidents quickly fell back to normal levels. However positive the current picture, Scrutiny is keen to support the work of officers to find further opportunities for expansion or improvement. This year the discussion focussed on plans to extend kerbside recycling to as many communal properties (flats) as possible and on encouraging the use of compostable food caddy liners to divert food waste away from landfill (black bins) and into the brown bins for composting.</p>
	<p><b>Climate Change Action Plan – review of progress.</b></p> <p>Since the baseline figures were established in 2008/9, energy efficient measures put in as part of the action plan have reduced CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Hertford Theatre by 90,472 kg (29%)</li> <li>Council Offices by 448tonnes (15%)</li> <li>Leisure and Pool facilities by 50% per visit</li> <li>Waste Contract by 27% - including the use of more fuel efficient vehicles and revision of collection routes</li> </ul> <p>Members were pleased to see the positive outcomes from the plan that came out of a detailed Scrutiny Task and Finish group but voiced their disappointment and frustration that the high profile project – of a Micro Hydro unit in the weir alongside Hertford Theatre - had been delayed for so long by complex negotiations with the Environment Agency (EA). Members were advised that the Council's negotiations were continuing and the latest piece of work being undertaken was acting on the EA's new requirement for an 'Eel Pass'.</p> <p>Evidence showed that similar projects elsewhere in the UK had taken about 5 years to set up, so East Herts' experience in dealing with the EA was typical. Scrutiny asked to be kept up-to-date with progress.</p>
	<p><b>Flooding Winter 2013 – and the lessons learned.</b></p> <p>Scrutiny received a report providing an account of the steps taken by the Council in dealing with the flooding since November 2013 and the lessons subsequently learned. One problem of dealing with the situation at the time on the ground was illustrated by an example from an area in Stanstead Abbots affected by flooding, which involved eight different owners or agencies, each responsible for different stretches of water or areas of management.</p> <p>Members were pleased with the prompt and positive response of staff that had turned out during the emergency to assist evacuated residents. Specialist staff were still holding flood 'surgeries' to help effected households complete the complex paperwork to claim grant funding from central government. However, scrutiny did question the sustainability of such resource intensive activity if the emergency had lasted for a longer time or impacted a wider area of the district.</p> <p>As with any unexpected event involving significant numbers of people, 'good communication' is a challenge for all agencies.</p>



**COMMUNITY**



**Box office: 01992 531500**

**End of year report for Hertford Theatre.**  
 After a significant financial outlay in 2010 to modernise and relaunch the theatre in Hertford, scrutiny is keen to see continuing evidence of a return on that investment. There was a positive theme to the report outlining activity at the venue:  
*estimated footfall was 156,245 (up from 127,250)*  
*income from 54 live shows was £154,320 (up from 45 shows last year and an income of £144,339)*  
*tickets sold for the Panto of 9,047 (up from 8,500)*  
*283 cinema screenings with 22,051 tickets sold (up from 250 screenings and 20,073 tickets)*

Last year, Members asked for data on the ticket sales figures to be more comprehensive and the report they saw this time gave them a clearer picture on the balance of popular events with those that attract more minority interests. Catering for a wide range of customers is part of the role of a community resource. A new website design and a growing relationship with schools the college and professional arts groups have all added to the success of the past year. The year also saw a welcome upgrade to seating and to audio, lighting and technical equipment. Even with additional expenditure on property maintenance and equipment (following a flood caused by a water leak), the financial position is still positive against the business plan which scrutiny approved back in 2009. The volunteers' scheme which was launched in July 2011 is now established as a key element of the successful front of house operation. Members agree that the current cohort of 70 volunteers is a great asset to the theatre and has made a huge contribution to the welcome and the community feel of the venue and the committee gave them a sincere vote of thanks.



A full list of grants and supported projects is available on [www.eastherts.gov.uk/grants](http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/grants)

**Community Grants: applications and allocations.**  
 Scrutiny is keen to ensure that grants are made available to as wide a range of eligible groups as possible, with no focus in any one area of the district. They were pleased to hear that more than half of the Community Activities pot was allocated to organisations that are reliant on volunteers to raise funds and deliver activities. Also, more than half of awards made were to organisations that had never applied to the Council before for a grant. The Community Capital Grants (large and small) also saw more than half of awards made to organisations that had never applied for a grant before. From information provided in applications, it is estimated that more than 30,000 people will benefit from this grant pot.  
 In respect of the Performance to Excellence (Sports and Arts) grants, the year saw an increase of applications from Bishop's Stortford. Members were satisfied that measures will be put in place to encourage applications from young people living in our other towns and the villages for next year.



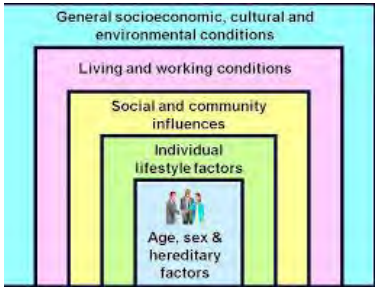
**Review of revised Housing Register and Allocations policy.**  
 Following some detailed work and a period of stakeholder consultation a new policy was introduced at the start of 2013/14. In order to check the agreed changes were not having any unexpected negative impact on applicants, residents and communities, a review at six and 12 months was requested. Evidence brought forward in this second report relating to 'village priority procedure' and 'salary threshold' did

not suggest a problem with the new policy. Scrutiny recommended continuing with the current rules and eligibility criteria for the rest of the year. Scrutiny feels that it is important to closely monitor the impact of changes to a policy which is as important and as sensitive as this one and look for any unintentional side effects.



**Annual Leisure contract performance report for 2014.**  
 On 1 January 2009, following a competitive tender process, the Council entered into a ten year fixed fee contract with the leisure provider SLM, trading as Everyone Active. This was the sixth annual report on their performance.  
 A key measure for the Council to assess the performance of the contractor in providing services that are attractive to local residents is the number of customers using the facilities. At the five sites in the district 733,366 visits were recorded in 2014 (up from 725,500 in 2013) for people attending the gym, group exercise classes, casual swimming, pool parties, school, private and Everyone Active swim lessons and outdoor activities including; tennis, bowls and football. Scrutiny was particularly pleased that over 49,500 of these visits were by people in the 60+age group showing that SLM were making a positive contribution to the wider 'Ageing Well' agenda.  
 Working with the council, SLM has also looked to reduce energy consumption across all sites – to reduce costs and contribute to bring down the council's overall carbon footprint. Following a big investment in pool covers last year, 2014 saw better insulation, more efficient air conditioning and LED lighting being installed.

**HWP**



**Full Year report on 2013/14 Public Health transitional action plan and Mid Year report on 2014/15 Health and Wellbeing action plan.**  
 Following the adoption of the new East Herts Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013-2018 in October 2013, scrutiny supported a Transitional Action Plan. This enabled a smooth link between the previous public health strategy and the new one which is about mainstreaming the public health agenda into the Council's core services. In 2013/14, we were able to complete 84% of projects (38 out of 45) and, between them, these projects are estimated to have benefitted 10,576 adults and children across East Herts. Projects ranged from smoking cessation to the allocation of small grants via the Public Health Partnership Fund (formerly LSP Health Inequalities Fund).  
 Members were pleased with the success rate and recommended that case studies be featured on the council's website and in Ward profiles so that all Members and the public could learn about progress in this area.  
 HWP was satisfied that there were justifiable reasons behind the seven non-completed projects – including shortage of staff and lack of external funding in some of our voluntary sector partners.  
 Mid-year progress on the 33 projects in the new 2014/15 Health and Wellbeing workplan showed one project already complete; 31 of the planned projects undertaken by the Council and external partners on track for completion by the deadline of 31 March 2015 and just one was yet to start.




## 6. LOOKING FORWARD:

Scrutiny has an important role to play in answering the key questions:




.....can we improve the service we offer residents and ensure we are getting the best balance between high quality and value-for-money? During 2014/15 all the topics Members wanted to review could be delivered within a single report format at a scheduled committee meeting – without the need to set up a long-running task and finish group.




### What changes and future actions did scrutiny support and recommend during 2014/15?


CBS	
	<p><b>Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFP) for the next 4 years.</b></p> <p>No complex organisation can operate without a clear idea of what it plans to do during the coming year and how it's going to pay for everything. It is prudent to look several years ahead – at least in outline - to offer residents and local partners some continuity and confidence. We work with a rolling 4 year programme and scrutiny has the chance to review two key documents which underpin this forward planning process.</p> <p>Members supported the three current council priorities (People, Place and Prosperity), agreed minor changes to some of the objectives under these headings and welcomed the additional clarity around the role the authority would play under each of the actions listed in the plan. The document was recommended to the Executive for approval.</p> <p>Members were also broadly satisfied with what they saw in the MTFP, but they were very conscious of uncertainty looking forward regarding local government funding with a general election due in May 2015. However, prudent management in East Herts over recent years means there is a general reserve which can be called on and Members recommended that the Council manage its level of general reserves and use them as a 'cushion' to freeze or minimise any Council Tax increases to local households over the coming years.</p>
	<p><b>Local Scheme for Council Tax Support.</b></p> <p>Along with every other council in the country, East Herts had to devise a local scheme of council tax support (CTS) when the national scheme of council tax benefits came to an end on 1 April 2013. Central government now funds only 90% of the old levels and expects local authorities to fund or find the other 10%. In 2013 scrutiny recommended an option that sought to share the funding burden across all working age claimants rather than target certain specified groups for complete exemption leaving others to share a higher cost to make up the shortfall. This year, when it came up for revision and renewal, Members felt that public and officers alike had now got to grips with the new scheme. With no compelling evidence of problems or inconsistencies arising from the current arrangements, scrutiny</p>

	<p>recommended keeping the arrangements for CTS the same for the coming 2015/16 year. This was agreed by Executive and adopted by Council in March 2015. However, CBS did ask for a report on this issue to come to committee in 2015/16 before going out to consultation with interested third parties and a second report when feedback had been received.</p>
	<p><b>Customer Service Strategy (plan)</b>  With a current strategy going out of date, the start of the year saw a report which asked scrutiny to support a plan for updating the authority's approach to customer service. Members agreed that the Council needs to understand the changes amongst its communities over the last ten years, identify the key issues that have impacted service delivery and look ahead to predict the pressures in the next 10 years in order to 'future proof' to the services we provide and the way we deliver them. Members took an active role in the consultation which followed, with 16 attending workshops held in Sept 2014. By the end of the year, the analysis of the research resulted in a new Customer Service Strategy for 2015-2020 being presented to Joint Scrutiny (see later in this report).</p>
	<p><b>ICT Strategy</b>  No public body can operate in the modern world without robust and reliable IT. Following the setting up of a shared service (with Stevenage Borough Council) the focus has been on strengthening the resilience of the infrastructure and systems. Members were pleased to hear that now, in the event of a catastrophic failure, the council could be back up and running within 4 hours as compared to 2 to 3 days previously. The proposed ICT Strategy 2015-2018 set out the next stages including replacing systems and applications, training officers and transforming services to make full use of new technology. The new Customer Service Strategy is one area which is dependent on getting the right ICT in place. Following a discussion and assurances regarding data security, Members commended the ICT Strategy to the Executive for approval.</p>
<p><b>ENVIRONMENT</b></p>	
	<p><b>Parks and Open Spaces – high level action plan.</b>  The new strategy identified that parks and open spaces serve different needs and groups, and aims to deliver quality and accessible services described in the context of:  <i>Parks for people</i>  <i>Parks for recreation and enjoyment</i>  <i>Parks for wildlife, conservation and heritage</i>  Scrutiny liked the plans and was pleased to see how projects were fitting in with the wider 'health and wellbeing' and 'ageing well' agendas. They were concerned that encouraging access to and use of our open spaces should not lead to inappropriate signage being put up which spoils the natural environment. They asked that only discrete way markers should be used to clarify walking routes with information/interpretation boards being placed at entrances. Both items are part of the plans which will also see the</p>



	<p>council working with partners to research needs in the play areas and 120 significant open spaces across the district.</p>
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center; margin-top: 100px;">  </div>	<p><b>Impact of ASB, Crime and Policing Act on East Herts Environmental Crime policies.</b></p> <p>Scrutiny received a presentation on the new legislative powers which affects:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Littering from cars</i></li> <li><i>Clearing litter and waste on land</i></li> <li><i>Graffiti and other defacement</i></li> <li><i>Controlling dogs.</i></li> </ul> <p>Members questioned the Council's ability to deliver all the new legislative requirements within the terms of current resources and queried whether some of the new powers could or should be devolved to Town and Parish Councils which, they suggested, would be in line with the spirit of localism.</p> <p>With guidance from central government awaited and case law still to evolve, scrutiny asked officers to report back to a future meeting on how the 2014 legislation would be implemented by the council, and review the existing Environmental Crime Policies to ensure compliance with legislation and best practice.</p> <p>Following a final discussion on the environmental dangers and nuisance of the release of sky lantern and helium balloons, scrutiny asked that guidance on the council's website be made clearer and for an article to be published in the next edition of LINK magazine to inform the public of the council's stance on the issue (Spring 2015 pg 5).</p>
<p><b>COMMUNITY</b></p>	
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Anti-social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014</p> </div>	<p><b>Use and implementation of the ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014 in East Herts.</b></p> <p>This report set out to introduce members to the new powers available to the East Herts Community Safety Partnership (CSP) since 20 October 2014 to address anti-social behaviour. Scrutiny welcomed the attendance of the local police Chief Inspector to the discussion.</p> <p>The 2014 Act introduces six new powers – replacing the previous 19 that had been available to address ASB. The local authority can use all but one of the new powers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Civil injunction</i></li> <li><i>Criminal behaviour notice</i></li> <li><i>Community protection order</i></li> <li><i>Public spaces protection order</i></li> <li><i>Closure notice/order</i></li> <li><i>Dispersal powers (police only)</i></li> </ul> <p>Scrutiny was keen to see the council continue to work closely with all agencies in the CSP and share the 'burden' of taking the lead on specific cases. Scrutiny recommended that using a 'good practice' model from elsewhere, East Herts should lead on Closure Notices/Orders where the property belonged to a housing association and the police could lead when the property was in private ownership.</p> <p>East Herts has a very low rate of criminal activity and the new powers have been little used since they came in during Oct 2014, however scrutiny did recommend that all income and costs awarded at court in any future cases should be reinvested and 'ring-fenced' into the ASB service.</p>

	<p><b>Housing Strategy Action plan 2013-2016.</b>  The new strategy looks to achieve three key objectives which scrutiny recommended during discussions last year:  <i>Maximise the delivery of new affordable homes, whilst ensuring the best use of existing housing</i>  <i>Meeting the needs of a growing elderly population</i>  <i>Meeting the needs of vulnerable people and encouraging stronger communities</i></p> <p>Discussions this year focussed on opportunities to increase the number of flexicare schemes for older people, better use of the Disabled Facilities Grant and the importance of bringing empty properties back into use as homes. With housing and housing need being an important issue in the district, scrutiny asked for a further report to come to them next year to monitor progress on the planned projects.</p>
<b>HWP</b>	
	<p><b>Integration of Public Health into the Council's core services - debate in response to Health and Social Care Act 2012</b></p> <p>In April 2013 the above legislation came into force and in that year, HWP heard from external partners how they were taking forward the enhanced public health agenda. In 2014/15, HWP turned scrutiny onto our own services to see how they can be adapted to help deliver public health priorities set out in the East Herts HWB Strategy (2013-2018). Recognising that core services of planning and building control, environmental services, community safety and housing had an impact on the wider determinants of health, HWP invited these Heads of Services to attend and discuss their work and direction of travel in this area. Panel members expressed concern about the impact of fast food outlets on the public's health and queried whether the cumulative effects of this could be taken into account when decisions needed to be taken by Members sitting on Licensing and Development Control committees. Members felt that real progress had been made by including health and wellbeing issues in Service Plans right across the council. Already a new Leisure Services Development Manager has been appointed to take forward the proposal to work more closely with the East and North Herts Clinical Commissioning Group on physical activity. HWP were pleased to hear that Hertfordshire's Director of Public Health considered East Herts a national leader in its attempts to mainstream the public health agenda. Members recommended that future progress of mainstreaming the public health agenda into housing, planning, community safety and environmental services should be tracked and a progress report on implementation of public health agenda should be submitted to HWP during 2015/16.</p>
	<p><b>Work Plan for 2015/16 under the new East Herts Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2013-2018)</b></p> <p>In December 2014, Members were invited to make suggestions for activities and projects to be included in the 2015/16 work plan. Officers consulted with 100 external stakeholders and partners and asked for project ideas for potential inclusion in the East Herts Health and Wellbeing</p>

<p>** JSNA: Joint Strategic Needs Assessment – more information can be found at <a href="http://jsna.hertslis.org/">http://jsna.hertslis.org/</a></p>	<p>workplan for 2015/16. Scrutiny is looking for ideas that are evidence-based and targeted at a particular community with a known health and wellbeing need. It was also agreed that JSNA** public health evidence, contribution and usage is an essential component of the new Action Plan. Several useful ideas were received and the final workplan was agreed by HWP in February 2015. There are 24 core projects and six new or updated projects including one on “Self Harm, supporting and equipping young people” which came from a Member’s suggestion</p>
<p><b>JOINT</b></p>	
	<p><b>Budget Report + MTFP 2015/16, Service Plans 2015/16 and 2014/15 Performance Indicator Estimates and 2015/16 Future Targets.</b></p> <p>These reports are closely interlinked and are considered by all scrutiny members sitting together in committee in January and February every year as a crucial part of the annual budget setting cycle. This joint work is much more cost effective compared to all three main committees sitting separately to consider just their allocated services. Also, as mentioned earlier in this report, it is important to get an holistic view and not look at aspects of the council in isolation. Full details of these papers and the scrutiny discussion can be obtained through the website. Following discussions at this meeting, it was agreed that each of the committees would scrutinise the ‘fees and charges’ that apply to services under their remit in more detail as part of their work programme for 2015/16.</p>

## 7. LOOKING OUT:



The council does not exist or work in isolation and often delivers its services in parallel or in partnership with other local agencies. Earlier in this document (in Sections 5 and 6), we have already mentioned

annual performance reports for our main external contractors

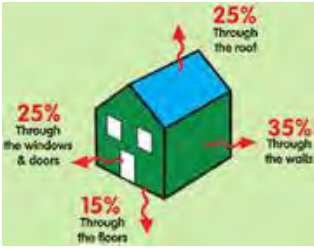

matters relating to our local Housing Association partners





'Public health' projects undertaken by East Herts working alongside a wide range of local health and wellbeing providers

As a part of this wider picture, the council (including scrutiny) needs to maintain both a watching brief on some key services delivered by external agencies, an active dialogue with our immediate partners and our own actions to engage with the public.

CBS	
	<p><b>Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP).</b> CBS had two reports on this topic during the year. The first was to help members understand the structure and strategy of the LEP and coincided with receiving its financial settlement from central government and the second to hear how some of the £200+million awarded to Hertfordshire LEP might be spent. Members heard about the four growth themes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. <i>Enabling flagship sites for housing and employment</i></li> <li>2. <i>Enhancing transport connectivity across the area</i></li> <li>3. <i>Growing the skills base</i></li> <li>4. <i>Creating jobs and supporting core sectors</i></li> </ol> <p>... and that East Herts falls within the M11/A10 Growth Area. Any LEP spending on infrastructure projects was already under consideration as part of the East Herts District Plan and some additional resources could come into the district via European Union funding - particularly for smaller economic projects in our rural areas. Scrutiny voiced some concern on the slowness of projects to get underway and that residents were yet to see any tangible outcomes or improvements. However, it was accepted that these infrastructure projects were very complex and benefits would take time to come through. Scrutiny will continue to track progress.</p>
ENVIRONMENT	
 <p><small>Each November, British Legion members lead the Remembrance Day march along Caswell Way, Castle Gardens where the Remembrance service is held.</small></p>	<p><b>Temporary Road Closures, timescales and the application process</b> Following some concerns raised by Members, scrutiny asked for a report to better understand the process and any problems in respect of community groups applying for temporary road closures for local events. The process starts with an 'Events Notification' being submitted to East Herts and these are shared with the wider Safety Advisory Group (SAG) which includes Police and Highways who undertake their own risk assessments. Street parties can often go ahead with little involvement if they meet certain criteria, whilst events needing limited redirection or stopping of traffic can be dealt with by East Herts (at nil cost) if there are no objections from SAG. Larger events which require full road closures and traffic moving against normal street signs has to</p>



<p><a href="#">Ctrl + CLICK HERE</a> for information on holding a safe event and an application form</p>	<p>be dealt with under a Temporary Traffic Regulation Order by County at a cost of up to £1056 (and 8 week notice). Problems which Members have heard about can arise from the applicant using out-of-date application forms, not supplying enough information or making a late application. It was emphasised that applicants should not use local/colloquial terminology when describing the route of the requested road closure as these can be misleading. Current application forms and guidance are available on the council website and, at the request of scrutiny, officers were asked to write to all Town and Parish Councils with a reminder of the process.</p>
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p><b>Questions about Home Energy Efficiency Grants</b>  <a href="mailto:environmental.health@eastherts.gov.uk">environmental.health@eastherts.gov.uk</a>  tel: 01279 655261</p> </div>	<p><b>Update report on Fuel Poverty in East Herts.</b>  Following a long awaited government report, Members were made aware that 7.5% of East Herts households were judged to be fuel poor (by the new definition). This was in line with the Hertfordshire average and surprisingly is a very similar level of fuel poverty as a typical inner London Borough. Members were advised that communities that were off mains gas towards the rural north of the district and owners of ‘hard to treat’ properties with solid walls were the most likely to be in fuel poverty. Officers are gathering further data on specific communities for a future report setting out a costed Fuel Poverty Strategy for the council. Members were reminded that, in the meantime, there were a number of avenues of advice and support available to vulnerable residents.</p>
<b>COMMUNITY</b>	
<div style="text-align: center;">  </div>	<p><b>Housing Stock transfer – residual undertakings annual statement.</b>  In March 2002 the council sold its stock of some 6,500 dwellings to two housing associations - now known as Registered Social Landlords (RSLs). There are still three conditions attached to the sale of that stock which are on-going and are reported to scrutiny annually. Both RSLs exceeded their requirements for the percentage nominations to vacant homes, giving the authority access to 100% of vacancies through the local Choice Based Lettings scheme. Both RSLs again reported a significant shortfall in homes sold under the preserved Right to Buy (RTB). This is a recognised issue related to the economic downturn and also the cap on permitted discount, high value of properties in East Herts and the fact that each year there are fewer RTB eligible tenants able to take up the offer. Concerns were raised at scrutiny last year regarding a downturn in the expenditure on Aids and Adaptations. Some shortfall was accounted for by minor works (such as grab rails) being carried out under a general maintenance budget and not being shown in the figure reported to Members. However, there was enough concern for scrutiny to initiate a series of face-to-face meetings with the main RSLs to discuss support for vulnerable tenants. The figures in this year’s report showed both RSLs had spent over the target figure for 2013/14. This target sum will increase annually in line with the Retail Price Index and the agreement lasts for 30 years from the sale of the stock (ie to 2032).</p>
	<p><b>Update on ‘Ageing Well’ initiative.</b>  A workshop in July 2013 saw 29 people from 14 different organisations (local and national) explore how they could work</p>

	<p>better together to promote the wellbeing and independence of older people so they can live healthier lives free from disability and pain for longer.</p> <p>Scrutiny was pleased with the successful projects arising from the initiative – with Fitsteps and Fellas Fitness being used as a key example of meeting local need.</p>   <p>Scrutiny heard that a bid for £250K over three years is still being considered by Sport England and, if successful, will offer opportunities to run a district-wide rural programme aimed at increasing participation in physical activity by the over 60s. Councillors have also shown their personal commitment to the initiative with 19 Members becoming ‘Dementia Friends’ by joining staff and partners at a series of training sessions run by a volunteer from the Alzheimer’s Society.</p> <p>Additionally, the Council awarded the local Alzheimer’s Society £1,750 to set up a new Dementia Café in Bishop’s Stortford, matching funds from HCC. An officer from the Engagement and Partnerships Team has been trained as a Dementia Champion and will be delivering new Dementia Friend workshops to staff, Members and businesses in 2015/16.</p>
<b>HWP</b>	
	<p><b>Public Health Grant from Hertfordshire County Council (£100K annually for 2 years) – “District Offer”</b></p> <p>HWP were pleased to learn about this grant fund and agreed to set up a working group to advise how the £100K for year one might be used for the delivery of public health outcomes to benefit residents. The Working Group met and made several recommendations to the Executive Member for health, housing and community support including that all applicants be invited to present their case for funding in person and the setting up of a Small Grants Funds linked to the Council’s existing discretionary community grants scheme. These recommendations were agreed by the Executive.</p> <p>There was an initial idea that the HWP chair would serve on the District Offer grants assessment. However, when it was agreed by the Executive that HWP would be responsible for monitoring outcomes, it was clear that this would be a conflict of interest and it was important for HWP (as with all scrutiny) to remain an independent objective partner in the process.</p> <p>In early 2015, the Executive agreed to match HCC’s offer raising the overall total to £400K. With such large sums of money involved, HWP will have a crucial role in scrutinising and monitoring the spend on behalf of East Herts residents. With this in mind, a mid-term report on progress will be included in 2015/16 HWP workplan.</p>
	<p><b>Watching Brief on external health and social care partners</b></p> <p>HWP continued to review services provided by key health and social care partners and this year’s programme allowed for a more progressive and assertive approach to questioning and considering what next. During 2014/15, the panel heard from:</p>



**Carers in Herts** - Members recommended that councillors, acting in their role as community leaders, should support their residents who are unpaid carers to be referred to this organisation. In January 2015, this group was awarded a £500 grant from the Community Activities pot to launch Unpaid Carers discount passports to help identify new carers who have not accessed support.

**Hertfordshire Healthwatch** - Along with others, HWP had raised concerns about access to GP surgeries in 2013/14 and, as a result, local research had been conducted. Subsequently, HCC rolled out an investigation across the county and a report was published with the findings and making 17 recommendations. Healthwatch said there was a 5 month implementation window to implement these recommendations, especially those around the appointment system and communications. This would be done with the help of volunteer Community Champions. HWP expressed concern that Healthwatch could not hold GP practices to account and that the increase in care homes and general population was putting a lot of pressure on GPs and their time. Because the Community Champion role was so new, there were still some unanswered questions about the details of the role and Members asked for clarification. At the time of writing this report, Healthwatch confirmed that four members of the public have volunteered as Champions. A GP Access Forum (to bring together GP practices, CCG and NHS England) is to be held in June 2015 to discuss what can be done to improve access and any national issues that create barriers to improvement.

**East Herts Citizen's Advice Service (EHCAS)** – HWP was interested in the integration of the wider public health agenda into services offered by EHCAS. They were pleased to learn that EHCAS did not look at client debts in isolation and would signpost clients, if appropriate to relevant external support services which deal with behaviours impacting on their debt (eg gambling, alcohol etc). HWP recommended that officers consider including health and wellbeing outcomes in any new Service Level Agreement negotiated with EHCAS. It also recommended that, in the future, an appropriate Scrutiny Committee should seek to work with EHCAS to identify any gaps in health and wellbeing support services that EHCAS becomes aware of in the course of sign-posting clients.

**JOINT**












**Customer Service Strategy (outcome)**

As Customer Service is a high priority for all services, the new Strategy for 2015-2020 was taken to Joint Scrutiny Committee rather than just CBS.

Building on the returns from the most recent Residents' Survey and on quantitative and qualitative evidence, the new strategy is designed to deliver a step-change in the use of on-line, self-help access to services. This is cost effective and meets the needs of many residents. Scrutiny was concerned that this did not mean 'digital by default' and that the public could still get help or support from a person. They were assured that customer service staff at reception and on the phones would still be available – along with face-to-face contact with officers from Planning, Housing, Benefits Service etc when needed. With these assurances, Members at the Joint meeting recommended the new strategy to the Executive for approval. Members also recommended that CBS be asked to accept a report on the Customer Service Project Plan onto its work programme for the meeting due to be held on 26 May 2015

## 8. EVALUATING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

Scrutiny committee members were all offered the opportunity to evaluate their performance in 2014/15 at the final meeting of each of the separate committees. A written response form was also made available for further reflection and for to those councillors who could not attend the meeting. They assessed their performance against a list of objectives they had set a year earlier which are shown in the first column of the table below:

What we wanted to achieve during 2014/5	Some examples of what we did towards achieving this objective	How did we do?
Actively look for ways to improve the level of community and public involvement in scrutiny	<p><i>Public consultation was a strong element in a number of original reports which came to scrutiny or came up for a second review during 2014/15.</i></p> <p><i>Parks and Open Spaces strategy</i>  <i>Local scheme for council tax support</i>  <i>Revised Housing strategy</i>  <i>Housing register and allocations policy</i></p> <p><i>The Customer Service strategy was based on analysis of the most recent Residents' Survey and on data collected regarding the public's use of the council website.</i></p> <p><i>Indirectly, positive evidence of the public's view of our Leisure Services and of Hertford Theatre is reflected in the increasing footfall/ticket sales at these venues.</i></p> <p><i>The Public Health action plan includes ideas from a wide range of community and statutory partners and is delivered in partnership with them.</i></p> <p><i>An item on scrutiny was published in the council's LINK magazine (which is delivered to every household). The public were invited to send in ideas for review – however, no scrutiny topic suggestion came directly from a resident. We did have public and/or press presence at six committee meetings.</i></p>	    
Strengthen and highlight use of evidence from independent or outside sources.	<p><i>External judgements were made by the Local Government Ombudsman regarding the complaints which were escalated to that level (none were upheld).</i></p> <p><i>Healthwatch provided a fully externally researched report on 'Access to GP services' which was brought to HWP.</i></p> <p><i>All our external visitors brought their perspective on an issue and our partners and contractors provided evidence as requested – however, we do need to strengthen the use of 'bench-marking' evidence and external research when scrutinising our services and performance.</i></p>	  
Clearly identify the 'value added' which scrutiny can bring to a topic and ensure this is monitored and recognised	<p><i>Other than material brought for training and development purposes – no report is brought to scrutiny just 'to note'. Topics and reports brought to scrutiny are agreed in advance by the committee or panel (or by the Chairman if request is short-notice).</i></p> <p><i>Although better, the wording of recommendations and written reports could still be improved to highlight the 'value</i></p>	



	<p><i>added' aspect and make it clearer why a topic was brought to scrutiny and what measures are needed to evidence 'improved' outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice Chairmen (who meet as a group three times a year) continue to receive a formal monitoring report at all their meetings in respect of tracking the progress and outcomes from all scrutiny recommendations. If concerned, they would bring any issues to the attention of their respective committee(s).</i></p>	 
Continue to keep scrutiny members informed and offer opportunities to develop skills needed	<p><i>An e-Newsletter has been published every 6 months and extensive use has been made of the weekly bulletin (MIB) to update councillors on significant issues/developments and confirm scrutiny related events.</i></p> <p><i>Where relevant, Councillors were supplied with 'pre briefing' material to widen their knowledge and understand the broader context to specific topics.</i></p> <p><i>Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice Chairmen have a briefing session with report authors before the meeting starts and all members were offered a budget/finance 'clinic' before meetings where the budget was to be discussed.</i></p> <p><i>The full range of scrutiny training taken up by members is listed in Section 11 of this report. During the year the council continued to evidence its training plan against the standards required for the Member Development Charter.</i></p>	   
Strengthen scrutiny of external public bodies and partners	<p><i>The contract performance of key contractors was monitored by the services throughout the year and an annual report brought to scrutiny.</i>  <i>Leisure provider - SLM Everyone Active</i>  <i>Waste &amp; Recycling and Street Cleansing contractor</i>  <i>Grounds' Maintenance contractor</i></p> <p><i>The 30 year agreement with the RSLs on the residual undertakings arising from the housing stock transfer was also reported to scrutiny.</i></p> <p><i>East Herts representative on the county's Health Scrutiny Committee contributed to a number of scrutiny reviews on various NHS and health service providers (This included visits to the SurgiCentre at Lister Hospital, Kingfisher Court, Watford General Hospital, the Hazard Response Team in Cambridgeshire and a meeting about urgent care).</i></p> <p><i>No external Joint Scrutiny was undertaken during 2014/15 however East Herts did look independently at the 'Revenue and Benefits Shared Service – two years on'.</i></p>	   

Councillors were asked to look at how well the scrutiny activity in East Herts matches up to the four principles of good practice set out by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (refer back to CfPS diagram on page 1 of this report). Their responses mirrored previous views: it will always be 'a work in progress' and there are improvements and new approaches to be tried out with every new topic.

The Directors and the Executive members were also canvassed for written feedback and asked for examples of how the scrutiny process in 2014/15 had supported the

work of the council and asked for specific areas to strengthen during 2015/16. The responses show support for scrutiny with an appreciation of the positive contribution that the scrutiny process can bring to improving services for residents.

Due to the number of retirements already notified, senior officers and members know already there will be a significant number of new councillors sitting on scrutiny in the coming year – support, induction and training for them will be important in 2015/16 to build confidence and skills to do full justice to the scrutiny function going forward.

## 9. WHAT ARE OUR PLANS FOR 2015/16?

Councillors have asked that we carry forward the same objectives into next year and to continue to strengthen scrutiny by:

<b>What we want to do?</b>	<b>How are we going to do it? – an action plan for 2015/16</b>
<b>Actively look for ways to improve the level of community and public involvement in scrutiny</b>	<p><i>Research and review how other (similar) authorities involve and engage the public in their scrutiny process.</i></p> <p><i>Continue to invite topic suggestions from residents and explore idea of getting issues raised through existing channels/agencies (including town/parish councils, youth councils, community groups, partnership meetings etc).</i></p>
<b>Strengthen and highlight use of evidence from independent or outside sources.</b>	<p><i>Scrutiny members (particularly Chairmen and ViceChairmen) to make it clear that they would expect to see some comparative evidence when they commission a report.</i></p> <p><i>Use cost effective and timely ways of bringing external evidence into any review where relevant or requested: through expert (external) witnesses – in person or in writing, visits, surveys/questionnaires, published documents/research and good practice examples from other (similar) authorities.</i></p>
<b>Clearly identify the ‘value added’ which scrutiny can bring to a topic and ensure this is monitored and recognised</b>	<p><i>Focus scrutiny reviews on topics where there is real scope for influencing change and where measurable benefits for residents can be seen.</i></p> <p><i>Continue to bring monitoring reports on progress/outcomes from reviews to the Chairmen and ViceChairmen meeting (3xyear).</i></p> <p><i>Identify outcomes which can be used in council publications to illustrate the positive impact of scrutiny to raise awareness (not just in the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report).</i></p>
<b>Continue to keep scrutiny members informed and offer opportunities to develop skills needed</b>	<p><i>Following the elections in May 2015, offer comprehensive induction training and information to all newly elected members assigned to scrutiny and offer refresher and update training for returning members.</i></p> <p><i>Continue to publish the scrutiny e-Newsletter every 6 months and make use of weekly bulletin (MIB) to update councillors on significant issues/developments and scrutiny events.</i></p> <p><i>Send councillors ‘pre briefing’ material where relevant to widen knowledge on the context/background to topics and offer briefing/clinics before critical budget meetings.</i></p>
<b>Strengthen scrutiny of external public bodies and partners</b>	<p><i>Where relevant, move from ‘scrutiny of’ to ‘scrutiny with’ partners when reviewing local services offered to residents.</i></p> <p><i>Identify opportunities (jointly with other councils where possible for</i></p>

	<p><i>efficiency) to scrutinise aspects of the Local Strategic Partnership, Local Enterprise Partnership, Community Safety Partnership or any common issue.</i></p> <p><i>When invited, contribute (in person or in writing) to scrutiny reviews run by other authorities on issues which impact on this council's services and/or on East Herts residents.</i></p>

## Work programmes

At the end of the year, councillors were asked to outline draft agendas for their 2015/16 meetings however, with full elections for district council due in May 2015, all arrangements are subject to confirmation by the incoming administration and the new committee members. At East Herts we look to have well programmed work plans for scrutiny to give partners and the public advance notice of topics - but there is always flexibility to review and amend them throughout the year as it is important to keep the work of scrutiny relevant and topical.

Topics in the draft plans include:

<b>CBS has already agreed to</b>	<p>Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3Cs) 2014/15</p> <p>Customer Service Strategy – project plan</p> <p>Council Tax Support Scheme review</p>
<b>Env Scrutiny has already agreed to</b>	<p>Joint working on Waste and Street Cleansing with NHDC</p> <p>Resident parking permit schemes – policy development</p> <p>Car park management system retendering – developing options</p> <p>Report on the study of Pavement and Grass Verge Parking</p>
<b>Community Scrutiny has already agreed to</b>	<p>CVS report on projects commissioned or funded by East Herts</p> <p>Hertford Theatre – end of financial year report</p> <p>Community Grants – review of applications and allocations</p> <p>Leisure Contract – year 7</p>
<b>Health and Wellbeing Panel** is interested in</b>	<p>Progress and outcomes against HWB Strategy Action Plan</p> <p>Healthwatch – update on progress re access to GP surgeries</p> <p>Presentation/report on integration of public health agenda into Benefits Service</p> <p>Report on the projects awarded ‘District Offer’ grant funding</p>

\*\* The name of this Panel has been changed for 2015/16 (see next Section 10).

The most up to date versions of all the topics scheduled for each committee can be found under the papers published on the East Herts website (<http://online.eastherts.gov.uk/moderngov/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1> will take you to the most recent ‘Work Programme’ report under each scrutiny meeting agenda).

The new 2015/16 scrutiny committee members will make the final decision as to which topics are added to their committee agenda or set up for more detailed review by a task and finish group.

Whatever is decided, all the work of the 2015/16 scrutiny committees will focus on helping to deliver the **three corporate priorities** of East Herts Council. (Subject to final confirmation from the incoming administration) the updated wording of these for the coming year is:

<b>PEOPLE:</b> 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.
<b>PLACE:</b> 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.
<b>PROSPERITY:</b> 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.

## 10. THE EVOLVING ROLE OF SCRUTINY



After operating with three full scrutiny committees and a Health and Wellbeing Panel (previously known as the Health Engagement Panel) for a number of years, 2015/16 will see some changes. Following the district council elections in May 2015, we have recently had confirmation from the incoming administration that the HWP will be 'up graded' to a full scrutiny committee in its own right and report direct to the Executive.

The role of the district council in helping to deliver the new Public Health agenda has grown in importance and with increased funding being devolved to the authority (£100K in each of the next two years which is going to be match funded from East Herts) it is important that this work is scrutinised by councillors on behalf of local residents.

This 'up-grade' will also lead to a review of the remit of the existing committees to better reflect the changing role of the council and the services it offers.



In November 2012, the landscape of policing underwent its biggest change since the creation of police authorities in 1964. This change was the creation of the post of directly elected Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). In Hertfordshire the elected PCC is David Lloyd.

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, which brought in this change also created **Police and Crime Panels (PCPs)** – bodies made up of local elected councillors and independent members with the responsibility to scrutinise and support the work of the PCC. These Panels are not local government committees, but they are obliged to meet in public, to publish their agendas and minutes, and to fulfil certain key statutory responsibilities. During 2014/15, East Herts was represented on this body by the Executive Member for community safety and environment.



The outcome of the May 2015 General Election was key to the future of the elected Commissioner and the PCP but it appears now that the roles will continue to exist in their current form with some changes possible in metropolitan areas as outlined in the Queen's Speech on 29 May 2015 .

<http://www.hertspcp.org.uk/default.aspx>

On 12 March 2015, the MJ published an article by Colin Copus (Professor of local politics and director of the Local Governance Research Unit in the Department of Politics and Public Policy at De Montfort University).

**‘Scrutiny – the lion yet to roar’** sets out his views that local councillors not in executive positions need more effective powers to examine local authority business but, unless Government produces a coherent legal framework for local scrutiny, the results will be *“further frustration and wasted opportunities”*.

He writes that not only does scrutiny need internal resources and recognition that it is a part of how a council governs its locality, it also needs its fragmented legal framework repaired. His view is that *“the solution rests with parliament relinquishing control, regulation and over-prescription”*.

Following the outcome of the May 2015 general election there is a new Minister for Communities and Local Government in post – and this may mean some changes for scrutiny within county, unitary, borough and district councils.



After serving since 2006, Jessica Crowe is stepping down as Executive Director at the CfPS to take up a new role in local government. The new appointee, Jacqui McKinlay, starts work on 1 May 2015 after being a Director at a county council.

In accepting the role, Jacqui said the CfPS had a “hugely important role” in ensuring public sector organisations were “fit for purpose”.



As she left office, Jessica blogged on-line and wrote in the C’lir Magazine (April 2015): *“..... I believe it is vital that all those responsible for good governance and scrutiny in publicly funded organisations ask themselves some hard questions: do we listen to our service-users and citizens carefully enough? Do we ask robust enough questions, without fear or favour? Do we get good enough information, from varied enough sources to enable us to triangulate and reach an informed judgment about what’s actually happening? Too often it is easier not to challenge, not to rock the boat, and to go through the motions of receiving reports, making some comments and moving on to the next item. That’s not good enough. If public scrutiny and accountability are to make a meaningful contribution to helping public services and decision-makers meet the difficult challenges they face – as I believe they can and must – non-executives must be willing to question and leaders must be willing to listen and provide answers”*.

The objectives East Herts scrutiny has set itself for 2015/16 are designed to address just these points.

## 11. TRAINING

It is important for elected members to have the knowledge, understanding and skills to undertake their roles as both a ward councillor and as part of the council's decision making structure. A wide training and development programme is on offer (in-house and external) and councillors from East Herts attended the following scrutiny related events during 2014/15:

Date	Scrutiny related event/session	Delivered by ...
10-Jun-14	CfPS Annual Conference - 'You have reached your destination': scrutiny's role on the road to better places	External- CfPS
19-Jun-14	Scrutiny induction – remit, roles and skills (for 1 new member)	Scrutiny officer
10-Jun-14	Performance management induction - Covalent and Healthchecks (for 1 new member)	Lead officer
31-Jul-14	Treasury Management - roles and responsibilities of members and officers	External – Capita Asset Services
25-Sep-14	Advanced Chaining Skills	External -LGiU
14-Oct-14	Implications of the new Health and Wellbeing section in the NPPF for Planning in East Herts	Head of Service to HWP
Four dates in Sept&Oct	ASB, Crime and Policing Act 2014	Multi-agency briefings
21-Oct-14	Financial and performance data – member workshop	Director and lead officers
28-Oct-14	JSNA Interactive maps – understanding the district and the assessed needs	Lead officer from HCC
11-Nov-14	ASB, Crime & Policing Act 2014 – environmental crime	Lead officers to Env Scrutiny
25-Nov-14	Finance and Decision making - questions to ask when considering the 'business case'	Director to CBS
09-Dec-14	Results of the research into "Accessing GP Services: Stort Valley and Villages Locality"	HealthWatch to HWP
16-Dec-14	CfPS Parliamentary Seminar (1)	External - CfPS
14-Jan-15	Signposting and guidance 'clinic' – finding your way around the BUDGET REPORTS in advance of Joint Scrutiny	Director and lead officers
26-Jan-15	Elected Member Public Health Masterclass - Obesity: a complex system in public health	External speaker at HCC
28-Jan-15	CfPS Parliamentary Seminar (2)	External - CfPS
23-Feb-15	CfPS Parliamentary Seminar (3)	External - CfPS
10-Mar-15	ASB, Crime & Policing Act 2014 - ASB crimes	Lead officers to Comm Scrutiny

Throughout the year, several members have also taken part in regular Action Learning Sets. These were originally set up to support members in their Community Leadership and Engagement role but the questioning approach needed within the group has enhanced their confidence and skills within the scrutiny remit.

A continuing training programme will be needed to keep all councillors briefed on their developing role as described above in Section 10 and offer them the chance to strengthen their scrutiny skills.

The local government elections held in May 2015 saw all 50 seats of the authority contested. With a significant number of retirements we knew there would be a number of newly elected members sitting on scrutiny committees in the 2015/16 civic year. The results have given us 22 new members, so targeted and timely training is important to help them take up this important role.

Councillors have indicated an interest in some specific areas of scrutiny related training for the coming year:

- Induction to scrutiny for newly elected members
- Where does local government finance come from?
- Data Protection Governance – role of members on CBS
- Question planning and evaluating evidence
- Chairing skills
- Confident challenge as a critical friend



**12. AND FINALLY .....** a reminder that the scrutiny function is greatly enhanced by co-operative working between all parties – and that includes East Herts residents. All our committee meetings are open to the public and anyone can suggest a topic for scrutiny. Contact us directly or talk to your local district councillor and let us know what is concerning you.



Contact details for all our councillors are on the East Herts Council website  
<http://online.eastherts.gov.uk/moderngov/mgMemberIndex.aspx?bcr=1>

Introduce yourself and get to know more about how we can work together to keep East Herts a great place to live, work and study in.

If you want more information on scrutiny in general, this can be found on the Centre for Public Scrutiny main website on <http://www.cfps.org.uk/>

#### **Call-In:**

Whenever a key decision is made by the Executive it is publicised and open to scrutiny for five working days before the decision takes effect. During that time, if four or more councillors object to the decision, it can be ‘called-in’ and heard by the most appropriate scrutiny committee. ***During 2014/15 there were no ‘call-ins’ at East Herts.***

#### **Councillor Call for Action (CCfA):**

Under section 119 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, councillors may call for debate and discussion at committee, on a topic of neighbourhood concern. These powers are limited to an issue which affects a single council ward and can only be brought when all other attempts at resolution have been exhausted.

***Since the introduction of CCfA, councillors at East Herts have never had cause to bring forward such a case.***

Scrutiny does not make final decisions – it makes recommendations to the Executive (and some then go onto full Council). Residents and the press are welcome to attend all these meetings and our Executive and Council are also webcast live on the evening. Access to the webcast service is through the button on the ‘Quick Links’ tab on the home page of our website and from there you can also get to the archive of previous recordings (held for 12 months).

All scrutiny reports and plans themselves are also readily available on the website at <http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=11547>

**There will be a limited print run of this document.**

Greater use will be made of signposting interested parties, partners and residents to the Council’s website to access the Scrutiny Annual Report. This will minimise use of material resources, distribution costs and gain potential CO<sub>2</sub> efficiencies from on-line provision.

<http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/scrutinyannualreports>

If you do require a paper copy, there will be a limited number available at the reception desk at Wallfields in Hertford and at our Customer Service Centre in Charringtons House, Bishop’s Stortford – or contact the Scrutiny Officer on 01992 531612 : e-mail [scrutiny@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@eastherts.gov.uk)

If you would like a translation of this document in another language, large print, Braille, audio or electronic, please contact Communications at East Herts Council on email [communications@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:communications@eastherts.gov.uk) or by calling 01279 655261.