



MEETING : OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
VENUE : COUNCIL CHAMBER, WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD
DATE : TUESDAY 10 JUNE 2025
TIME : 7.00 PM

PLEASE NOTE TIME AND VENUE

This meeting will be live streamed on the Council's YouTube page:

<https://www.youtube.com/user/EastHertsDistrict>

MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE

Councillor David Jacobs (Chair)

Councillors D Andrews, P Boylan, E Buckmaster, R Carter, N Clements, N Cox, C Horner, S Marlow, S Nicholls, T Smith, M Swainston, G Williams, D Woollcombe and J Wyllie

Substitutes

Conservative Group: Councillors A Holt and G Williamson
Green Group: Councillors V Burt, V Smith and S Watson
Labour Group: Councillor C Redfern
Liberal Democrat Group: Councillor R Townsend
Reform: Councillor G McAndrew

(Note: Substitution arrangements must be notified by the absent Member to Democratic Services 24 hours before the meeting)

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- must not participate in any discussion of the matter at the meeting;
- must not participate in any vote taken on the matter at the meeting;
- must disclose the interest to the meeting, whether registered or not, subject to the provisions of section 32 of the Localism Act 2011;
- if the interest is not registered and is not the subject of a pending notification, must notify the Monitoring Officer of the interest within 28 days;
- must leave the room while any discussion or voting takes place.

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AGENDA

1. Appointment of Vice-Chair

2. Apologies

To receive apologies for absence.

3. Minutes - 4 March 2025 (Pages 5 - 17)

To approve as a correct record the Minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2025.

4. Chair's Announcements

5. Declarations of Interest

To receive any Members' Declarations of Interest.

6. Refreshed LEAF priorities and annual report for 2024-25 (Pages 18 - 31)

7. Council Tax Support Scheme (Pages 32 - 45)

8. Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Draft Work Programme
(Pages 46 - 51)

9. Urgent Items

To consider such other business as, in the opinion of the Chairman of the meeting, is of sufficient urgency to warrant consideration and is not likely to involve the disclosure of exempt information.

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER,
WALLFIELDS, HERTFORD ON TUESDAY 4
MARCH 2025, AT 7.00 PM

PRESENT: Councillor D Jacobs (Chair)
Councillors E Buckmaster, V Burt, N Clements,
N Cox, A Holt, C Horner, G McAndrew,
S Nicholls, M Swainston, G Williams and
D Woollcombe

ALSO PRESENT:

Councillors B Crystall, A Daar, B Deering,
V Glover-Ward and T Hoskin

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE:

Michele Aves	- Committee Support Officer
Andrew Figgis	- Economic Development Officer
Jonathan Geall	- Head of Housing and Health
Peter Mannings	- Committee Support Officer
Hilary Marsh	- Programme Manager
Ben Wood	- Head of Communications, Strategy and Policy

Apologies for absence were submitted from Councillors Boylan, Carter and Thomas. It was noted that Councillor Burt was substituting for Councillor Carter and Councillor Holt was substituting for Councillor Boylan.

368 MINUTES - 14 JANUARY 2025

Councillor Buckmaster proposed, and Councillor Clements seconded, a motion that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Minutes of the meeting held on 14 January 2025, be confirmed as a correct record, and signed by the Chair.

369 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The chair mentioned that he had asked a question at full council regarding taking meetings of the council on the road to towns and villages in the community. He asked if there was any appetite for Overview and Scrutiny to perhaps be a trailblazer in meeting outside of Wallfields.

Councillor McAndrew said that this was a really good idea, and asked how this would work in terms of webcasting the meetings off site. Councillor Buckmaster commented on the challenge of finding appropriate facilities.

Councillor McAndrew said that going offsite to an area where the agenda topics were not relevant to that area would not be a useful exercise.

Councillor Swainston commented on whether the new Bishop's Stortford High School had appropriate facilities in their new auditorium. Councillor McAndrew said that some parish councils had facilities for meetings to be webcasted.

370 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Nicholls declared an interest in the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) report on the basis that she took part in the arts in East Herts event as a participating artist and East Herts resident, and applied for and received a grant towards this activity.

Councillors Horner, Jacobs and Swainston declared interests as Members of Bishop's Stortford Town Council, which was a beneficiary of the UKSPF. Councillor E Buckmaster declared an interest as a Member of Sawbridgeworth Town Council, which was a beneficiary of the UKSPF.

Councillor Williams declared an interest as a Member of Ware Town Council, which was a beneficiary of the UKSPF.

371 UK SHARED PROSPERITY FUND

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth, the Executive Member for Communities and the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability jointly submitted a report updating Members on the UK Shared Prosperity

Fund, which officially started on 1 April 2022 and was due to cease on 31 March 2025.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth thanked Officers and the Town and Parish Clerks for their efforts in respect of projects and the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF). She spoke about the £3,000 new premises grants and the business strand of UKSPF funding. The Executive Member for Planning and Growth spoke about the significant work that had been undertaken towards securing grants for a lot of villages and the smaller towns. She referred in particular to the work undertaken in collaboration with Buntingford Town Council, Sawbridgeworth Town Council and Ware Town Council.

The Chair drew Members' attention to the recommendations, which included an invitation for Members to consider priorities for the coming financial year (2025/26), and to make any recommendations to the Executive in that regard.

Councillor McAndrew said that the outcomes were all very positive so far. He referred to the table regarding funding in terms of where this had been received and what type of funding had been received.

Councillor McAndrew said that he was fully aware that some towns and parishes were more proactive than others, and he asked how the council was reaching out to those that needed help when considering applying for resources from the UKSPF.

Councillor Buckmaster referred to discussions at an environmental forum he had attended, and the links to the general environment agenda. He referred to small

plots of land, town and parish councils and other clubs and associations, including allotment holders benefiting from small pots of money such as UKSPF grants.

Councillor Nicholls said that various different grants had made a massive difference to businesses, individuals, and the wider communities in so many places across the district. She was really pleased that there had been a decision to share the money, particularly in smaller communities where local parish councils had very low reserves and were trying to maintain buildings and put on events with very little budget.

Councillor Nicholls said that in Buntingford and Cottered, community spaces benefited from grant money to make them more accessible for local groups and events, and this meant that these spaces were available throughout the year as there was often a problem in the winter when communities were not accessible as it was too expensive or too cold to put on events. She said that it was great that funds had been put into refurbishing the toilets in Buntingford.

Councillor Nichols said that going forward, funding for climate change and funds available to improve town and village centres had a lot of overlap. She said that she would like to see this continue as a funding area in the next round of UKSPF allocations in the 2025/26 financial year. She referend in particular to Aspenden Parish Council and efforts to rectify drainage issues on the village green.

Councillor Hoskin said that it was incumbent on East Herts Councillors to carry the message out to parish councils in respect of accessing UKSPF funding support. Councillor

Daar said that it was easier for her to communicate with the town council as she was a double hat councillor, on both the District and the Town Council. She felt that if more District Councillors visited town and parish meetings in a consistent way, this would help with getting the messages out in respect of the grants that were available.

Councillor Horner said that he was really pleased to see the benefits of the work that had been done in respect of the UKSPF. He said that the table seemed to cover about 70% of the actual allocation, and he said that he presumed that there was still 30% going through at the moment.

Councillor Horner said that he was aware of projects in Bishop's Stortford that had not been fulfilled as they would not have been completed by the end of the 2024/25 year. He asked for a flavour of what was still outstanding and suggested that sustainability hubs could be considered for future UKSPF funding. He also suggested using current UKSPF funding for building community capacity around environmental initiatives would mean that the fund had legacy going into the future.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth explained that the remaining 30% of the funding was for district wide initiatives such as the energy hubs and contributions towards Hertfordshire Futures, for the film office and various other initiatives. She reiterated that district councillor involvement to assist parish councils with getting projects moved forward was definitely what was needed.

Councillor McAndrew sympathised with the officers in the timescales that had to work in when dealing with 50 plus parish councils. He praised the officers for their work.

Councillor Nicholls spoke about the setting up of an energy hub in Buntingford and also commented on Arts in East Herts as an excellent initiative. She highlighted an ongoing issue of finding suitable venues for activities across the district. She praised the proposal of setting up a steering group for a future Art in East Herts event next year perhaps.

Councillor Nicholls said that smaller groups and individual artists faced real challenges when promoting their activities and get noticed in their local communities and beyond. She said that larger umbrella events needed to be more inclusive in that respect.

Councillor Clements thanked Officers for their work. He made the point that there was a lot of good work taking place in the community that Officers were not aware of. He commented on whether future allocations could be more heavily weighted towards the villages and smaller localities.

The Executive Member for Communities said that there should be a delicate balance between grant funding for running free events and funding for marketing. Councillor Jacobs said that he had been encouraged by an observation that Bishop's Stortford had benefited from 41.6% of the total spend to the towns.

Councillor Jacobs said that next year 2025/26 funding was predominantly revenue (£473,000) and £107,000 capital. He asked if this breakdown would cause any issues as

most of the spend appeared to be capital spend. He asked about the practicalities of hitting the ground running as per the advice.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said there were a number of projects where funding had been withdrawn as they could not be completed. She said that there were back up emergency projects where funding could be diverted to ensure that the funding was spent. She said that the town and village centre projects could be moved forward relatively quickly.

The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability mentioned carbon reductions and a focus on biodiversity. He also commented on the local nature recovery strategy and initiatives such as active travel.

Councillor McAndrew asked if any of the projects that had not been processed in the year 2024/25 would be suitable for moving in 2025/26. He referred in particular to active travel.

The Executive Member for Planning and Growth said that there were a number of projects that would not get finished within the timeframe. She said that Officers had been creative in finding solutions for some of the projects, and there were other projects that were on the backburner and were still ready to be funded. She said that there were a number of villages that did not get funded from the village centres fund, and applications would be very quick for any villages that had not had funding already.

Councillor Nicholls proposed and Councillor Williams seconded, a motion that the progress to date be

reviewed, and the priorities for the 2025/26 civic year be considered with the following being recommended for UKSPF funding in 2025/26:

- active travel
- climate change
- town and village centres
- empowering the voluntary community

RESOLVED – that (A) the progress to date be reviewed; and

(B) the priorities for the 2025/26 civic year be considered and the following be recommended for UKSPF money in 2025/26:

- active travel
- climate change
- town and village centres
- empowering the voluntary community

372 EAST HERTS EXECUTIVE SCRUTINY PROTOCOL

The Committee Support Officer presented a report in respect of the East Herts Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Protocol to take effect from 18 March 2025, with a review due to take place in June 2027 following the district council elections.

The Committee Support Officer referred to government guidance issued in April 2024 in respect of Overview and Scrutiny and how this should be conducted. The guidance was shared with the Committee and the protocol set out the principles that should define the relationship between the Executive and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee Support Officer explained that the protocol was less procedural than the constitution and was more of a set of principles to guide members of Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive. Members were invited to comment on the protocol and agree to sign up to the protocol prior to approval by the Executive.

Councillor Buckmaster commented on whether there were any differences that could be highlighted compared to what had been happening previously. The Committee Support Officer said that the protocol highlighted the opportunity for Executive Members to report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on a regular basis.

Councillor McAndrew said that the protocol document had not included the words overview and scrutiny. The Committee Support Officer said that the protocol document was intended to be a guide for how the relationship between the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny should ideally work.

The Chair explained that this committee could still scrutinise external activities and could accept requests for scrutiny from external organisations. He said that this was not reflected in the flow chart and asked that the word Overview be included in the document.

Councillor McAndrew referred to the links in the document and referred to narrative in terms of what Members wanted to get out of meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. He said that Members to date had not got together to consider topics in terms of what was to be scrutinised and what questions were going to

be asked, and in particular what outcomes Members were looking for.

Councillor McAndrew commented on training for the committee and referred to a half a day session he had attended some years ago in Westminster followed by observing a Westminster overview and scrutiny meeting. He said that training on offer now was less in depth, and he wondered what training could be on offer moving forward to adopt the scrutiny protocol.

Councillor McAndrew referred to a comment from the chair earlier in the meeting about going out to parishes. He asked about the guidance that stated that a Local Authority should consider how communications officers could help scrutiny engage with the public and how wider internal expertise and local knowledge from Members and Officers might contribute to that engagement.

Members made a number of comments in respect of performance monitoring and key performance indicators (KPIs). The Chair made the point that the committee looked at the performance indicators that were relevant to the topic that Members were discussing, e.g. herbicides.

Councillor Horner said that the protocol document did indicate that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could use performance data to identify topics for scrutiny going forward.

Councillor McAndrew referred to the point in the document about how and when scrutiny could best influence policy and development. He asked how this would evolve moving forward.

The Chair said that he had invited the Executive to the forward plan workshop at the end of March. He also said that he had an open invite to the Joint Administration Steering Group where issues were identified for scrutiny by this Committee.

Councillor Woollcombe commented on benchmarking and KPIs and the need for more specifics in that regard. The Chair said that the issue was to what extent this detail needed to be highlighted in the primary document rather than as a link. He said that the Executive could be asked to consider whether they felt that was necessary.

Councillor Woollcombe proposed, and Councillor Swainston seconded, a motion that Overview and Scrutiny have considered and commented on the East Herts Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Protocol and Overview and Scrutiny sign up to the protocol prior to approval of the protocol by the Executive.

After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that (A) Overview and Scrutiny Committee have considered and commented on the East Herts Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Protocol; and

(B) Overview and Scrutiny Committee agree to sign up to the protocol prior to approval of the protocol by the Executive.

373 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - DRAFT WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee Support Officer submitted the work programme report and Members were invited to consider and determine the work programme going forward.

The Chair reminded Members of the workshop due to be held in March via MS teams, to which the Executive had been invited. There were a number of comments from Members that the forward plan for the Executive needed to go further ahead.

Councillor Nicholls proposed and Councillor Clements seconded a motion that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme be agreed. After being put to the meeting and a vote taken, the motion was declared CARRIED.

RESOLVED – that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme in Appendix 1 be agreed.

374 URGENT ITEMS

There were no urgent items.

The meeting closed at 8.00 pm

Chairman
Date

Agenda Item 6

East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: 10th June 2025

Report by: Councillor Ben Crystall, Leader of the Council

Report title: Refreshed LEAF Priorities and Annual Report
for 2024/25

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

- This report provides Committee Members with an update on performance against LEAF priorities over the 2024/25 year and proposed amended LEAF priorities for the 2025/26 year onwards.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE MEMBERS:

- (A) That Committee Members review performance over the 2024/25 year; and**
- (B) That Committee Members review the proposed amended LEAF priorities for 2025/26 and make any recommendations for Executive or Council to consider.**

1.0 Proposals

- 1.1 That Committee Members review progress against last year's LEAF priorities and consider the amended LEAF priorities before adoption by Council in July.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 On 28th February 2024, Council approved its new “LEAF” corporate priorities. These set out the strategic priorities of the Council and were grouped under the following four headings:
- Listening, Open and Transparent
 - Environmentally Focused
 - Acting with the Community
 - Fair and Inclusive
- 2.2 Under each of these headings are a series of sub objectives and actions which officers were tasked with delivering. The paper to Council can be found here:
[democracy.eastherts.gov.uk/documents/s65262/East Herts Council Corporate Plan.pdf?J=3](https://democracy.eastherts.gov.uk/documents/s65262/East%20Herts%20Council%20Corporate%20Plan.pdf?J=3)
- 2.3 A further, more detailed set of actions, projects and measures were then implemented at an operational level. This framework helped inform the delivery plans for services, teams and individual staff performance goals. In theory, every member of East Herts Council staff should be able to relate their day-to-day actions to strategic delivery of LEAF priorities agreed by Members.
- 2.4 With the 2024/25 year completed, progress against the LEAF priorities can be found in Appendix A, which sets out updates against each area in detail.
- 2.5 The LEAF priorities are kept under review by Executive on an annual basis and adjusted/ amended as required. This enables The Council to change priorities to accommodate new challenges (e.g. in national legislation) and local issues.
- 2.6 For 2025/26 Executive are keen to stay with the LEAF framework with an update to some of the sub-objectives. These reflect the fact that progress has been made in some areas but also that new challenges have arisen which need to be accommodated. The proposed new LEAF framework is as follows:

2.7 Listening, Open and Transparent. Sub objectives as follows:

- Listen and be open and transparent in decision making and actions. We will prioritise improved consultation, engagement and conversation with our communities and evaluate the impact
- Strive to achieve excellent customer service **(new)**
- Encourage residents to use our digital communication channels so those who are not digitally able can easily talk to us by phone or in person
- Engage the community in Local Government reorganisation **(new)**
- Engage with residents through Community Forums and the Development Management Forum, to enhance planning outcomes at strategic sites

2.8 Environmentally Focused. Sub objectives as follows:

- Implement our new Air Quality Action Plan to cut pollution and improve health
- Implement our Parking Strategy and other options including the LCWIP to encourage active travel
- Encourage the reduction of carbon emissions from homes and businesses through training and by supporting “Energy Hubs” in towns and parishes
- Roll out more EV chargers in urban and rural locations across the district
- Encourage residents to play their part in supporting local wildlife and improving our natural environment and support delivery of the Hertfordshire Nature Recovery Strategy **(new)**
- Maximising the positive environmental impacts with the delivery of the new waste contract **(new)**

2.9 Acting with the Community

- Consult with communities to update our Local Plan, prioritising improved sustainability standards

- Prioritise actions that can provide housing which is truly affordable
- Help create thriving high streets, by encouraging local markets and by working positively with partners
- Create a long term asset management plan based on community values **(new)**
- Support communities to create or update their Neighbourhood Plans
- Support voluntary sector groups to continue their work supporting the whole community

2.10 Fair and Inclusive

- Deliver the Cultural Strategy, with support for art and cultural events
- Maintain and improve council services while making them more cost efficient through the "Transforming East Herts" programme
- Deliver our Thriving Together Plan to promote physical exercise, healthy lifestyles and support other measures including healthy hubs that boost community wellbeing
- Support those facing homelessness or recovering from it, and include them in consultations
- Improve our Council Tax Support scheme to make it fairer, simpler and more transparent

2.11 These are proposed for adoption by Executive to Council, via the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

2.12 After adoption, Council officers will identify any additional actions or measures that need to be implemented in order to deliver the priorities. These will then filter into service, team and individual performance plans.

3.0 Reason(s)

3.1 The LEAF Corporate Plan helps residents understand the priorities

of the Council and how resources are used to achieve them. The plan also drives service, team and individual performance goals.

4.0 Options

4.1 The new priorities have been developed by the Joint Administration with support and advice from officers on deliverability, risks and financial implications. No alternatives are currently being considered, as to do so would disregard the development process which has been undertaken.

5.0 Risks

5.1 There is no legal requirement for councils to develop a corporate plan, however, should the Council fail to refresh priorities there may be a risk that resources are not directed towards achieving key priorities.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

6.1 The new Corporate Plan priorities will guide the organisation's work over the coming years. They will be reviewed on an annual basis and agreed at Council. A key priority is to ensure that consultation is carried out effectively.

Community Safety

Not directly however some of the priorities and subsequent actions will be focused on supporting community safety

Data Protection

No

Equalities

As the Corporate Plan is translated into operational priorities, individual equalities impact assessments will be undertaken where there is a change to service delivery

Environmental Sustainability

Actions under the Environmentally Focused section of the Corporate Plan will address issues around Sustainability

Financial

No

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

No

Specific Wards

No

Background papers, appendices and other relevant material:

Appendix A – Annual Plan for 2024/25

Contact Member

Ben Crystall, Leader of the Council. ben.crystall@eastherts.gov.uk

Contact Officer

Benjamin Wood, Director for Regeneration, Customer and Commercial Services, Tel: 01992 531699. benjamin.wood@eastherts.gov.uk

Report Author

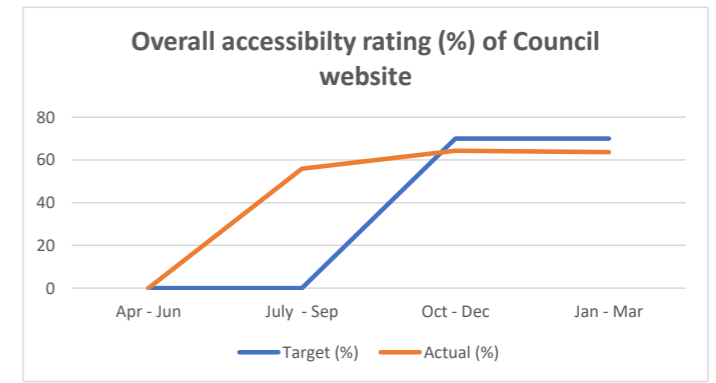
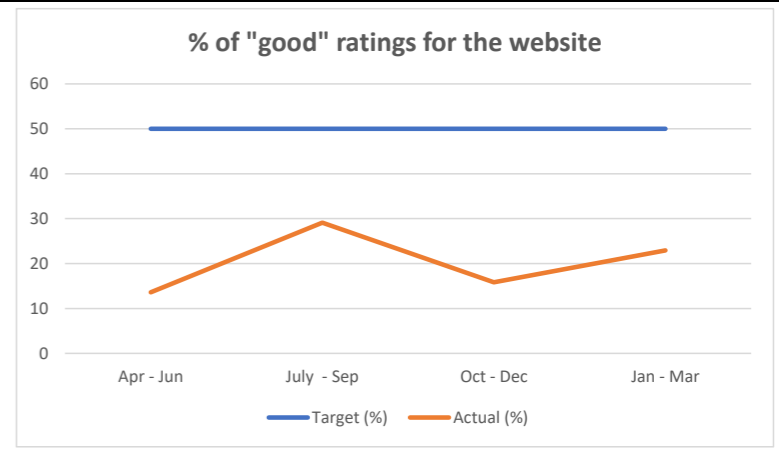
Benjamin Wood, Director for Regeneration, Customer and Commercial Services, Tel: 01992 531699. benjamin.wood@eastherts.gov.uk

LEAF - ANNUAL REPORT FOR 2024 - 25



Listening, Open and Transparent

	Objective	Actions	Measure	Update for 2024/25	
				Progress	measure/ results
1	Listen and be open and transparent in decision making and actions. We will prioritise improved consultation, engagement and conversations with our communities	Publish the Listening Council Strategy	N/A		Listening Council Strategy was adopted by Executive in July 2024 after consultation with stakeholders. It sets out the principles for all consultation and engagement, including prioritising face to face engagement
		Publish a Forward Plan of Consultations	N/A		Due to the infrequent nature of consultations, a forward plan for 2024/25 only had two items on it (with a recent addition in regards to the District Plan Vision consultation planned for summer 2025 and the ORL masterplanning exercise June/ July 2025. We are piloting the using of a tool called Engage HQ as platform to host all consultations going forward.
		Undertake key consultations this year on the ORL Public Space and Parking Strategy	N/A		Both consultations undertaken. Each involved face to face sessions as well as online surveys to align with Listening Council principles. With ORL this was on market stalls attended by Members and officers as well as pro-active surveys of younger people undertaken by a third party company. We had 730 online responses and almost 300 via face to face. These designs will now feed into the planning application for the overall site. For parking this was roadshow/ workshops in 6 towns across the district. This resulted in 60 attendees across the five events and over 1600 online responses. The responses helped inform the Parking Strategy which was adopted by Council in early 2025. For partnership based consultations there were 900 responses to the LCWIP - Local Walking & Cycling Infrastructure Plan from East Herts residents, the highest of any district. For the LNRS (Local Nature Recovery Strategy) more than 1/4 of all respondents across Hertfordshire were from East Herts.
2	Ensure information on our website is as up to date as possible	Undertake review of web content	Govmetric rating for web pages - aim to reach 50% "good" rating		Overall ratings are well below target and have been for the past three years. Such low numbers of feedback make it challenging to draw any conclusions about issues or take any remedial action. Over 2024/25, we received just 268 ratings on our webpages, a drop from several thousand up and during Covid. Often there is no additional information given on why we receive a poor rating, free text comments are usually in regard to a service received rather than about website feedback. Eg. the parking pages often receive negative ratings with associated comments about why we haven't cancelled a PCN. We have tried various ways to increase engagement including changing the position, shape and colouring of the govmetric widget. We have also trialled just using it on specific pages (eg. positive things like giving out grants) and more challenging pages (eg. increases to charges) to see if feedback aligns in any way to content tone. However, the sample sizes have never been enough to draw any conclusions. As a consequence we intend to decommission govmetric as move to a new platform called EngageHQ which will enable to us manage consultations more effectively and seek feedback via this route.
			Maintain accessibility standards (against WCAG 2.2 standards)		Our accessibility monitoring tool provides regular feedback on the website. The new tool (Monsido) was launched in late 2024 hence there is no earlier comparative data. Our score is lower than expected due to the number of pdf documents that are on the website and this tends to be a format which does not meet accessibility standards, which are often judged by availability of alternative text for images, captions for videos, colour schemes and keyboard use. The web team works with service areas to minimise the amount of low accessibility rated content on the website. Feedback from the monitoring tool is also shared with Webcurl, who host the website, too address any obvious fixes. We have set a target of 70% for 2025/26 which will require further removal of pdf documents



3	Provide full and timely advertising for all major council decisions	Keep forward plan up to date and ensure it is published	N/A	All committee items regularly published on modgov and forward plan. The Council's Leadership Team review the committee programme on a fortnightly basis to assist Members with ensuring forthcoming decisions are published											
<p>Review of Cinders (BEAM panto) included digital marketing (eg. 129 posts across X/ Meta/ Insta and 59 videos) and print marketing including 19 adverts in local publications, train billboard at Hertford North and bus backs for 2 weeks. Paid digital adverts had a reach of 234,914. With print adverts it is hard to quantify the reach. Overall the panto made a net profit of £41k</p> <p>FACEBOOK Over the last year we've had 13.4 thousand content interactions (70% up from the previous year) an increase of 861 followers (5.4%) and 5.7 thousand link clicks. The top social content is as follows: changes to bin collections (227k interactions) solar together (101k interactions - please note this included paid for ads) UKSPF, maison de scarlett promotion (36.9k) 2 posts on christmas waste collections (19.2k/ 16.8k)</p> <p>INSTAGRAM 12.8k content interactions (up 50.3%) 814 follows (up 11.4%) 5.6k link clicks (down 2.6%)</p> <p>top content mirrored that of facebook</p>															
						4	Evaluate the impact of our communications and understand how we can do better	Review reach and impressions from all campaigns to see how we can target communications more effectively in future	Reach on social media	<p>Over the year we had 26 number of media enquiries, 360 mentions in the press and 64 number of press releases issued, our overall press score remains above 0. Even when titles of articles appear as though they are negative the majority of coverage is neutral or positive.</p>	<p>Press Mentions</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Press Mentions Data</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Quarter</th> <th>Press Mentions</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Q1</td> <td>100</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Q2</td> <td>90</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Q3</td> <td>80</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Q4</td> <td>90</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Quarter	Press Mentions	Q1	100
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Q1	100														
Q2	90														
Q3	80														
Q4	90														
<p>We started the year with 15,918 number of subscribers and finished with 16,067. Average open rate of 54% per newsletter with a total of 11,120 link clicks across the articles. We moved over to a new system which cleared out a lot of disengaged contacts, with the new email marketing system we are able to start building up our subscriber rate even more and target them better. our top network campaigns of 2024 are as follows: BEAM opening Bin Collections Hertford Town Council Support For Rivers Council Budget VE Day Street Party Application Gilston Planning Permission What goes in my bins AiEH Listings Statement of Persons Nominated New Bin Collection Service</p>															
								Increase subscribers to Network by 10%			<p>Subscribers to Network</p> <table border="1"> <caption>Subscribers to Network Data</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Quarter</th> <th>Subscribers to Network</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Q1</td> <td>15920</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Q2</td> <td>15950</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Q3</td> <td>15840</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Q4</td> <td>16060</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Quarter	Subscribers to Network	Q1	15920
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Q4	16060														

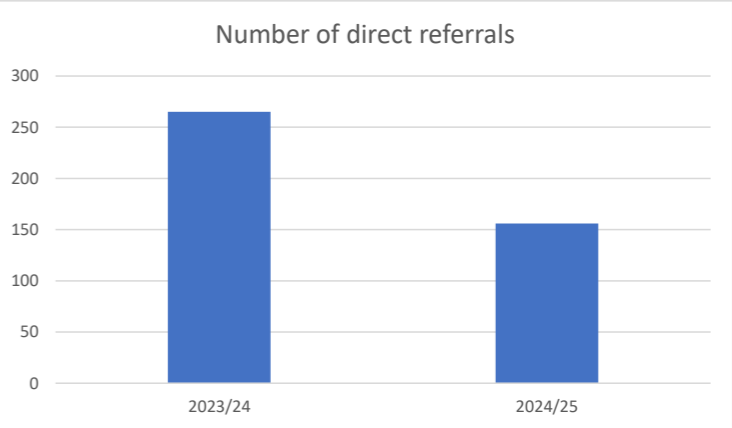
5	Encourage residents to use our digital communication channels, so those who are not digitally able, can contact us by phone or in person	Maintain a front of house offer for residents who most need assistance	Number of people visiting reception	Receptions continue to be open between 10 - 2 at Wallfields on Tuesdays and Thursdays, and Jackson Square (Navigation House) on Wednesdays and Fridays. Over 2024/25 we had 1840 visitors. This compares to 3331 in 2023/24 and 3641 in 2022/23. We are seeing fewer people visit which we assume means more residents are able to transact with us online. However, those that do come and see us often need more support and assistance, mostly in relation to council tax, benefits and housing. The only exception would be for residents who visit to obtain parking vouchers, most of whom are seeking hard copy permits as they provide a level of flexibility for visitors that cannot be obtained through the parking system, permitsmart	
		Encourage more digital take up of services	Increase proportion of digital contacts	The proportion of contacts via digital means has slowly increased since we introduced a new CRM in East Herts in late 2023. Prior to that it was less than 30% however it now averages close to 50%. Telephony remains the contact channel of choice with only 3 months (October, November and December 2024) where digital contacts exceeded telephony contacts. Over the year, customer services received 48,888 phone calls and 47,576 digital contacts. There were 1300 appointments booked (which consists of licencing interviews, planning, housing or benefit "call backs"), slightly more than last year (1041)	
			Increase % of residents who have online accounts for council tax	The % of households who have online council tax accounts has been steadily increasing over recent years due to campaigns within the Revenues and Benefits Service to encourage people to sign up	
			Increase % of businesses that have online NNDR accounts	The rate of take up of online business rates is significantly lower than for council tax. Numbers are slowly increasing however often businesses do not see this a priority.	
6	Engage with residents at community forum events to enhance planning outcomes at strategic sites	Run community forums	N/A	Community Forums set up and running for the Gilston Area and Stortford Fields. During 2024, four Community Forums have been held for the Gilston Area and two for Stortford Fields. The Forums have been well received with topics for the Forums identified through the issues and matters being raised by residents. They are well attended and supported by officers and relevant stakeholders including applicants	

Environmentally Focused				
	Objective	Actions	Measure	Update for 2024/25
				Progress and measure/ results
<u>7</u>	Update the council's parking strategy to encourage sustainable travel	Develop a new strategy and consult on it	N/A	A new strategy was drafted and consultation took place over Autumn 2024. This involved an online survey and workshops in Ware, Bishop's Stortford, Hertford, Sawbridgeworth, Buntingford and Stansted Abbots. The strategy was discussed at Overview and Scrutiny in January 2025 and adopted by Council in February. The strategy focuses on encouraging greener types of travel, fairer and more consistent charging and active travel.
<u>8</u>	Develop and implement our new Air Quality Action Plan to cut pollution and improve health.	Develop and implement new strategy	Reduction in NO2 levels across the 3 AQMAs in East Hertfordshire	The East Herts Air Quality Action plan has been approved by DEFRA and formally adopted by the council. Work with partner agencies (eg HCC) already underway. Historic data can found in our air quality webpage: https://easthertsairquality.co.uk/ and in the 2024 report: https://easthertsairquality.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/2024-Air-Quality-Annual-Status-Report.pdf
<u>9</u>	Roll out more EV chargers in urban and rural locations across the district.	Procure partner to install further EV chargers		Ambitious tender launched in November 2025 to find a partner to install ev chargers in the council's car parks across the district. Award to be let early in 2025/26.
<u>10</u>	Reduce carbon emissions from homes and businesses by creating "Energy Hubs" in towns and parishes that offer information on grants and other support to help residents save money and cut carbon.	Run energy hub events	Number of events	17 Energy Hub events have taken place over the year with over 1,000 residents taking part. The Hubs have been instrumental in driving uptake of retrofit grants and schemes. They have helped East Herts consistently lead across the county in levels of engagement and participation, including: securing the most participation in teh county on consultation on the Local Cycling and Infrastructure Plan . Securing significant uptake of the Home Upgrade Grant. Encouraging over 200 residents and businesses to invest £2.2 million in solar panels through the Solar Together bulk purchasing scheme, installing 2,100 solar panels and saving 175,000kg CO2 to date.
<u>11</u>	Encourage residents to play their part in supporting local wildlife and improving our natural environment.	Encourage tree planting	Increase number of new trees planted in the district	In total, 11.24k trees were planted over the year. Big tree give away - 578 residents took part so engagement remains high. Great example of collaboration and co-ordination between County, East Herts and contractor teams. Have also undertaken a partnership with the County Council to plant trees in urban locations with a focus on air quality zone and flood prone areas with a projection of saving of 1000 CO2e annually
Acting with the Community				
	Objective	Actions	Measure	Update for 2024/25
				Progress and measure/ results
<u>12</u>	Consult with communities to review and refresh our Local Plan, prioritising improved sustainability standards.	Publish a new Local Development Scheme	N/A	A new Local Development Scheme (LDS) was agreed by the Council in October 2024. The LDS sets out the timetable for production of the new District Plan.It is anticipated that formal plan-making will comence in early 2026.
		Undertake a Call for Sites	N/A	A Call for Sites ran from the 5 July to 30 September 2024. Over 280 sites were submitted, including for housing and employment and nature recovery/BNG. A report was considered by the Executive in February 2025 which provided a summary of the sites and set out the next steps in relation to their assessment. Sites visits are currently being undertaken by the Planning Policy Team.

		Collaborate with stakeholders on a Vision for the new District Plan	N/A	A Strategic Vision has been produced to chart a clear and ambitious course for the District's future which will serve as the golden thread for the new District Plan, informing policies and decision-making that will shape East Herts in the years to come. It comes at a crucial time as East Herts faces significant growth pressure. The Vision will guide the Council as it seeks to balance development against protecting the District's unique character and ensuring a high quality of life for residents. Stakeholder and community engagement on the Vision will take place between 5 June and 18 July 2025. This will include a series of in-person events across the District.																																					
13	Help create thriving high streets, by encouraging local markets, and by delivering grants to support local businesses and enhance town and village centres.	Increase number of new traders on the charter and farmer's markets in Ware and Hertford	Number of traders	Temporary markets manager employed between September 2024 - March 2025 to assist with marketing and bring in new traders. In the Hertford Commercial market we now have 17 traders licensed with an additional 1 pending, an increase of 4 from last year. In the Ware Commercial market there are 6 traders licensed with a further 2 in process of getting a licence (2 more in total than last year). The Hertford Farmers market has 4 traders.																																					
		Provide grants to businesses to encourage job growth and increased amount of commercial floorspace	Number and value of grants given out	14 new premises grants were given out over 2024/25, totalling £42,000. These went to a mixture of businesses across the 5 towns but also smaller industrial parks in Tewin and Aston. The grants have supported businesses open up new premises or expand, helping create employment and economic growth in the district. In addition we also gave out 5 large grants to businesses, totalling over £200,000 of investment. This included Honrbeck in Hertford to help export sustainable materials for street lighting and signage; UKPN in Much Hadham, towards developing new products for energy management on large sites; Skill at Arms in Sawbridgeworth) towards costs of refurbishing and fitting out old, disused agricultural barns into new commercial office space; the Black Horse Pub in Brent Pelham towards creating 6 accommodation units/ rooms on site to help diversify income and Air Energy in Hertford towards expanding on site manufacturing and distribution capacity for air compressors and heating systems. The grant funding has leveraged over £750k of private sector investment in the district and helped these businesses accelerate growth, bringing more employment to East Herts.																																					
14	Actively encourage more communities to create or update their Neighbourhood Plans.	Support production on neighbourhood plans	N/A	Neighbourhood Plans continue to be prepared and updated across the District. Support provided by the Planning Policy Team at key stages. Executive agreed the Hertford Castle Plus Neighbourhood Area Designation on 9 July 2024. Walkern Neighbourhood Plan First revision was adopted by the Council on 24 July 2024. An Examination on the Stanstead Abbots and St Margarets Neighbourhood Plan is due to commence shortly.																																					
15	Prioritise actions that can provide Housing which is truly affordable.		N/A	Negotiated innovative rent reduction scheme with Paradigm Housing. First tranche of scheme resulted in 4no. four bedroom houses having their rents reduced and capped at the three bedroom local housing allowance, meaning the rents are just 57% of market rents. Discussions now underway with Paradigm and other housing associations about lowering the rents for more properties.																																					
16	Work with partners to help make town centres more attractive, safer and easier to navigate.	Support town and village centre improvements with UKSPF funding to increase footfall	Number and value of grants delivered to town and village centres	11 grants were given out over the 2024/25 year totalling around £450,000 for town centres. These went to Ware as a contribution to the new public toilets refurbishment, Buntingford to refurbish the public toilets, Sawbridgeworth to support refurbishment costs of the Memorial Hall, Datchworth for outdoor play equipment, Watton-at-Stone for improvements to the Lammas common area, Cottered and Throcking to help refurbish the pavillion, Buntingford High Street for improvement works, Castle Park/ mound improvements in Bishop's Stortford and artwork in the Northgate End Car Park. Funds also supported rangers in Bishop's Stortford through the BID and costs of the market manager in Hertford and Ware. Over the course of the UKSPF project, 14 towns and parishes benefitted from grant funding which was usually matched by the town or parish council, creating or improving over 1000 sqm of community space. In addition £52,000 also funded 17 village hall decarbonisation plans and 150 small to large energy saving and warmth improvement initiatives in 10 village halls																																					
		Deliver new contract for street cleansing and waste collections in the district	% of collections emptied on the scheduled day	Work was undertaken throughout 2024/25 in preparation for the new waste contract which went live on 6th May, 2025. Performance against the key metrics of missed bin collections and street cleansing quality was maintained throughout 2024/24 under FCC																																					
			Percentage of Contract Officer street inspections graded B and above	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Apr-24</th> <th>May-24</th> <th>Jun-24</th> <th>Jul-24</th> <th>Aug-24</th> <th>Sep-24</th> <th>Oct-24</th> <th>Nov-24</th> <th>Dec-24</th> <th>Jan-25</th> <th>Feb-25</th> <th>Mar-25</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>% of collections emptied on the scheduled day</td> <td>99.9</td> <td>99.9</td> <td>99.9</td> <td>99.9</td> <td>99.9</td> <td>99.9</td> <td>99.9</td> <td>99.9</td> <td>99.9</td> <td>99.9</td> <td>99.9</td> <td>99.9</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Percentage of Contract Officer street inspections graded B and above</td> <td>92.8</td> <td>95.2</td> <td>95.8</td> <td>94.3</td> <td>91.2</td> <td>92.6</td> <td>92.9</td> <td>95.0</td> <td>98.1</td> <td>97.3</td> <td>94.0</td> <td>88.5</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>		Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	% of collections emptied on the scheduled day	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	99.9	Percentage of Contract Officer street inspections graded B and above	92.8	95.2	95.8	94.3	91.2	92.6	92.9	95.0	98.1	97.3
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17	Support voluntary sector groups to continue their work support the whole community		N/A	We continue to provide grant support for Citizens Advice, Community Alliance Broxbourne and East Herts and Active in the Community (who provide sports development across the district). Also, we provided 15 community grants of up to £3,000 each to community groups for activities including mental health support, older people's physical health initiatives and community gardening.
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Fair and Inclusive

	Objective	Actions	Measure	Update for 2024/25 Progress and measure/ results							
18	Deliver the Cultural Strategy, with support for new events such as Pride, Herts inclusive Theatre and the East Herts Arts Showcase	Open BEAM Theatre	N/A	In August 2024, East Herts Council opened up BEAM Theatre, following a three year redevelopment "growth and legacy" project at a cost of £30m. BEAM is a hugely ambitious expansion of the single stage facility which previously sat on the site (having closed in 2021). The council's primary aims were to: Reach beyond the traditional 'theatre crowd' and attract more diverse audiences, creating a social and community space welcoming to all; drive the local economy, encouraging visitors to the district, generating employment and boosting business in surrounding areas; Achieve high building sustainability performance standards. On the opening weekend of August last year, BEAM welcomed 2,300 visitors and £30,000 in ticket sales. In terms of the economic impact BEAM has raised the profile of Hertford as a centre for culture and arts, but it is also attracting additional visitors to the town who will be spending in the local economy. It has also served as a venue for other events such as "Generation Hertford", connecting over 800 year 10 & year 13 students with 35 local employers offering non university routes to employment, and business networking events. BEAM is also part of a net zero carbon pilot scheme to become the country's first net zero theatre.							
		Run the Arts in East Herts programme	Number of volunteers	The appetite for the Arts in East Herts Showcase from the cultural sector and residents was enough for us to run a 2 month programme, where we were able to offer participatory events every single day for the full two months, adding up to well over 300 individual events over September and October 2024. This included over 50 individual artists and groups, with 20 of these supported by grants from the council. Participation was phenomenal. Over 5,400 individuals attended the various taster sessions, artist-in-residence events and classes with more forming the audiences at various shows and exhibitions, giving a final estimate of 7,000+ beneficiaries. Perhaps the most amazing outcome of all was that over 1,700 people reported that they were engaging with the organisations and their chosen cultural activities for the first time ever. Of these, just over 500 people have gone to sign up for further sessions, demonstrating that running taster events really worked in drawing in completely new audiences. Furthermore, the showcase provided 213 volunteering opportunities for people to make connections, build their CVs or simply give back to their communities.							
19	Deliver our Thriving Together Plan to promote physical exercise, healthy lifestyles and other measures that boost community wellbeing.	Promote the Healthy Hub	Number of events delivered/ referrals made	<p>Between April and October 2024, the Healthy Hub East Herts (HHEH) continued its successful outreach approach using East Herts Libraries. Of 638 overall interactions, 196 interactions took place at Hertford, Sawbridgeworth, Bishop's Stortford, Ware and Buntingford Libraries. At the HHEH venue in Fore Street, Hertford 346 lite-contact awareness raising conversations took place with 218 attendances at the HHEH Art Group and 112 slow cooker course attendees This same period saw 174 telephone conversations, enabling the HHEH team to support residents with a variety of healthy lifestyle issues. For the entire period of 1st April 2024 until 31st March 2025, 156 direct referrals were received from a variety of external and internal council team routes including follow on referrals to financial support, digital skills training and a further 200 slow cooker course attendees for Q3 2024 and Q4 2025. 66 residents contacted the HHEH support team directly via email for help with health, social and wellbeing concerns. Please note that the staffing and delivery arrangements changed from October 2024 due to a member of staff leaving, with no library engagement taking place and a volunteer provider arrangement put in place to cover an interim phase until 31st March 2025. As a consequence the number of referrals was less than the previous year</p>	 <table border="1"> <caption>Number of direct referrals</caption> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Number of direct referrals</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2023/24</td> <td>270</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2024/25</td> <td>156</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Year	Number of direct referrals	2023/24	270	2024/25	156
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20	<p>Improve our Council Tax Support scheme to make it fairer, simpler and more transparent.</p>	<p>Review the Working Age Council Tax Support Scheme to produce a status and income banded scheme</p>	<p>N/A</p>	<p>The scheme was reviewed over the 24/25 year with a view to making it fairer and simpler. Proposals are going to Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2025</p>																																																																							
21	<p>Support those facing homelessness or recovering from it, and include them in consultations and community activities</p>	<p>Continue to ensure developers build affordable homes</p>	<p>Number of affordable homes delivered</p>	<p>439 affordable homes delivered over the year which is a big increase on previous years. This breaks down into 295 affordable rented, 102 shared ownership, 26 social rented and 16 intermediate. The council seeks to ensure up to 35% affordable housing is delivered on sites proposing 11 to 14 dwellings, and up to 40% affordable housing on sites proposing 15 or more dwellings.</p> <p>Overall, 31.16% of homes delivered in 2024/25 were affordable tenures.</p> <p>The proportion of affordable completions has increased by around 4% compared with the previous year.</p> <p>Please note the figures above relate to planning permissions granted. The Housing team count the number of affordable dwellings which come to market for rent or sale and can be found in this table. There is always a lag in the permissions given to the time they make it to market hence the numbers are smaller</p>	<div data-bbox="2092 275 2760 672"> <p>No. of affordable homes delivered</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Affordable rent</th> <th>Social rent</th> <th>Shared ownership</th> <th>All</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2024/25</td> <td>196</td> <td></td> <td>82</td> <td>278</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2023/24</td> <td>259</td> <td>5</td> <td>108</td> <td>372</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022/23</td> <td>196</td> <td>21</td> <td>84</td> <td>301</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/22</td> <td>132</td> <td></td> <td>41</td> <td>173</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/21</td> <td>89</td> <td>15</td> <td>135</td> <td>239</td> </tr> <tr> <td>All</td> <td>872</td> <td>41</td> <td>450</td> <td>1363</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div> <div data-bbox="2092 693 2760 924"> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Year</th> <th>Affordable rent</th> <th>Social rent</th> <th>Shared ownership</th> <th>All</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>2024/25</td> <td>196</td> <td></td> <td>82</td> <td>278</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2023/24</td> <td>259</td> <td>5</td> <td>108</td> <td>372</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2022/23</td> <td>196</td> <td>21</td> <td>84</td> <td>301</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2021/22</td> <td>132</td> <td></td> <td>41</td> <td>173</td> </tr> <tr> <td>2020/21</td> <td>89</td> <td>15</td> <td>135</td> <td>239</td> </tr> <tr> <td>All</td> <td>872</td> <td>41</td> <td>450</td> <td>1363</td> </tr> </tbody> </table> </div>	Year	Affordable rent	Social rent	Shared ownership	All	2024/25	196		82	278	2023/24	259	5	108	372	2022/23	196	21	84	301	2021/22	132		41	173	2020/21	89	15	135	239	All	872	41	450	1363	Year	Affordable rent	Social rent	Shared ownership	All	2024/25	196		82	278	2023/24	259	5	108	372	2022/23	196	21	84	301	2021/22	132		41	173	2020/21	89	15	135	239	All	872	41	450	1363
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		<p>Deliver a robust homelessness advice and assistance service</p>	<p>Number of people in temporary accommodation</p>	<p>There were an average of 51 homeless households in temporary accommodation at any one time during 2024/25. This was higher than either of the two previous years (2023/24 = 47 on average at any one time - 2022/23 = 49). This reflects the growing numbers of approaches from people facing homelessness. In 2024/25, at one point there were 35 households in bed and breakfast accommodation because the council's hostels were full. In order to provide more suitable temporary accommodation, the council will be leasing five self-contained flats in Hertford town centre. During 2024/25, the owner was renovating the flats, with lettings to start in qtr1, 2025/26.</p>	<div data-bbox="2092 1218 2760 1617"> <p>Number of approaches</p> </div>																																																																						
22	<p>Explore replacing a "strong leader and cabinet" system with a committee system.</p>		<p>N/A</p>	<p>The Member Constitution Review Group have met four times to look at different governance systems, including contact with Spelthorne about their system. Since this priority was agreed, the government's re-organisation plans have been released. In May 2025 Council will consider a paper which postpones any changes in light of these developments.</p>																																																																							

<p><u>23</u></p>	<p>Maintain and improve council services while making them more cost efficient through the “Transforming East Herts” programme</p>		<p>Savings delivered</p>	<p>As of May 2025, the transformation programme has achieved substantial progress across a range of strategic and tactical initiatives, delivering meaningful change and improving the way we serve our communities.</p> <p>The Customer Relationship Management (CRM) programme has delivered a suite of integrated solutions to modernise service delivery and strengthen resident engagement. This includes the successful launch of the new waste services through the CRM system, supported by the integration of Echo and GovDelivery to automate customer updates and improve communication. The Customer Services team has been upskilled to manage service requests through the new platform, enabling a more efficient, consistent, and customer-focused approach. A major milestone within the CRM programme has been the launch of East Herts Your Voice, our new customer engagement platform powered by Engagement HQ. This platform represents a transformational shift in how we engage with residents, enabling transparent, inclusive, and accessible two-way conversations that will inform future service design and decision-making. In addition, Customer Experience Reviews have commenced, with a pilot focused on parking services to help shape improvements based on real customer insight.</p> <p>Alongside the CRM programme, the Revenues and Benefits improvement programme is progressing through four key workstreams. These include a review of the Council Tax Reduction scheme, enhancements to council tax collection activities, the development of a digital self-service toolkit, and a full service restructure to increase responsiveness and effectiveness.</p> <p>The Digital Workplace programme continues to enhance internal capabilities. Phase Two has delivered enhanced intranet features to improve collaboration and access to information, while Phase Three, focused on SharePoint migration, is currently in the planning and concept development stage.</p> <p>The corporate restructure, led by HR, is aligning our organisational design with future service models, ensuring teams are structured to deliver more flexible and effective support.</p> <p>Tactical projects are also delivering results. The leasing of Wallfields to High Oak has begun generating rental income, directly supporting our financial targets. Meanwhile, forward-looking initiatives such as Cloud Financials and the Cloud 9 application are progressing through early-stage scoping and business case development under the new governance model.</p> <p>The transformation programme delivered £206,000 in savings in time for the 2025 to 2026 financial year, reflecting a strong return on investment and a clear commitment to delivering high-quality, modern, and efficient public services.</p>
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Agenda Item 7

East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: Tuesday 10 June 2025

Report by: Councillor Carl Brittain – Executive Member for Financial Sustainability

Report title: Council Tax Support Scheme

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

Summary

The purpose of this report is to update members on the work undertaken so far and to request permission to undertake a consultation with both the public and the Major Precepting Authorities in respect of proposed changes to the Council's Council Tax Support Scheme with effect from 1 April 2026.

1. Each year the Council is required to review its Council Tax Support Scheme in accordance with the requirements of the schedule 1A of the Local Government Finance Act 1992 and to either maintain the scheme or replace it.
2. Council Tax Support (CTS) was introduced from 1 April 2013 when it replaced the Central Government funded Council Tax Benefit regime. From its inception, the funding available to the Council from government has reduced year on year.
3. As with the majority of authorities within England, the Council need to make changes to the CTS scheme for working age applicants (the scheme for pension age applicants is prescribed by Central Government) in order to reduce the significant administrative burden placed on the Council by the introduction of Universal Credit.

4. This report provides details of the proposed scheme, which will provide assistance to the most vulnerable and negate the negative administrative effects of the introduction of Universal Credit. If the review of the current scheme is approved, the report requests permission to consult on these proposed changes as required by the legislation.

RECOMMENDATION FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:

(A) To consider the Council Tax Support Scheme and provide comments to the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability for his consideration.

5. The proposed scheme within this report will address the issues faced by the Revenues and Benefits Service in administering the current scheme.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION

1. CTS was introduced by Central Government in April 2013 as a replacement for the Council Tax Benefit scheme administered on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). As part of the introduction, the Government:
 - Placed the duty to create a local scheme for **Working Age** applicants with billing authorities;
 - Reduced initial funding by the equivalent of ten per cent from the levels paid through benefit subsidy to authorities under the previous Council Tax Benefit scheme; and
 - Prescribed that persons of **Pension age** would be dealt with under regulations set by Central Government and not the authorities' local scheme.

2. Since that time, funding for the Council Tax Support scheme has been amalgamated into other Central Government grants paid to Local Authorities and also within the Business Rates Retention regime. It is now generally accepted that it is not possible to identify the amount of funding actually provided from Central Government sources.
3. The current CTS scheme administered by the Council is divided into two schemes, with pension age applicants receiving support under the rules prescribed by Central Government, and the scheme for working age applicants being determined solely by the local authority.
4. Pensioners, subject to their income, can receive up to 100% support towards their council tax. The Council has no power to change the level of support provided to pensioners and therefore any changes to the level of CTS can only be made to the working age scheme.
5. When CTS was introduced in 2013, for working age applicants, the Council broadly adopted the previous means tested Council Tax Benefit scheme as the basis of awarding support.
6. Due to the reduction in finance, the Council reduced the maximum level of support available to working age applicants 91.5%.
7. The only other changes made were in line with prescribed requirements (set by Government) and to bring the scheme into line with either Housing Benefit or Universal Credit.

The main issues with the current scheme

8. There are a number of issues with the current scheme that will need addressing if the system is to continue to provide effective support to low-income taxpayers and also to provide the service

in an efficient manner. The main issues are as follows:

- The need to continue to assist low-income households and assist in the collection of Council Tax;
- The introduction of Universal Credit for working age applicants; and
- The need for a simplification of the scheme.

9. Each of these points are examined in detail below:

The need to assist low-income households and assist in the collection of Council Tax

10. Similar to other authorities, the Council, now requires all working age applicants to pay a minimum payment (8.5%). Under the previous scheme (Council Tax Benefit), almost 75% of working age applicants would not have been required to pay any Council Tax and would have received full (100%) support.
11. It is essential that this level of support is maintained notwithstanding that the design and the administration of the scheme needs to change.

Council Tax Support and the roll out of Universal Credit

12. The introduction of Universal Credit within the area has, as experienced in all other areas, brought a number of significant challenges to both the administration of CTS and also the collection of Council Tax generally. All Councils have experienced the following:
- The reluctance of Universal Credit claimants to make a prompt claim for Council Tax Support leading to a loss in entitlement;
 - A high number of changes to Universal Credit cases are received from the Department for Work and Pensions requiring a change to Council Tax Support entitlement. This

currently stands at 48746 per annum and is expected to rise from the end of 2025. On average 40% of Universal Credit claimants have between eight and twelve changes in entitlement per annum. These changes result in amendments to Council Tax liability, the re-calculation of instalments, delays, and the demonstrable loss in collection; and

- The increased costs of administration through multiple changes with significant staff time being needed. Consequently, this has resulted in delays in processing CTS claims and sending revised council tax bills.

13. The existing means tested CTS scheme, is too reactive to change, and is not viable in the longer term now that Universal Credit has been rolled out fully within the area and the managed migration from legacy benefits (to be completed by the 2026). The move to a new more efficient CTS scheme from 2026/27 has now become essential.

The need for a simplified approach to the Council Tax Support Scheme.

14. Notwithstanding the introduction of Universal Credit, the existing scheme is based on an 'old fashioned;' means tested benefit scheme. It has major defects namely:
 - It is difficult for customers to understand and is based on a complex calculation of entitlement;
 - The administration for staff is complex, with staff having to request significant amounts of information from applicants;
 - Staff have to undergo significant training to be competent in processing claims, it takes over a year for an assessor to be proficient in the basics.
 - The timescales for processing applications is lengthy, mainly due to the complexity and evidence required to support the applications; and
 - The administration of the scheme is costly when compared to other discounts for Council Tax

15. There is now a need to review the CTS scheme, not only to mitigate the effects of Universal Credit, but also make it easier for customers to make a claim and to significantly reduce the time and costs of administration so work demands are more manageable on the team.

The proposed approach for the 2026/27 Council Tax Support Scheme

16. In view of the problems being experienced with the current scheme, it is proposed that an alternative approach be taken from 2026/27. The approach is to fundamentally redesign the scheme to address all of the issues with the current scheme and in particular:
- (a) To maintain the level of support available to the poorest households;
 - (b) To address the problems with the introduction of full-service Universal Credit; and
 - (c) To reduce the administration costs and delays in processing due to the high level of changes received in respect of Universal Credit;
17. Work has been ongoing since the beginning of January this year on a proposed new scheme which is nearly completed. If agreed by committee, consultation needs to be undertaken with the public and the major precepting authorities. If agreed by Full Council later this year, the new scheme will take effect from 1 April 2026.
18. The current means - tested schemes will be replaced by a simple income grid model as shown below in Table 1:

Table 1 - EXAMPLE

	Passported	Single	Single with 1 Child	Single with 2 or more	Couples £	Couple with 1 Child	Couple with Two or
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				Children		£	more children £
Discount level	Weekly Income Levels £						
100% Band 1*	Relevant Benefit	£0.00 to £125.00	£0.00 to £225.00	£0.00 to £275.00	£0.00 to £175.00	£0.00 to £225.00	£0.00 to £275.00
80% Band 2	N/A	£125.01 to £175.00	£225.01 to £275.00	£275.01 to £325.00	£175.01 to £225.00	£225.01 to £275.00	£275.01 to £325.00
60% Band 3	N/A	£175.01 to £225.00	£275.01 to £325.00	£325.01 to £375.00	£225.01 to £275.00	£275.01 to £325.00	£325.01 to £375.00
40% Band 4	N/A	£225.01 to £275.00	£325.01 to £375.00	£375.01 to £425.00	£275.01 to £325.00	£325.01 to £375.00	£375.01 to £425.00

- It is proposed that the highest level of discount will be at a maximum level of liability Band 1, and all current applicants that are in receipt of a '*passport benefit' such as Income Support, Jobseeker's Allowance (Income Based) and Employment and Support Allowance (Income Related) receive maximum discount:
- All other discount levels are based on the applicant's and partner's, (where they have one) net income;
- The scheme allows for variation in household size with the levels of income per band increasing where an applicant has a partner, and / or dependants;
- All of the proposed scheme options specified below, have the same 'grid' and are identical in other respects except for non-dependant deductions;

19. For all of the above options, the following key features will apply:

- To encourage work, a standard £25 per week disregard will be provided against all earnings This will take the place of the

current standard disregards and additional earnings disregards. Where a family also receives a childcare disregard (for childcare costs not paid for by Central Government schemes), the income levels in the 'grid scheme' are set at a higher rate;

- No charges will be made for non-dependants;
- Disability benefits such as Disability Living Allowance and Personal Independence Allowance will continue to be disregarded;
- Where any applicant, their partner or any dependant child(ren) are disabled, a further disregard of £50 per week will be given, thereby maintaining the current level of support to those with disabilities;
- Carer's Allowance and the Support Component of Employment and Support Allowance will be disregarded;
- Child benefit and Child Maintenance will be disregarded;
- The following elements of Universal Credit will also be disregarded:
 - An amount in respect of the Housing Element;
 - Limited Capability for Work and Work Related Activity Element;
 - Carer's Element; and
 - Disabled Child Element
 - The total disregard on war pensions and war disablement pensions will continue (maintaining the Council's commitment to the Armed Forces Community Covenant);
 - Extended payments will be removed; and
 - The capital limit will be £10,000 but with no tariff (or assumed income) being applied.

How the new scheme will address the problems with the current Council Tax Support

20. With the simplicity of the proposed new scheme and by taking a more 'Council Tax discount approach', it will address the problems

associated with the increased administration and delays in processing caused by failings in the current scheme and Universal Credit as follows:

- **The scheme will require a simplified claiming process.** All applicants will see a significant reduction in the claiming process and, where possible, CTS will be awarded automatically. For Universal Credit applicants *any* Universal Credit data received from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) will be treated as a claim for CTS. Where information is received from DWP, the entitlement to CTS will be processed automatically without the need to request further information from the council taxpayer. These changes will have the following distinct advantages namely:
 - **Speed of processing** – all claims will be able to be calculated promptly and largely automatically without the need to request further information which inevitably leads to delays;
 - **Maximising entitlement to every applicant.** The claiming process will be simplified significantly for all CTS claimants. Entitlement to CTS will be maximised with a reduced risk of loss of discount or the need for backdating;
 - **Maintenance of collection rates** – the new scheme will avoid constant changes in discount, the need for multiple changes in instalments and therefore assist in improving and increasing collection rates. The maintained maximum level of discount will also assist all those applicants on the lowest levels of income, again improving the overall collection rate;
 - **The income bands are sufficiently wide to avoid constant changes in discount.** The current CTS scheme is very reactive and will alter even if the overall change to the person's liability is small. This is leading to constant changes in Council Tax liability, the need to recalculate monthly instalments and the requirement to issue a large number of Council Tax bills. The effect of this is that Council Tax collection is reduced. The new scheme, with its simplified income banding approach will have the following advantages:

- Only significant changes in income will affect the level of discount awarded;
- Council Taxpayers who receive Council Tax Support will not receive multiple Council Tax demands and adjustments to their instalments; and
- The new scheme is designed to reflect a more modern approach, where any discount changes it will be effective from the day of the change rather than the Monday of the following week.

The effect of proposed scheme on individual households

21. The proposed changes will have a significant effect on households especially those on the lowest of incomes. Current modelling allows us to project the likely outcomes for typical households given their individual circumstances.
22. Based on the schemes as outlined the following would result:

Table 2 - the potential number of that gain winners and that lose under the proposed options

Number of recipients that would:	
Gain	2186 (43%)
Stay the Same	2140 (43%)
Lose	708 (14%)

23. Inevitably, with any change in scheme, there will be some who would be worse off although the proposed scheme has been designed to protect the most vulnerable and the vast majority of applicants. The amount of CTS lost by residents is dependent on the income they receive. They are then attributed to a band under the new scheme. A summary of potential annual CTS recipients who would be worse off are included below. This is based on

information held on the system currently and could be subject to change.

Band 1 – CTS recipients who receive a partial award currently due to their income level will potentially lose all of their CTS entitlement. Amounts vary from £10 to £509 per annum.

Band 2 - 517 cases with a potential loss of £197 per annum

Band 3 – 221 cases who, dependent on income received will lose between £182 and £673 per annum.

Band 4 – 69 cases who will lose between £809 and £1283 per annum under the scheme due to income levels. Most of the cases affected are where the resident receives income from employment which is included in the Universal Credit calculation.

The losses will apply mostly to working age residents. Of the potential loss, 10 relate to Pensioner cases.

24. In order to assist any household who may lose entitlement, it is proposed that the new scheme will contain additional provisions to protect individuals who experience exceptional hardship. Where any applicant is likely to experience exceptional hardship, they will be encouraged to apply for an exceptional hardship payment.
25. The Council will consider all applications for hardship on an individual case-by-case basis, taking into account available income and essential outgoings. Where appropriate further support will be given to the applicant. Any discretionary awards made are to be paid through the Collection Fund.

OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

26. The alternative to introducing a new income-banded scheme for Council Tax Support from 2026/27 is to leave the existing scheme in place. This would be a short-term option; lead to increasing costs of administration; and in the longer term, continue to significantly affect the collection of Council Tax and the effectiveness of the scheme to support households within the Council's area.

ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

27. In order to change the scheme, a full consultation will need to be undertaken in line with the statutory requirement with:
- The County Council;
 - Police and Crime Commissioner;
 - The public
28. The responses to the consultation will assist the authority in making its decision which must be made by Full Council

6.0 Implications/Consultations

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

Yes, if the proposed recommendation is agreed, we will assess the Council's equalities duty in regard to this proposal and include any relevant findings from the outcome from the consultation in the report to Full Council

Environmental Sustainability

There will be no measurable environmental impact

Financial

Since 2013 the tax base has grown whilst the effect of CTS on the tax base has reduced considerably.

The overall CTS caseload is reducing year on year due to mainly the increasing income of pensioners (this is in line with all other English Authorities) and whilst the working age caseload increased temporarily through the COVID crisis, this is again reducing and is expected to reduce further from now on.

The current Council Tax Support scheme costs approximately £7.3 million which is borne by the Council's Collection Fund. Costs are shared between the Council and the Major Precepting Authorities in the following proportions:

- Council 9%
- County Council – 79.2%
- Police and Crime Commissioner 11.8%

The approach and 'shape' of the scheme is changing, and the overall approach will be to provide additional support to those households on the very lowest incomes. Based on current modelling, were the new scheme to be in place at the current time, the cost would be approximately £224k

Financial modelling will continue to be undertaken throughout the project as CTS caseloads change throughout any financial year.

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

Schedule 1A (3) of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, states that before making a scheme, the authority must:

- consult any major precepting authority which has power to issue a precept to it,
- publish a draft scheme in such manner as it thinks fit, and
- consult such other persons as it considers are likely to have an interest in the operation of the scheme.

In addition to the statutory consultation, in order to set a new scheme, the Council is obliged to make a resolution by 11th March of the year prior to the scheme coming into place.

Specific Wards

No

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 N/A

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Agenda Item 8

East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of meeting: Tuesday 10 June 2025

Report by: Chairman of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report title: Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Draft Work Programme

Ward(s) affected: (All Wards);

Summary

- This report considers topics for inclusion in the Committee's Draft Work Programme. By establishing a work programme of topics for scrutiny Members are better able to plan their future workload, with an agenda which is focussed, maximising the efficacy of the scrutiny process by taking a longer term, strategic view of the issues facing the council.
- A suggested list of topics is detailed in **Appendix 1**.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR Overview and Scrutiny Committee

(A) That the work Programme at Appendix 1, be agreed.

1.0 Background

1.1 **Appendix 1** sets out the Draft Work Programme which may be reviewed at any time. Members are reminded to complete the scrutiny proposal form when putting forward an item for the draft work programme.

- 1.2 A key function of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is to hold the Executive to account for its decisions, to review existing policies and consider proposals for new policies. In doing so, it will act as the Executive's critical friend in the process. The principle power of scrutiny is to influence policies and decisions made by the Council. Its aim should be to achieve positive outcomes for local people by undertaking a thorough targeted examination of the council's services and procedures and make recommendations for improvement.
- 1.3 It has no formal powers to make changes but where a recommendation is made to the Executive, the Executive is required to respond to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee if it decides not to accept a recommendation and the rationale for that decision. The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny (CfGS) recommends that the Executive has to respond to any recommendation within two months.

2.0 Update

- 2.1 Topics for scrutiny at the following meetings are detailed in Appendix 1.
- 16 September 2025
 - 4 November 2025
 - 20 January 2026
 - 10 March 2026
- 2.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met for a workshop on Thursday 27 March 2025, to discuss potential topics for scrutiny on the work programme for 2025/26. The Executive were invited to attend to share any upcoming matters they may have that the Committee might like to scrutinise.

2.3 The following topics are in the work programme for possible scrutiny in 2025/26, albeit some topics need to be refined via a scrutiny proposal form:

- Affordable Housing
- Sustainable Transport
- Development Management and Community Forums
- Grounds maintenance contract – Task and Finish Group
- Anti-Racism Charter and the Equalities Strategy

2.4 All new up and coming strategies and policies will automatically be added to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee work programme, and Members of Overview and Scrutiny can then consider whether they wish to look at these as part of the work programme.

3.0 Reason(s)

3.1 Members are welcome, and encouraged, to submit a scrutiny proposal at any time. This form is available in the Microsoft Teams channel and provides Officers with sufficient information to assess if it is appropriate for scrutiny and to ensure that specific questions are addressed. A Scrutiny Flowchart is also available which explains the processes involved in submitting a Scrutiny Proposal Form. Democratic Services will then liaise with Officers and the Chairman to consider the best way forward to address the subject and complete the scoping document.

4.0 Options

4.1 The work programme will be kept under review by the Committee throughout the coming year.

5.0 Risks

5.1 The establishment of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee is enshrined in the Local Government Act 2000 (Section 9). The 2000

Act obliges local authorities to adopt political management systems with a separate Executive. Various sub sections of the 2000 Act set out the powers and duties for Overview and Scrutiny Committee including the right to investigate and make recommendations on anything which is the responsibility of the Executive. Legislative provisions can also be found in the Localism Act 2011 (Schedule 2) with options to retain or re-adopt a "committee system" Section 9B.

- 5.2 Potential risks arise for the council if policies and strategies are developed and / or enacted without sufficient scrutiny. Approval of an updated work programme contributes to the mitigation of risk (and Call-Ins) by ensuring key activities of the council are scrutinised.

6.0 Implications/Consultations

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

No

Environmental Sustainability

Yes - the proposed Work Programme envisages the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receiving reports on the progress of the council's environmental strategies.

Financial

No

Health and Safety

No

Human Resources

No

Human Rights

No

Legal

Yes - scrutiny is enshrined in statute (the Local Government Act 2000 as amended by the Localism Act 2011)

Specific Wards

No

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 **Appendix 1** - Summary of Topics

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Programme of Proposed Scrutiny Topics

Topic	Corporate Objectives (LEAF)	Questions/concerns	Scrutiny Approach (Bulletin, Report, rapid review or task and finish group)	Background Notes / Officers' comments	Reporting timeframe
Sustainable Transport			Report	Topic is to be narrowed down via a scrutiny proposal form	September 2025?
Affordable Housing			Report	Topic is to be narrowed down via a scrutiny proposal form; the topic will be delayed to September 2025 if a form is not submitted by the 10 June meeting.	September 2025?
Glyphosate and Grounds Maintenance Contract Task and Finish Group			Report	To be presented by Ian Sharratt to start the process of supporting a Task and Finish Group	September 2025?
Development Management and Community Forums		Review about how the Development Management and Community Forums can impact positively in the engagement process with both residents and developers	Report	To be presented once there is a full year of DM Forum meetings	2025/26
Anti-Racism Charter and the Equalities Strategy					2025/26