

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 2 DECEMBER 2008

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT
AND CONSERVATION

5. ENVIRONMENTAL QUALITY REVIEW – SCOPING REPORT

WARD(S) AFFECTED: All

'D' RECOMMENDATION - that (A) the set up of a Task and Finish Group to review local environmental standards and inform future policy development be supported; and

(B) a further report in respect of a detailed scope be brought back to the Committee by the Task and Finish Group.

1.0 Purpose/Summary of Report

1.1 To propose a review of local environmental standards with the objective of identifying further opportunities to work with partners to improve the appearance of the District.

2.0 Contribution to the Council's Corporate Objectives

2.1 This report contributes to the following corporate priorities:

Pride in East Herts

Improve standards of the neighbourhood and environmental management in our towns and villages.

Caring about what's built and where

Care for and improve our natural and built environment.

3.0 Background

3.1 The Council has good performance in maintaining cleanliness and the visual amenity of the street scene through its environmental maintenance contracts when measured against national and local performance indicators. These are detailed in an annual report to Environmental Scrutiny Committee. Traditionally, the way the

Government has set these indicators and the approach taken by the Audit Commission to monitoring local government performance has resulted in them being focused upon the activities that fall within the council's powers and duties. Consequently activities which are outside their control, or are the responsibility of other agencies are given a lower priority.

- 3.2 The Government is seeking to encourage local authorities to work more closely with partners to achieve a co-ordinated improvement in standards. It is introducing a new local performance framework called the Comprehensive Area Assessment (CAA), which will be implemented from April 2009. It will replace the existing Comprehensive Performance Assessment (CPA). The details of the CAA framework are still under consideration by the Government, following the recent close of a consultation. The new assessment regime will link closely to existing Local Area Agreements (LAA).
- 3.3 Local Area Agreements (LAAs) are a way of working between central and local government designed to promote partnership working and deliver new improved services, focusing on the things that matter most to local people. LAAs set out a contract between central and local government to deliver on a range of targets aimed at improving performance, over a 3 year period. Some of these targets have a 'performance reward grant' (PRG) attached, making them 'stretch' targets and especially challenging to meet.
- 3.4 Hertfordshire's LAA 2006 -2009 has agreed to deliver on 79 targets, 31 of these are 'stretch' targets. New targets are currently being developed for the next three year period. Although, none of these targets currently focus specifically upon local environmental quality standards. It is likely that they may do in future.
- 3.5 In contrast to CPA, the new CAA inspection system will not focus on individual organisations and services. Rather it will include within its scope the roles and responsibilities of statutory and non-statutory partners that are contributing to the delivery of outcomes for citizens in an area. In terms of environmental quality this means that a holistic view will be taken of an area covering aspects that are the responsibility of many different agencies.
- 3.6 The Audit Commission is responsible for carrying out CAA inspections. It will use performance information from local public services (including information on the satisfaction of local people with their locality and the public services they experience).

- 3.7 There are three main questions around which the area assessment is based:
- a) How well do local priorities express community needs and aspirations?
 - b) How well are the outcomes and improvements needed being delivered?
 - c) What are the prospects for future improvement?
- 3.8 The first year's CAA will set a baseline after which the focus will be how performance changes over time. The first reports will be available in November 2009.
- 3.9 Under an 'Area Assessment' Councils will receive a green flag or a red flag to indicate outcomes that are particularly good or particularly bad.
- 3.10 There is the possibility that councils could receive a poor assessment, even though they are performing well at the things they are responsible for, because residents are unhappy with things in their area that are outside its control.
- 3.11 The expectation of Government is that local authorities are working in partnership to seek to address issues which are of concern to local people.
- 3.12 Since 2001 the Government has commissioned ENCAMS (The Tidy Britain Group) to undertake the Annual Local Environmental Quality Survey of England (LEQSE), to provide DEFRA with relevant and reliable data on the state of the local environment. In April 2006 ENCAMS were commissioned to undertake not only the national LEQSE, but also to increase the size of the survey so that every English Council could be provided with its own report between 2007 and 2008.
- 3.13 These reports provide a detailed picture of how each district area is performing on a range of local environmental quality issues, including:
- Litter and detritus
 - Graffiti
 - Fly-posting
 - Condition of highways (road surfaces etc..)
 - Street furniture (poles posts, signs, litter bins etc)
 - Bus stops
 - Buildings and boundary structures

- Landscaping condition.

3.14 Although the survey is limited in its nature and there are some questions as to consistency, its objective was to enable councils to benchmark their performance and learn from others. The LEQSE survey looked at the district as a resident or visitor would, and ignores which part of the street scene is the responsibility of which organisation.

3.15 Officers have used this information to target and improve the activities that the Council is responsible for and has worked with key partners on some joint initiatives. However, it is felt that to take this further a more holistic approach is needed to make further improvements in environmental standards through partnership working.

4.0 Report

4.1 It is proposed that a Task and Finish Group be set up to review and make recommendations on the following:

- a) The current performance and standards within the district, from a resident's perspective taking into account wider information sources.
- b) The Council's approach to maintaining and improving environmental quality, within the context of legislation, powers and duties and limited financial resources.
- c) Best practice approaches taken by similar rural district councils.
- d) Opportunities for partnership working with local and national agencies, including public private and voluntary bodies.

4.2 A full scoping report, including timescales would be submitted to the Committee by Members of the Task and Finish Group, once established. As a guide, it is expected that a final report could come forward to the June meeting.

5.0 Consultation

5.1 None for this report.

6.0 Legal Implications

6.1 The Council must comply with legislation and statutory guidance specifying its powers and duties with respect to environmental management. In the context of this report these relate mainly to the control and management of waste, including street cleansing, specified within the Environmental Protection Act (1990). Other relevant legislation includes the Refuse Disposal (Amenity) Act 1978; Antisocial Behaviour Act (1993); Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act (2005); and The Town and Country Planning Act (1990).

7.0 Financial Implications

7.1 There are no financial implications of this report.

8.0 Human Resource Implications

8.1 There are none.

9.0 Risk Management Implications

9.1 There are no specific risk management implications to this report. However, the following issues should be noted.

9.2 It will be necessary to demonstrate, to the satisfaction of the Audit Commission, that the Council has mechanisms in place which take a holistic approach to managing and improving local environmental standards. Failure to do this could have a negative impact upon the Council's CAA score and therefore its reputation as a good performing authority.

9.3 Members are asked to note that this review is to take place at the same time as the planned implementation of the Council's recycling strategy, which will necessarily impose additional pressures on staff resources and this will need to be taken into account when considering timescales.

Background Papers

None.

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