

# Public Document Pack



Chairman and Members of the  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Your contact: Peter Mannings  
Tel: 01279 502174  
Date: 24 November 2022

cc. All other recipients of the  
Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
agenda

Dear Councillor,

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 8 NOVEMBER 2022**

Please find attached the answers to the pre-submitted questions from  
Members of the Committee.

10. Responses to Members' Pre-Submitted Questions (Pages 2 - 14)

Yours faithfully,

Peter Mannings  
Democratic Services Officer  
East Herts Council  
[peter.mannings@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:peter.mannings@eastherts.gov.uk)

**MEETING** : OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
**VENUE** : COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD  
**DATE** : TUESDAY 8 NOVEMBER 2022  
**TIME** : 7.00 PM

# Agenda Item 10

## Questions to Executive Members

### Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 8 November 2022

#### Agenda item 5 - Data Protection Policy

To: Cllr Cutting, Executive Member for Corporate Services

Q1. Does the council have any protocols in place to ensure/check that officers who work from home have a secure environment with respect to Data Protection, notwithstanding the requirements detailed in Section 27, giving responsibility to the employees? When an employee does not have the capacity to work in a secure environment, is there facility for them to work full-time in the office?

From: Cllr Wilson

Q2. What plans are there to train/refresh members about their obligations with respect to Data Protection?

From: Cllr Wilson

Q3. How often are members of staff to be trained/given refresher training about the principles of Data Protection?

From: Cllr Wilson

Q1. Following the introduction of agile working arrangements there have been no data breaches related to working from home and the risk remains low and so officers will have the responsibility for ensuring a secure environment at home in line with this policy.

However, should future data breaches be related to home working, additional protocols may be considered.

Q2. A data protection training video has been prepared and this, along with other training videos, will be incorporated into Member Induction 2023.

Q3. All staff must take annual data protection e-learning as part of the PDR process. Additionally, bespoke training is developed and run by the Information Governance and Data Protection Manager in relation to new policies, learning

	<p>from data breaches, or changing legislation.</p> <p><u>Additional Information</u></p> <p>Over the last year, Four sessions were run to cover the Access to information, Data Retention and Data Breach Policies and 124 staff members attended.</p> <p>Five sessions were to run to cover more in-depth data breach training and 179 staff members attended.</p>
<p>Q4. How many internally reported data breaches have there been at the council over the last 12 months?</p> <p>From: Cllr Wilson</p>	<p>Q4. There have been 20 reported data breaches over the last 12 months.</p> <p><u>Additional Information</u></p> <p>Urgent actions are implemented as soon as possible with learning being shared more widely through regular data protection best practice updates on the staff intranet. This is supported by 6 monthly reporting of all breaches to Leadership Team and Audit and Governance Committee.</p>
<p>Q5. Councillors should be included in the Policy Introduction. Given the constraints on Members' other</p>	<p>Q5. Councillors will be added to the policy introduction and throughout wherever responsibilities are noted. Key</p>

<p>roles (i.e. some are working full time), Members should be informed of what the key aspects are. Could Officers explain how these key facts could be addressed and what level of training is appropriate for Councillors?</p> <p>From: Cllr Kemp</p>	<p>requirements of this policy have been included in the member data protection video.</p>
<p>Q6. There are other external trainers which can deliver quick succinct training, have Officers explored different training options?</p> <p>From: Cllr Drake</p>	<p>Q6. Not at this time as the Information Governance and Data Protection Manager develops and delivers training. This ensures a cost-efficient approach to the specific training requirements of the Council.</p> <p><u>Additional Information</u> However, external trainers may be considered if training requirements go beyond the scope of data protection and information governance.</p>
<p><b>Agenda item 6 - Surveillance Technologies Policy -</b></p> <p><b>No Questions</b></p>	
<p><b>Agenda item 7 - Development Management Update</b></p> <p>To: Cllr Goodeve, Executive Member for Planning and Growth</p>	
<p>Q1. The Planning Officers have done a tremendous job under great pressure for the last</p>	<p>Q1. As outlined in the report, there have been arrangements and measures put in place over</p>

couple of years under the increased workload. It's good to see the plans to speed things up by streamlining non-controversial applications and assigning a task force to the backlog. However, could these measures have been identified and implemented earlier?

Q2. Could we have an indication / breakdown of the number of planning officers normally engaged in  
(a) general planning applications (household and business),  
(b) Gilston,  
(c) other major sites in the District Plan,  
(d) enforcement, and  
(e) any other planning operations?

the last 18 months in order to help with the workload. Some have been more successful than others.

Capacity to support improvements has been an issue and officers have also weighed up the balance of risk associated with streamlining the more straightforward applications.

Q2. The service has recently been restructured to provide more resilience and support. A recruitment campaign is planned for mid November.

Currently, the position is:

12 posts working on general planning applications. 4 vacancies.

5.8 posts working on strategic sites and major planning applications. 4 vacancies.

6 posts allocated to the Gilston Area. 4 vacancies.

3.8 posts within enforcement. 2 vacancies.

6.3 posts within planning policy. 4 vacancies.

<p>Q3. For (b) and (c), what tasks are involved over the period when a planning application hasn't yet been submitted, and are there any opportunities for temporary redeployment to ease pressure elsewhere?</p> <p>From: Cllr Kemp</p>	<p>8 posts with design and conservation. 5 vacancies.</p> <p>7.4 posts within planning support. No Vacancies.</p> <p>2 Service Managers. 1 Head of Planning and Building Control and 1 PA.</p> <p>Agency staff are used as an interim measure whilst recruitment takes place.</p> <p>Q3. 17 out of our 18 site allocations currently at some stage in the planning process, whether that's at the master planning or pre-app stage or post planning permission where officers are having to manage multiple reserved matters and discharge of condition applications. This is a significant pressure on resources and is work that for the most part can only be undertaken by experienced principal officers who are all working at capacity.</p> <p>For example, in terms of the Gilston Area, the scale and complexity of the proposals and the timescales for development</p>
------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------	---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>delivery at Gilston are exceptional. There is an ambitious planning programme covering multiple work streams over the coming years, including the preparation of the strategic landscape masterplan and masterplans for village 1 and 7 alongside the CPO process for the river crossings, discharge of conditions relating to the outline permissions and then submission of the first reserved matters application for village 1. There will also be a complex and extensive s106 legal agreement that will need to be actively monitored and managed in parallel.</p> <p>The nature of the job in dealing with major applications is very different to dealing with a large case load of minor applications where the pressures and level of expertise required is very different.</p> <p>For this reason it would be difficult to juggle the two types of applications together and it would not be making the best use of the skills and expertise of principal officers to redeploy them on minor applications that</p>
--	----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------

	<p>can be processed by much less experienced officers.</p> <p>It's therefore not straight forward to move resources around given the level of work.</p>
<p>Q4. Can the Council lobby Central Government to seek support to manage large scale applications such as Gilston, including for appropriate grants to employ sufficient staff?</p> <p>From: Cllr Goldspink</p>	<p>Q4. The Government are aware of the shortage of planners and staffing issues within local authorities and did indicate that they would develop a comprehensive resources and skills strategy for Planning at the time the 2020 White paper for planning was released. Nothing has been forthcoming from the government but it is likely they will be consulting at some point on increasing planning application fees which haven't been increased since 2017/2018 and aren't indexed linked.</p> <p>We do agree planning performance agreements with applicants for certain applications which helps support costs but an increase in planning applications fees would help.</p> <p>Any consultation on increases to planning application fees can be used as an opportunity to highlight the costs of processing large scale planning applications.</p>



## Agenda Item 8 Digital Communications Update

To: Cllr Cutting, Executive Member for Corporate Services

Q1. Does the council have any plans to do paid adverts on Facebook or on any other forum?

From: Cllr Wilson

Q1. The council runs paid adverts on Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn, most often on a campaign-specific basis rather than for day-to-day service-related information. Examples include the promotion of the East Herts Healthy Hub services, Covid-19 vaccination clinics and energy efficiency grant schemes. This month, coinciding with National Enterprise Week, we have plans to promote the Launchpad2 support for businesses using social media advertising.

Q2. Does the council send out informative posts, advising what our functions and responsibilities are compared to other tiers of local government?

From: Cllr Wilson

Q2. Thank you for the suggestion. We are not currently posting this information, but I am aware that the council's communications manager created an informative 'who does what' graphic for this purpose at a previous authority. We will update this to ensure it is relevant for East Herts and schedule as part of our content plan going forwards.

Q3. What is the overarching aim of our digital engagement strategy? Is it primarily to educate or to get more people

Q3. We don't have a specific digital engagement strategy as such, however the Corporate Plan does have a theme called

to interact with us in a digital way or is there a further aim?

From: Cllr Wilson

“digital by default” which outlines our objectives in three areas: firstly an inward focusing objective to deliver the Transforming East Herts programme which is very much about getting our processes to be as efficient as possible. Secondly an outward looking objective to encourage more residents to self-serve on the website and lastly a collaborative objective around working with partners to ensure communities are digitally enabled. There are specific examples of projects and activities under each in the corporate plan document itself but to give you a feel under the first objective officers are currently reviewing our telephony requirements with a view to procuring a new system next year. I know that has been an issue close to Members hearts for some time so that is something I’m fully behind. On the second objective we launched a trial of a chat bot on our website last year to help customers get to the right content on our website. And for the third objective some of you may be aware of the Digital Inclusion Project which has been run by the CDA in some of our

	<p>rural areas to build confidence amongst older or isolated individuals with the use of smartphones and tablets.</p>
<p>Q4. Can we redesign the reception area to give it a “user friendly” approach and make it more welcoming and so encourage digital interaction?</p> <p>From: Cllr Rutland-Barsby</p>	<p>Q4. I would certainly welcome any specific feedback or ideas about how to make the reception areas more user friendly and welcoming. We haven’t invested a great deal of money in this area for a while however have made some changes to the reception in Hertford for example by moving the reception desk back which allows customers to go straight to a computer before speaking to a member of staff. Having observed the reception areas a few weeks ago for a few hours however I get the impression most people who come in do so because they want to speak to somebody. If Councillor Rutland-Barsby wants to join me one day however in the reception area I’m certainly happy to discuss how we could do this.</p>

<p>Q5. Can we re-open the reception area more than one day a week?</p>	<p>Q5. It is of course possible to do this however for now our priority is tackling the call answer rate. If we were to open for more days that would severely impact our response times which are struggling as many Members will know. I'm pleased to say we are seeing some improvement thanks to recruiting of new staff which the October call answer rate at just shy of 70% which is still not amazing but better than some previous months. I want to carry on this trajectory before looking again at opening hours.</p>
<p>Q6. In terms of the usage of our website, how do we compare with other Councils such as North Herts, Welwyn, Broxbourne and St Albans?</p>	<p>Q6. So far in 2022, our average page views per quarter is 686,598 – doubling what they were the year before. Other councils do not routinely publish their statistics, so I have asked the teams to gather what they can from neighbouring authorities. If agreeable, I will circulate this via email to the committee as soon as it's received.</p>
<p>Q7. What progress is being made to sign up the community to emails?</p> <p>From: Cllr Snowdon</p>	<p>Q7. We're making good progress in signing residents up to our weekly newsletter, Network, and you'll see that the report sets out our current growth rate of 13%. Sign-ups are promoted through the website and via email and the team is working on a refresh</p>

	<p>of the design to improve how the content is presented. Sign-up is also highlighted on social media as a way for residents to make sure they do not miss important local news that affects them, and a focused campaign is planned for 2023 to boost this even further.</p>
<p><b>Agenda item 9 – Draft Work Programme</b></p>	
<p>Q. Air Quality Management Plan – is it being followed, is it fit for purpose, is our website advertising the issue sufficiently for our residents? Are we fulfilling our statutory duty to deal appropriately with AQMA areas?</p> <p>From Cllr Wilson</p>	<p>Members supported the suggestion for the following approach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 17 January 2023 – proposed items should remain as is.</li> <li>• Delivery of Strategic sites be deferred to the new civic year;</li> <li>• Air Quality Management plan (opposite) be added to the Work Programme for 21 March 2023.</li> <li>• Parking Standards – planning Officers to provide an update on when this will be reported</li> </ul>

*Copies to: Executive Members: Cllrs Cutting and Goodeve,*

*Richard Cassidy, James Ellis, Katie Mogan, Sara Saunders, and Ben Wood*