



OVERVIEW and SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

June 2014

www.eastherts.gov.uk

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14

Contents

	Page
Scrutiny – what is it?	3
How do we organise Scrutiny at East Herts	4
Looking Back	7
Looking Forward	13
Looking Out	17
Evaluating Overview And Scrutiny	21
Plans for 2014/15	23
Evolving Role of Scrutiny	26
Training	28
... and finally	29

1. SCRUTINY – what is it?

Scrutiny provides an open and transparent forum in which your elected councillors, sitting in public, can review the work of the council to check that policies and services are meeting the priorities and the needs of local people. The scrutiny committees don't make final decisions themselves, but they have the power of influence. They make recommendations informed by public and partner opinions, performance information, examples of best practice, expert advice and research/evidence.

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




A total of 33 councillors have served on the scrutiny committees, Health Engagement Panel or project groups during 2013/14.


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


2. HOW DO WE ORGANISE SCRUTINY AT EAST HERTS.

During 2013/14, scrutiny was supported by one full-time officer. The Scrutiny Officer role is to provide project management support to the Scrutiny Committees and undertake research and information analysis in relation to reviews set up by the main Committees. Another important strand of the officer's role is to ensure external witnesses, experts, partners and local residents are invited to be involved in the scrutiny activity within East Herts.

East Herts has three 'topic specific' scrutiny committees.


Corporate Business Scrutiny (CBS): meets 6 times per year												
They keep a close eye on	Regular performance monitoring											
	Budget setting proposals and strategies											
	Comments, Compliments and Complaints											
	Scrutiny and policy development of the 'business' side of the council including: finance, ICT, facilities, legal, procurement and reviewing plans for shared services											
 <p>Chairman: Councillor David Andrews</p>	Membership: Councillors											
	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>E Bedford</td> <td>R Sharma</td> </tr> <tr> <td>G Jones</td> <td>G Williamson (vice chair)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>J Mayes</td> <td>J Wing</td> </tr> <tr> <td>T Page</td> <td>S Bull (sub)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>M Pope</td> <td>K Crofton (sub)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>J Ranger</td> <td>M Wood (sub)</td> </tr> </table>	E Bedford	R Sharma	G Jones	G Williamson (vice chair)	J Mayes	J Wing	T Page	S Bull (sub)	M Pope	K Crofton (sub)	J Ranger
E Bedford	R Sharma											
G Jones	G Williamson (vice chair)											
J Mayes	J Wing											
T Page	S Bull (sub)											
M Pope	K Crofton (sub)											
J Ranger	M Wood (sub)											

Environment Scrutiny: meets 4 times per year												
Their focus is on	Planning Policy and Transport											
	Waste Management and Environmental Quality											
	Conservation and Climate Change											
	Parks and Open Spaces											
 <p>Chairman: Councillor Daniel Abbott</p>	Membership: Councillors											
	<table border="0"> <tr> <td>W Ashley</td> <td>K Warnell</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P Ballam</td> <td>B Wrangles</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E Buckmaster</td> <td>J Wyllie (vice chair)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P Gray</td> <td>R Beeching (sub)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>M Pope</td> <td>A Dearman (sub)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>C Rowley</td> <td>M Newman (sub)</td> </tr> </table>	W Ashley	K Warnell	P Ballam	B Wrangles	E Buckmaster	J Wyllie (vice chair)	P Gray	R Beeching (sub)	M Pope	A Dearman (sub)	C Rowley
W Ashley	K Warnell											
P Ballam	B Wrangles											
E Buckmaster	J Wyllie (vice chair)											
P Gray	R Beeching (sub)											
M Pope	A Dearman (sub)											
C Rowley	M Newman (sub)											

Community Scrutiny: meets 4 times per year												
They focus on	Community Safety and Protection											
	Community Development, Leisure & Culture											
	Health and Housing											
	Ageing Well agenda											
 <p>Chairman: Councillor Diane Hollebon</p>	Membership: Councillors											
	<table> <tr> <td>R Beeching</td> <td>N Symonds</td> </tr> <tr> <td>S Bull</td> <td>M Wood</td> </tr> <tr> <td>D Hone</td> <td>C Woodward</td> </tr> <tr> <td>J Jones</td> <td>T Herbert (sub)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>J Mayes</td> <td>C Rowley (sub)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>P Moore (vice chair)</td> <td>J Wing (sub)</td> </tr> </table>	R Beeching	N Symonds	S Bull	M Wood	D Hone	C Woodward	J Jones	T Herbert (sub)	J Mayes	C Rowley (sub)	P Moore (vice chair)
R Beeching	N Symonds											
S Bull	M Wood											
D Hone	C Woodward											
J Jones	T Herbert (sub)											
J Mayes	C Rowley (sub)											
P Moore (vice chair)	J Wing (sub)											

During the year, two **Joint Scrutiny** sessions are held to allow members from all the committees to come together to discuss significant budgetary and cross-cutting issues. It is cost effective and more time efficient to hold a single meeting rather than three separate ones.

We also have an important ‘standing’ panel operating under Community Scrutiny Committee:

Health and Wellbeing Panel: meets 4 times per year								
This Panel has an outward-facing focus and works closely with local partners across the health, public health and wellbeing agenda	Our Public Health strategy and action plan							
	Relationships and partnership working with health and social care agencies important to the district including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local hospitals and NHS trusts • The new Clinical Commissioning Groups of GPs • Hertfordshire County Council Health and Community Services • The Director of Public Health and our local public health agencies • Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board • Voluntary and third sector organisations 							
 <p>Chairman: Councillor Norma Symonds</p>	Membership: Councillors							
	<table> <tr> <td>P Ballam</td> <td>P Moore</td> </tr> <tr> <td>R Beeching</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>S Bull</td> <td>M Newman (sub)</td> </tr> <tr> <td>E Buckmaster (vice chair)</td> <td>A Warman (sub)</td> </tr> </table>	P Ballam	P Moore	R Beeching		S Bull	M Newman (sub)	E Buckmaster (vice chair)
P Ballam	P Moore							
R Beeching								
S Bull	M Newman (sub)							
E Buckmaster (vice chair)	A Warman (sub)							

3. How do the Committees decide what to scrutinise?

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

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

At East Herts we think it is important to spend time scrutinising things which allow us to reduce risk (for residents and the council), which might incur significant costs or which could bring substantial savings to the council....and during 2013/14 we have tackled topics under all three of those headings.

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

4. How to get involved

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

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

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

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

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

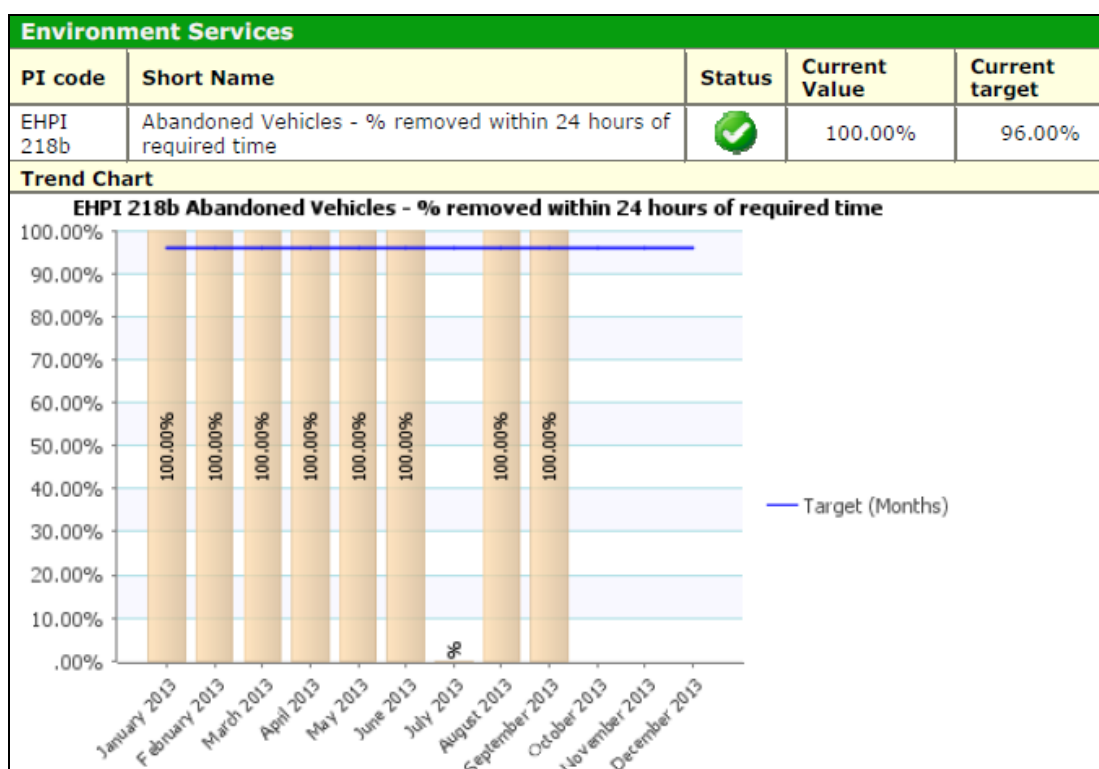
<http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/scrutinyfeedback>

5. LOOKING BACK:

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

Performance monitoring:

- When funding is tight, it is important Council makes every penny count and make a measurable difference to residents. At every scrutiny meeting (alternate meetings for CBS), councillors receive a report showing how well the services are performing against target levels. The report is known as a 'Healthcheck' for good reasons – it is one way of taking the temperature of the council and checking it is functioning well. For CBS this report also includes financial information so that scrutiny gets an holistic view across the council's business functions.
- One example from the Environment Scrutiny autumn meeting is copied below. It relates to the percentage of abandoned vehicles removed within 24 hours (of required time).




- The chart shows a reliable 100% success rate for the contractor – except for the month of July. A change like this is what scrutiny wants an explanation for. They want to catch a problem before it escalates and be assured that any issue is being addressed promptly.

- In this case there was no need for alarm or remedial action. The vehicles for removal during July were on the land of one of our housing association partners and were behind a locked barrier. Scrutiny members were satisfied that the 0% performance figure was not an indication of 'poor' service but just an isolated event caused by a delay in locating a key to gain access to the area.
- It is important not to jump to conclusions and for each piece of performance data to be seen and considered by scrutiny 'in the round' and not in isolation – this is why members get to see the historic trend charts alongside the most recent data.
- As all the Healthcheck reports are available on line, residents (and the press) can act as '**public scrutineers**' at any time by checking up on how well the council is doing against its performance targets. Just click onto East Herts website <http://online.eastherts.gov.uk/moderngov/mgListCommittees.aspx?bcr=1>

Service Plan Monitoring:

- At the start of the year every area of the council sets out the new projects it plans to tackle during the next 12 months. As part of the budget setting process councillors agree (or not) to fund these and every project has a completion date set against it. Halfway through the year the scrutiny committees get a report on the progress of each of the projects that fall under their remit – with another report coming to them at year end.
- One mid year report which came to CBS in November 2013 began by stating:
In total, there are 40 actions in the 2013/14 Service Plans relevant to Corporate Business Scrutiny Committee, of which:
 23% (9) have already been achieved
 55% (22) are on target
 05% (2) are off target
 15% (6) have had their completion dates revised
 03% (1) has been deleted as the action is no longer appropriate
- A good start – but scrutiny is more interested in the 9 projects which have not gone fully to plan as these might lead to problems further down the line. Each hold up is explained and councillors check to see whether they are satisfied that enough is being done to remedy the situation. Sometimes it is another agency outside the council which might be taking longer than expected to act or make a decision – but if it is internal, then we have to find a solution and learn from the situation.



What else did scrutiny look back over and review during 2013/14?

CBS	
	<p>Corporate Annual Report 2012/13. As with any large organisation, East Herts publishes an annual report every year. This document covers the council's key achievements for each of the corporate priorities over the previous financial year, provides an overview of the council's financial position and performance and ends with a statement on contracts. This early draft of the document gave scrutiny an opportunity to comment on and shape the final report. As this document is available to residents, Members commented that there were a couple of places where the</p>

	<p>information was not as clear as it might be. Changes were made for the final version around identifying the sources of council funding and clarifying whether the figures relating to our leisure centre usage related to 'people' or to 'visits'</p>
	<p>Comments! Compliments! Complaints! To put things in perspective, this Council receives over 1.5 million phone calls a year – and no organisation of our size and complexity is going to get everything right every time. Although the number of formal complaints received in a year is low (less than 100), all need to be taken seriously and investigated. The government's welfare reforms fell within this reporting year and it was in this area where we had the highest number of upheld complaints. A greatly increased workload led to delays in response times – and complaints from applicants. Members were satisfied with the 'welfare reform action plan' which had been implemented by Revenues and Benefits/Customer Services to significantly improve enquiry handling capacity – had resulted in a sharp decrease in complaints. Every year some residents choose to escalate their case up to the Local Government Ombudsman and during the 2012/13 period, 12 cases were adjudicated on at this level. As in previous years, no cases of maladministration were identified. This year also saw the volume of complaints received by e-mail increase significantly and this was seen by Members as a sign of the times - with e-mail becoming more widely accepted as submitting a query or complaint in writing.</p>
	<p>Data Protection and Information Security. After receiving training on their governance role at the start of the 2013/14 year, CBS Members considered the first half year report on the action plan for the council's data protection compliance programme. The office and officer based actions were felt to be robust and the majority of the discussion centred on the Councillors' role in handling sensitive material sent to them by residents, how to store data securely and the importance of safe disposal of information. The scheme of registering with the ICO as a 'data controller' was also emphasised to Members.</p>
<p>http://www.eastherts.gov.uk</p>  	<p>Web Site Action Plan and Communication Action Plan. With the fast changing world of modern media and new ways of communicating, it is important to ensure the council can offer its services in a manner that local residents want and expect. More people are contacting us, getting information and engaging with our services on-line. Members heard that our research during the past year showed 69% of our 456,979 web visitors never landed on our Home Page but used a search engine to directly access the page/task they wanted – and top of this list was viewing planning applications on line. Knowing what the public want to see and do has driven the redesign of the council's website and greatly reduced the number of mouse clicks needed to get through to these priority pages/tasks. Scrutiny was pleased to learn that the redesigned site is now deemed Level 1 'accessible' by the RNIB and we are working towards gaining Level 2. During the past year our Facebook 'likes' have increased slowly but the number of twitter 'followers' has almost doubled and this channel is now being used as a primary communication tool. Video is emerging as an important tool for the future and the council is starting to build a presence on YouTube. The</p>

	<p>videoclips will be used to give the public information (eg about specific wards), demonstrate changes to services (eg sorting of recycling) or provide a record of consultation events. East Herts is keen to supply parish/town/village magazine and newsletter editors with press releases relevant to their locality and scrutiny wanted to promote this offer to them through ward councillors.</p>
ENVIRONMENT	
<div style="text-align: center;">  </div> <p style="text-align: center;"> Did you know? We make 4.3million collections of waste and recycling across East Herts every year! </p>	<p>2012/13 Contract Performance:</p> <p>With a combined value of £5.4 million the refuse & recycling, street cleansing and grounds' maintenance contracts cover the largest area of service expenditure across the council – so residents should rightly expect both performance and value for money to be closely monitored and scrutinised. As well as receiving performance data for every month, an annual report is brought to scrutiny for each financial year.</p> <p>There were some very good performance figures across the service which pleased Members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>the number of missed bin collections had decreased</i> • <i>residual waste collected from households had dropped by 10kg per household - a significant improvement in terms of waste minimisation.</i> • <i>litter levels against the Council's performance indicator in 2012/13 decreased from 2.3% to 1.78%. There had also been a decrease in the number of "validated" complaints about litter received last year.</i> • <i>the number of fly tipping incidents had also decreased by 27%</i> <p>Two new initiatives particularly interested members:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>acquisition of a smaller 3-compartment vehicle means we are now able to offer our residents on Folly Island a full kerbside recycling service.</i> • <i>targeted work with the five areas of the district with the lowest kerbside recycling activity brought about a 30% increase in the weight of dry recyclables being collected on those rounds.</i> <p>However positive the current picture, Members are keen to look forward and work with officers to find areas for improvement or expansion. On this occasion the discussion focussed on extending kerbside recycling to as many communal properties (flats) as possible and on exploring the business case for collection of dry recyclables from local commercial premises.</p>
<div style="text-align: center;">  </div>	<p>Climate Change Action Plan – review of progress.</p> <p>Information was given to scrutiny to show that there had been a reduction in carbon dioxide emissions in relation to the waste contract via improved scheduling of rounds and use of more energy efficient vehicles. There had been the introduction of energy efficiency measures at Hertford Theatre and savings had also been achieved at Wallfields, but occupancy had increased with the closure of The Causeway office. Energy usage had increased at our Leisure Centres but this needed to be viewed in the context of increasing membership levels and the expansion of the service to include larger gymnasiums. Members were assured that before any project on the action plan could be undertaken, a full cost benefit analysis was carried out taking into account any changes in technology and costs since the plan was first written.</p> <p>Although pleased with the initial outcomes, Members felt there were still some simple steps that could be introduced to reduce power usage further with additional power-down features on IT</p>

	<p>equipment. The next report to scrutiny will included more quantitative data, particularly in regard of CO₂ savings, now that a full year base line figure had been established.</p>
COMMUNITY	
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Box office: 01992 531500</p> </div>	<p>End of year report for Hertford Theatre. After a significant financial outlay in 2010 to modernise and relaunch the theatre in Hertford, scrutiny is keen to see continuing evidence of a return on that investment. There was a positive theme to the report outlining activity at the venue:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>estimated footfall was 127,250 (up from 111,104)</i> • <i>income from live shows was £144,339 (against an original business plan target of £140,700)</i> • <i>250 cinema screenings with 20,073 tickets sold (up from 223 screenings and 12,711 tickets).</i> • <i>income from the Panto was £81,111 (up from £68,777).</i> <p>Members did ask for the ticket sales figures to be clarified in the next annual report to indicate the number of performances of each film/show and the maximum sales possible for that event. Scrutiny felt the theatre was offering a good balance and mixture of events across its programme to attract a varied audience. Members were also pleased to see that feedback from the public had been responded to with an additional investment in upgrading audio, lighting and technical equipment and an investigation into renewing the auditorium seating. The growing relationship with Hertford Regional College was felt to be good development for the future and the growing band of volunteers seen as a great asset. Scrutiny gave notice that for the coming year attention had to be paid to improving the café offer for customers, building the Pantomime ticket sales and reviewing the future governance arrangements for Hertford Theatre.</p>
<div style="text-align: center;">  <p>A full list of grants and supported projects is available on www.eastherts.gov.uk/grants</p> </div>	<p>Community Grants: applications and allocations. The successful Olympic/Jubilee theme in 2012 had attracted a lot of interest and widened awareness of the grant scheme in East Herts. In the end, the total allocation for the 2012/13 financial year was £135,269, which was distributed to 193 groups for a wide range of projects and services. These revenue grants, along with the capital grant programme (of £198,600) are greatly valued by Members on behalf of their local community groups. Scrutiny Members asked to hear about ‘dormant funds’ from the Hertfordshire Community Foundation so they could better understand options and possibilities to maximise the benefit of such funds for local groups in future. This item was on their November agenda and led to further work on the legal, financial and audit implications of dealing with such funds.</p>
<div style="text-align: center;">  </div>	<p>Review of revised Housing Register and Allocations policy. Following some detailed work last year and a period of stakeholder consultation a new policy was introduced at the start of 2013/14. In order to check the agreed changes were not having any unexpected negative impact on applicants, residents and communities, a review at six months was requested. Evidence brought forward at this time did not suggest a problem with the new policy and scrutiny recommended continuing with the new rules and eligibility criteria for the rest of the year. A further review is scheduled for</p>

	<p>June 2014. Scrutiny feels that it is important to closely monitor the impact of changes to a policy which is as important and as sensitive as this one and look for any unintentional side effects.</p>
	<p>Annual Leisure contract performance report for 2013. On 1 January 2009, following a competitive tender process, the Council entered into a ten year fixed fee contract with the leisure provider SLM, trading as Everyone Active. This was the fifth annual report on their performance. A key measure for the Council to assess the performance of the contractor in providing services that are attractive to local residents is the number of customers using the facilities. At the five sites in the district over 725,500 visits were recorded in 2013 for people attending the gym, group exercise classes, casual swimming, pool parties, school, private and Everyone Active swim lessons and outdoor activities including; tennis, bowls and football. Adult gym visits have increased by 254% since 2009 to 204,071 visits in 2013. SLM's investment in a major new inflatable and fun session at Grange Paddocks pool has instigated a turnaround in the declining Junior swim visits with an increase of 22% on 2012 figures. Further investment is planned for 2014 on new gym equipment and spin bikes. The new pool covers installed during the year are already showing a reduction in energy consumption (and costs) by reducing heat loss from the pools when they are not in use. These savings will contribute to reducing the carbon footprint of the authority.</p>
HWP	
	<p>Full Year report on 2012/13 Public Health action plan and Mid Year report on 2013/14 Public Health action plan. The council has public health and wellbeing projects running throughout the year – some of our own, some with local partners and some where we fund and support activity delivered by other agencies/organisations. In 2012/13 we were able to complete 49 of the 51 planned projects which, between them, gave an estimated 15,813 people who live, work or study in the district access (direct or indirect) to public health advice or events. Scrutiny Members were impressed with the completion and success rate given the current pressure on resources and reduced funding across local government and our partners. Jim McManus (Hertfordshire Director of Public Health) was present at the meeting and he stated that what the Council was currently doing health-wise was an excellent model, adding that partnership working was the key to success. Progress on the 45 projects in the current plan (for 2013/14) was reviewed mid year and this showed 4 completed, 33 on track and 8 not yet started. During the review, Members acknowledged that the wealth of information on so many projects made it difficult to focus in on areas which required closer scrutiny. Officers undertook to make full detailed information on our Public Health projects available to Members through a searchable function on the website (so they can check on new initiatives and on projects running in their own ward) – but the written report to scrutiny in future would be a 'highlights and exceptions' one, setting out new or particularly successful projects and any areas of concern or challenge.</p>

6. LOOKING FORWARD:


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

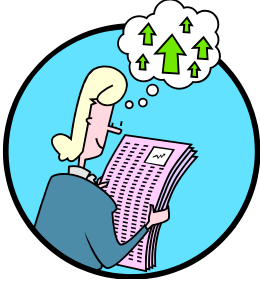


.....can we improve the service we offer residents and ensure we are getting the best balance between high quality and value-for-money? During 2013/14 all the topics Members wanted to review could be delivered within a single report format at a scheduled committee meeting – without the need to set up a long-running task and finish group.



The only issue which did involve a working group of members was that of reviewing our own Performance Management Indicators. It is important that Members get to see the data which best reflects the concerns of the public and offers an ‘early warning system’ to pick up on anything that might be going off target. This is important at any time, but even more so in a period of financial constraints.




Two members from each scrutiny committee worked with officers on the data which would go forward into Healthchecks for 2014/15. All the suggestions were accepted by the full scrutiny committees and then by the Executive. Members on the working groups also made suggestions about presentation of the data and the Healthcheck to make the information clearer – both for Members and for the public. These changes have already been brought in.

What other changes and future actions did scrutiny support and recommend during 2013/14?

CBS	
	<p>Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFP) for the next 4 years.</p> <p>No complex organisation can operate without a clear idea of what it plans to do during the coming year and how it plans to pay for everything. For a council, it is prudent to look several years ahead – at least in outline - to offer residents and local partners some continuity and confidence. East Herts works with a rolling 4 year programme and scrutiny has the opportunity to review the two key documents which underpin this forward planning process.</p> <p>Members were content to support the existing three council priorities (People, Place and Prosperity) and the objectives under each heading. The new theme of ‘Here to Help you’ attracted some discussion with ideas on wording and delivery being raised. In the end, the document was recommended to the Executive for approval.</p> <p>Members were also broadly satisfied with what they saw in the MTFP, but they were very conscious of government’s new funding regime in terms of the Revenue Support Grant, and retention of business rates and that it was anticipated that this would be cut by 10% per year from 2015/16.</p> <p>However, with prudent management in East Herts over recent years there is a general reserve which can be called on and Members supported the suggestion that the Council should reduce its level of general reserves and that they be applied particularly in relation to keeping car park charges down and reducing the pensions shortfall and that these</p>

	<p>should be fully costed for further detailed consideration. This work was done and funds were allocated for both purposes when the final budget came to Council.</p>
	<p>East Herts Improvement Plan. Following a two-day 'inspection' from five external peers (Directors, Chief Executives and Leaders from other councils) the authority received a report which suggested ways in which East Herts might make further improvements in respect of community leadership, organisational culture and customer service. The Members were pleased to read the report's opening paragraph: "<i>East Hertfordshire District Council ... is a sound council, delivering good services with a high level of satisfaction from residents and underpinned by a healthy financial base. It is well focused on the residents and communities it serves</i>". Based on the recommendations, an action plan was drawn up for scrutiny. Members agreed with the plan but made three additional suggestions. A progress report on the 28 actions in the agreed plan came back to CBS after six months. By then</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 36% (10) had already been achieved • 50% (14) were on target • 7% (2) had their completion dates revised. • 7% (2) had not started <p>The final report will come back to scrutiny at the start of the new civic year.</p>
	<p>Employment Land Review 2013. A detailed land review in 2008 revealed that the majority of the employment areas in the district's towns were fit for purpose and functioning well. It was reported to scrutiny that the situation has not changed significantly in the interim and despite the recession, the number of vacant units is low. In addition, the amount of employment land lost to other uses is minimal. Whilst Members voiced their support for the local economy, there are relatively few opportunities for direct interventions that would deliver more and better jobs in the short term. Even minor works such as signage and environmental improvements are likely to involve a considerable input of resources. Although this might confirm the Council's support for the local economy and may encourage both tenants and landowners to improve their properties, more significant benefits could be achieved by concentrating on perhaps two major interventions in Hertford and Bishop's Stortford. Scrutiny supported this targeted approach and went on to recommend that there should also be a separate review of rural employment land.</p>
	<p>Local Scheme for Council Tax Support. Last year, along with every other council in the country, East Herts had to devise a local scheme of council tax support (CTS). The national (uniform) scheme of council tax benefits came to an end on 1 April 2013 and central government will in future fund to only 90% of the old levels, looking to local authorities to fund or find the other 10%. At that time scrutiny recommended an option that sought to share the funding burden across all working age claimants rather than target certain specified groups for complete exemption leaving others to share a higher cost to make up the shortfall. This year, when it came up for revision and renewal, Members felt that public and officers alike had just</p>

	got to grips with the new scheme. With no compelling evidence of problems or inconsistencies arising from the current arrangements, scrutiny recommended keeping the arrangements for CTS the same for the coming 2014/15 year. This was agreed by Executive and adopted by Council at the budget setting meeting in March 2014.
ENVIRONMENT	
 	<p>CoMingling Recycling (SPARC).</p> <p>Through out the year scrutiny has been consulted and updated with regard to developments in the improvement of the council's recycling services to residents. At the start of the year they were informed of changes which had to be brought in to remove cardboard from the green waste recycling to upgrade the quality of the composting material to meet new EU standards. This impacted on all councils in Hertfordshire and East Herts took the chance make wider improvements to the service at the same time as making this change. The new scheme expanded the range of items which could be collected at the kerbside from households and allowed residents to put all dry recyclables into one container together – except for clean paper. This Separate Paper and Recycling Collection (SPARC) was welcomed by scrutiny and they went on to recommend a new bin be provided which had an integral/insert box to hold the paper so residents did not have to have a separate container taking up more space. The SPARC scheme was advertised extensively during the summer and Members were delighted to hear it met with keen interest from residents. New bins and paper insert boxes were delivered in October 2013 and collections started in November. Part of the improvement 'package' was to acquire more energy efficient vehicles and alter the collection routes which led to most households in the district having their bins emptied on a different day of the week. Inevitably this big change led to a surge of 'missed bins' and a 300% increase in workload at our call centre. Scrutiny was satisfied that both factors had been prepared for and data shared with Members in February 2014 showed that performance figures had already reduced back to expected levels.</p> <p>In February, a second wave of improvements to the scheme was proposed with plans to expand a recycling service to as many communal properties (flats) as possible, introduce the use of compostable bags in kitchen caddies to increase food capture and take out soft plastics (like plastic bags) from the comingled recycling to improve quality and hence value of the material. Scrutiny voiced their support for the new improvements and recommended them to the Executive (who later agreed).</p> <p>In addition they asked that further consideration should be given to expanding the recycling scheme to more schools, care homes and commercial premises where and when possible.</p>
COMMUNITY	
	<p>East Herts revised Homeless strategy (2013-18).</p> <p>Under the Homelessness Act 2002 all local authorities are required to carry out a homeless review and to develop and</p>


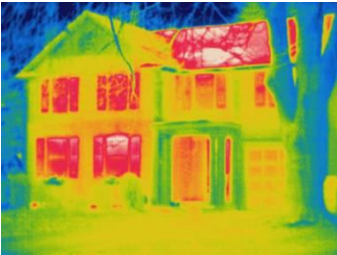
	<p>publish a strategy based on the review every five years. East Herts published its first Homeless Strategy in July 2003, it's second in 2008 and was therefore due to publish the next review and strategy before the end of 2013. Scrutiny members had a chance to see the draft version before it went out to consultation with the public, partners and stakeholders. Following discussions on affordable housing target figures, 'rogue' landlords, properties in multiple occupation (HMOs), rough sleepers and sofa surfing – Members supported the draft policy and recommended it for a four week long consultation period. The strategy came back to Executive and went through Council later in the year with minor amendments made in response to external feedback.</p>
HWP	
	<p>East Herts Health and Wellbeing Strategy work plan for 2014/15.</p> <p>On 2 October 2013, the Council approved the East Herts Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2013-2018. This needed to be accompanied by an updated and redesigned action plan. In December 2013, HWP members were able to see a first draft of the plan and make their own suggestions of other activities and projects which might be undertaken during the coming year. The plan then went out for consultation with 99 stakeholders and local partners. We received a number of useful responses giving us feedback and additional ideas. The final plan was then agreed by HWP in February 2014. There are 38 projects in the plan which the Council and Key Partners aim to deliver before the end of March 2015. It was also agreed that the Council should look to see how its own services can be amended to help deliver the public health priorities set out in the East Herts Health and Wellbeing Strategy (2013-2018). In the coming year this activity will focus on</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Food hygiene interventions • Occupational health and safety interventions
JOINT	
	<p>Budget 2014/15, Fees and Charges 2014/15, Service Plans 2014/15 and Estimates and Future Targets.</p> <p>These reports are closely interlinked and are considered by all scrutiny members sitting together in committee in January and February every year as a crucial part of the annual budget setting cycle. This joint work is much more cost effective compared to all three main committees sitting separately to consider just their allocated services. Also, as mentioned earlier in this report, it is important to get an holistic view and not look at aspects of the council in isolation. Full details of these papers and the scrutiny discussion can be obtained through the website.</p>

7. LOOKING OUT:



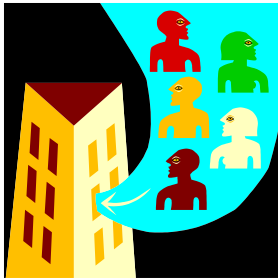
The council does not exist or work in isolation and often delivers its services in parallel or in partnership with other local agencies. Earlier in this document (in Sections 5 and 6), we have already mentioned

- annual performance reports for our main external contractors
- matters relating to our local Housing Association partners
- 'Public health' projects undertaken by East Herts working alongside a wide range of local health and wellbeing providers

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

CBS	
	<p>Webcasting of future council meetings.</p> <p>Currently Full Council, Executive, District Planning Executive and Development Management Committee are webcasted. The current service enables the public, Officers and Members to view these meetings live or from the archive. The recordings of meetings are archived for a period of 12 months to enable people to view meetings, in whole or part, at their leisure. Scrutiny invited a discussion as to whether this service should be extended to other committees, have additional options included, be maintained as now, have the service reduced or cease all together. Members scrutinised the viewing figure 'hits' (live and archived), the associated costs, the rationale behind providing the service and comparison information with neighbouring authorities. Following the review, the Committee stated that they valued the openness and transparency afforded by the Webcasting facility and considered the current arrangements to be acceptable and had no desire to extend the arrangements beyond the current status quo.</p>
ENVIRONMENT	
	<p>Fuel Poverty – an overview.</p> <p>Members were brought up to date with the government's revised definition of 'fuel poverty' which now considers income left <u>after</u> housing costs, fuel prices and fuel consumption (for space heating, water heating, lights, cooking and appliances). Fuel Poverty is not necessary restricted to low income families in urban social housing. Social housing units tend to be of a higher energy efficiency standard than general housing stock and these social homes are usually on mains gas. Across the UK there is a significant proportion of the fuel poor in more rural communities, off mains gas and living in 'hard to treat' properties. It is this pattern we see in East Herts as this district has a wide mix of house types with many of these older 'hard to treat' homes and many of these properties are also in rural areas where they have no access to mains gas. Scrutiny is aware of the Council's limited influence over the wider picture but is keen to support its role as a provider of impartial advice and a conduit for some distributed government grants. Following a discussion, Members asked for the council's own Affordable Warmth strategy to be reviewed and come back to scrutiny in the new civic year.</p>

COMMUNITY	
	<p>Housing Stock transfer – residual undertakings annual statement.</p> <p>In March 2002 the council sold its stock of some 6,500 dwellings to two housing associations - now known as Registered Providers (RPs). There are still three conditions attached to the sale of that stock which are on-going and are reported to scrutiny annually. Both RPs exceeded their requirements for the percentage nominations to vacant homes, giving the authority access to 100% of vacancies through the local Choice Based Lettings scheme. Both RPs again reported a significant shortfall in homes sold under the preserved Right to Buy (RTB). This is a recognised, on-going issue related to the economic downturn and also the cap on permitted discount, high value of properties in East Herts and the fact that each year there are fewer RTB eligible tenants able to take up the offer. Of concern to scrutiny was the news that one RP reported a £11K short-fall against target on their spend on Aids and Adaptations for 2012/13. This is the first time either provider has not met this target. The subsequent discussion indicated that minor works (such as grab rails) had been carried out under their general maintenance budget and did not show up in the reported figure. Members were also made aware that during the year there had been a delay in getting OT specialist assessments carried out for major works due to staff shortages at health/social care partners. Scrutiny asked the RPs to continue to be proactive in meeting this target in coming years and also recommended that Councillors who sit on the Boards of the RPs should keep this issue high on the agenda at those meetings.</p>
	<p>Provision of services to vulnerable tenants in East Herts.</p> <p>Following a member request at the earlier scrutiny meeting where expenditure on Aid and Adaptations was discussed, a further report came to committee to review the whole range of services offered to vulnerable tenants by the two main Registered Providers (RPs).</p> <p>Although the written report included many of the additional services provided by the two main RPs in the district which operate in addition to their own Financial Inclusion teams – such as arrangements with SureStart, the CAB, Thriving Families, Money Advice and the GreenAider Garden Project – the focus of discussion and significant concern was around examples of the poor response to tenants by the RP repairs and maintenance service. Members were able to cite a catalogue of problems, specific cases where repairs had been outstanding for over a year and where they themselves had waited up to 40 minutes for the call centre to answer the phone when calling on behalf of tenants living in their ward.</p> <p>Not every RP attracted the same level of concern, but issues were significant and widespread enough that scrutiny wanted to ensure the RPs were made aware of the issues. It was agreed that a representative group of councillors and the Director of Neighbourhood Services would seek meetings with senior executives of the relevant RPs over the coming weeks.</p> <p>The press was present at the committee meeting and some of the key points were reported on-line the next day and in the next print edition of the local paper (w/e 14/3/14).</p>

 <p>CTRL + Click on the image above to link to the Police and Crime Plan for Hertfordshire 2013-2018</p>	<p>Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC). At the invitation of the Committee, Mr David Lloyd (PCC for Hertfordshire) gave a short presentation and introductory responses to the key issues of concern to Members. These had been set out in a written briefing sent to him in advance and focused on crime reduction/prevention, opportunities for partnership working and the vital work of our local Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs). The ensuing open discussion covered 20 mph speed limits, the 'safer schools' initiative, the role of police 'Specials', the fear of crime in areas of low crime rates and the dangers posed by cyclists on pavements. The PCC's confirmation of reduced funding for PCSOs was of real concern to Members and even after Mr Lloyd had left the meeting this issue continued to be debated. Scrutiny asked for two written questions to be sent to the Chief Constable to seek clarification of the operational implications of any reduction in resources for PCSOs in the district.</p>
HWP	
	<p>Public health issues arising out of food hygiene inspections. East Herts' Environmental Health/Technical Officers are responsible for ensuring compliance with food hygiene law in approximately 1,343 food businesses across the district. The food businesses range from home-caterers to retailers to restaurants to manufacturers; each of which represent their own type of risk to the public. Approximately 93% of the food businesses in East Herts are deemed to be "broadly compliant" with food hygiene laws. When compared with the latest published data collected from the Food Standards Agency's annual monitoring return (2011/12), Members could see this is 2% more than the UK average of 91%. Of the 7% of failing food businesses in East Herts, 52 premises are classed as either a restaurant/café or pub/club. The next largest group of failing premises are takeaways which account for 16 premises. Members were interested to learn that officers are seeing an increase in the number of untrained people running event catering businesses from their homes and an increase in the number of music festivals which are being held in East Herts with travelling/temporary food outlets from outside the district. Members went on to discuss public health issues associated with public houses, mobile burger vans, market traders, WI markets and residents who offer food items for sale outside their homes. Scrutiny was satisfied with the evidence provided and thanked the inspection team for their vigilance in maintaining high standard of food safety in the district.</p>
	<p>Public health issues arising out of housing in multiple occupation (HMO). Members are keen to underline that many HMOs are well run by responsible landlords, and provide a much needed lower cost alternative to owner occupation. However, tenants of some HMOs visited by officers are unhappy with the standard of their home, but are reluctant to complain or provide information/evidence due to the risk of retaliatory eviction by their landlord. High demand for HMO accommodation means some landlords would sooner evict their tenant and re-let rather than carry out necessary works. Poor housing significantly affects public health, ranging from</p>

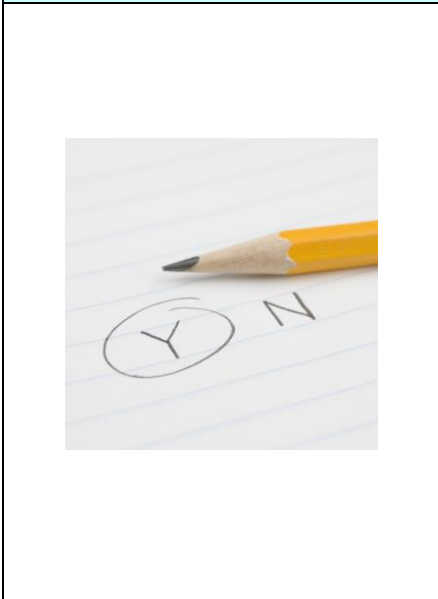
mental health effects from sharing insanitary, cramped or unsuitable conditions, to serious injury from falls in the home, or to death from fire, which is more likely in HMOs than in single family homes. Recently the Council successfully prosecuted a landlord of three large and poorly managed HMOs, for 26 contraventions of HMO Management Regulations, resulting in fines of £10,400. The landlord's subsequent appeal was dismissed in May 2013, increasing the fine to £12,980. There are currently 34 licensed HMOs but work needs to be done to identify premises in the district which are operating without a license (ie those of three or more storeys, with five or more occupiers). After a discussion regarding the sources of evidence which can be used to identify an undeclared HMO, Members thanked officers for the successful prosecution and their on-going hard work on behalf of residents.



Significant changes to health, public health and the NHS came in from 1 April 2013, meaning a whole new approach to working across agencies. During the year, we invited several of our key local partners to a discuss their work and future plans and – most importantly – how we were all going to work together in the future for the benefit of East Herts residents. We welcomed the people listed below and will keep in touch with all of them to consolidate the working arrangements.

- Head of Engagement for East and North Herts NHS Trust
- Director of Development at PAH NHS Trust in Harlow
- Director of Public Health for Hertfordshire
- HCC Public Health Partnership Manager
- The lead GPs for the two Clinical Commissioning Groups covering East Herts
- Chairman of Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board
- Manager of Countryside Management Service (in respect of their Health Walks)
- Team Leader – Safe and Sustainable Journeys to Schools

JOINT




















2013 Residents' Survey.
Although the survey is carried out by East Herts, it attracts responses about all the local services delivered to our residents – many of them by our partners, not by us. Scrutiny members were pleased to see results from this survey reflected well for East Herts but there were some key services which fell into the 'high priority/most in need of improvement' category which were not the responsibility of this authority. Scrutiny asked for, and received, assurance that these results would be shared with relevant partners at the earliest opportunity. Feedback concerning East Herts as a council and as a service provider would be analysed and actions in response to address any problems would be included in the next Corporate Strategic Plan.

[CTRL + click here](#) for the full report and detailed analysis of the results from the 2013 Residents' Survey.

8. EVALUATING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

During a previous scrutiny evaluation exercise a year ago, Councillors identified some areas where they wanted to make some improvements to scrutiny. Recently they looked at what progress had made in these areas during the last 12 months:

What we wanted to achieve during 2013/14	Some examples of what we did towards achieving this objective	How did we do?
Actively look for ways to improve the level of community and public involvement in scrutiny	<p><i>Public consultation was a strong element in a number of original reports which came back to scrutiny for a second review during 2013/14.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Local scheme for council tax support</i> • <i>Revised Housing strategy</i> • <i>Housing register and allocations policy</i> <p><i>The Residents' Survey report was entirely based on responses from the public. Indirectly, the public's view of our Leisure Services and of Hertford Theatre is reflected in the footfall/ticket sales at these venues.</i></p> <p><i>The Public Health action plan includes ideas from a wide range of community and statutory partners and is delivered in partnership with them.</i></p> <p><i>The suggested changes to the car parking fee structure which came to Joint scrutiny as part of the budget process is now out for public consultation both through formal Traffic Regulation Orders and informally through social media and local meetings</i> http://www.eastherts.gov.uk/index.jsp?articleid=29363</p> <p><i>An item on scrutiny was published in the council's LINK magazine (which is delivered to every household). The public were invited to send in ideas for review – however, no scrutiny topic suggestion came directly from a resident and we had public and press presence at only one committee meeting.</i></p>	    
Strengthen and highlight use of evidence from independent or outside sources.	<p><i>External judgements were made by the Local Government Ombudsman regarding the complaints which were escalated to that level (none were upheld).</i></p> <p><i>Although the Improvement Plan was based on evidence provided by the external 'peer inspectors' and evidence was received from 11 neighbouring local authorities for the webcasting report there does need to be greater/wider use of external sources of evidence.</i></p>	 
Clearly identify the 'value added' which scrutiny can bring to a topic and ensure this is monitored and recognised	<p><i>Other than material brought for training and development purposes – no report is brought to scrutiny just 'to note'. Topics and reports brought to scrutiny are agreed in advance by the committee or panel (or by the Chairman if request is short-notice).</i></p> <p><i>Although better, the wording of recommendations and written reports could still be improved to highlight the 'value added' aspect and make it clearer why a topic was</i></p>	 

	<p><i>brought to scrutiny and what measures are needed to evidence 'improved' outcomes.</i></p> <p><i>East Herts has a good record of responding to scrutiny but the monitoring process has not formally been reported or presented back to members (although logged by scrutiny officer and highlighted in the Scrutiny Annual Report). During this year Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice Chairmen (who meet as a group three times a year) have agreed to receive a formal monitoring report at all their meetings in future. The first of these reports came to their meeting in January 2014 and they will bring any issues or concerns to the attention of their respective committee(s).</i></p>	
Continue to keep scrutiny members informed and offer opportunities to develop skills needed	<p><i>An e-Newsletter has been published every 6 months and extensive use has been made of the weekly bulletin (MIB) to update councillors on significant issues/developments and confirm scrutiny related events.</i></p> <p><i>Where relevant, Councillors were supplied with 'pre briefing' material to widen their knowledge and understand the broader context to specific topics.</i></p> <p><i>Scrutiny Chairmen and Vice Chairmen have a briefing session with report authors before the meeting starts and all members were offered a budget/finance 'drop-in clinic' before scrutiny meetings where the budget was to be discussed.</i></p> <p><i>The full range of scrutiny training taken up by members is listed in section 11 of this report. During the year the council continued to evidence its training plan against the standards required for the Member Development Charter.</i></p>	   
Strengthen scrutiny of external public bodies and partners	<p><i>The contract performance of key contractors was monitored by the services throughout the year and an annual report brought to scrutiny.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Leisure provider - SLM Everyone Active</i> <i>• Waste & Recycling and Street Cleansing contractor</i> <i>• Grounds' Maintenance contractor.</i> <p><i>East Herts representative on the county's Health Scrutiny Committee contributed to a number of scrutiny reviews on various NHS and health service providers (including local responses to the Francis Report arising from the Mid-Staffordshire enquiry).</i></p> <p><i>No external Joint Scrutiny was undertaken during 2013/14 however East Herts did submit formal evidence to a County topic group reviewing "HCC relationship with District and Borough councils".</i></p>	  

The Directors and the Executive members were canvassed for written feedback and asked for examples of how the scrutiny process in 2013/14 had supported the work of the council and asking for specific areas to strengthen during 2014/15. The responses show support for scrutiny with an appreciation of the positive contribution that the scrutiny process can bring to improving services for residents. There is

willingness for the Executive to be held to account more robustly and directly by scrutiny committees and lessen the focus on reports written by officers. There is also encouragement for scrutiny members to actively engage with Executive meetings and discuss topics/issues with Executive members and lead officers prior to a scrutiny meeting to better prepare and focus the questioning at committee.

Scrutiny committee members were all invited a workshop in April 2014 to evaluate their performance in 2013/14. A written response form was also made available to those councillors who could not attend the interactive sessions.

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

9. WHAT ARE OUR PLANS FOR 2014/15?

Councillors have identified some areas in which they would like to further strengthen scrutiny in 2014/15:

What we want to do?	How are we going to do it? – an action plan for 2014/15
Actively look for ways to improve the level of community and public involvement in scrutiny	<i>Research and review how other (similar) authorities involve and engage the public in their scrutiny process.</i> <i>Continue to invite topic suggestions from residents and explore idea of getting issues raised through existing channels/agencies (including town/parish councils, youth councils, community groups, partnership meetings etc).</i>
Strengthen and highlight use of evidence from independent or outside sources.	<i>Scrutiny members (particularly Chairmen and ViceChairmen) to make it clear that they would expect to see some comparative evidence when they commission a report.</i> <i>Use cost effective and timely ways of bringing external evidence into any review where relevant or requested: through expert (external) witnesses – in person or in writing, visits, surveys/questionnaires, published documents/research and good practice examples from other (similar) authorities.</i>
Clearly identify the 'value added' which scrutiny can bring to a topic and ensure this is monitored and recognised	<i>Focus scrutiny reviews on topics where there is real scope for influencing change and where measurable benefits for residents can be seen.</i> <i>Bring monitoring reports on progress/outcomes from reviews to the Chairmen and ViceChairmen meeting (3xyear).</i> <i>Identify outcomes which can be used in council publications to illustrate the positive impact of scrutiny to raise awareness (not just in the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report).</i>
Continue to keep scrutiny members informed and offer opportunities to develop skills	<i>Continue to offer induction training and information to any newly elected member(s) and offer refresher and update training for returning members.</i> <i>Continue to publish the scrutiny e-Newsletter every 6 months</i>

needed	<p><i>and make use of weekly bulletin (MIB) to update councillors on significant issues/developments and scrutiny events.</i></p> <p><i>Send councillors 'pre briefing' material where relevant to widen knowledge on the context/background to topics and offer briefing/clinics before critical budget meetings.</i></p>
Strengthen scrutiny of external public bodies and partners	<p><i>Where relevant, move from 'scrutiny of' to 'scrutiny with' partners when reviewing local services offered to residents.</i></p> <p><i>Identify opportunities (jointly with other councils where possible for efficiency) to scrutinise aspects of the Local Strategic Partnership, Local Enterprise Partnership, Community Safety Partnership or any common issue.</i></p> <p><i>When invited, contribute (in person or in writing) to scrutiny reviews run by other authorities on issues which impact on East Herts residents.</i></p>

Work programmes

At the end of the year, councillors were asked to agree outline agendas for their 2014/15 meetings - but there is flexibility to review and amend them throughout the year as it is important to keep the work of scrutiny relevant and topical.

Topics already confirmed:

CBS has already agreed to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3Cs) 2013/14 • Data protection – action plan closure report • Customer Service Strategy
Env Scrutiny has already agreed to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Severe weather and flooding events in Feb 2014: lessons learned • Temporary Road Closures • Parks and Open spaces – high level action plan • Review of Affordable Warmth Strategy • Climate change: analysis of data and progress against action plan
Community Scrutiny has already agreed to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review of the Revised Housing Register and Allocations policy • Hertford Theatre – end of financial year report • Community Grants – review of applications and allocations
Health and Wellbeing Panel is interested in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Progress and outcomes against 2013/14 Public Health Action Plan • Integrating the public health agenda into 'joined-up' delivery by all different services within East Herts • Mental Health services offered in East Herts

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

There are a couple of important topics which *might* come under more detailed examination by task and finish groups during 2014/15:

- Policy development on Grass Verge and Footpath Parking
- Scrutiny and review of our AntiSocial Behaviour and Environmental Crime policies (once guidance on the new legislation is published by government) – which will be a shared/joint scrutiny between Community and Environment

Our task and finish groups tend to meet several times, spread out over a number of months and this is appropriate when evidence needs to be gathered over time. However, there may be some topics which could benefit from 1 or 2 day scrutiny, where councillors can be immersed in an issue over a shorter period of time – making recommendations based on fresh and immediate evidence.

Although this approach has not been used to date, the pressure of reduced resources may make it an appropriate method during 2014/15.

Every year an article about scrutiny is printed in the council's quarterly LINK magazine which goes to every household in the district. This year's spring edition, delivered during March 2014, invited residents to put forward issues of concern for consideration by the scrutiny committees during the coming year.

The new 2014/15 scrutiny committee members will make the final decision as to which topics are added to their committee agenda or set up for more detailed review by a task and finish group.

Whatever is decided, all the work of the 2014/15 scrutiny committees will focus on helping to deliver the **three corporate priorities** of East Herts Council. The updated wording of these for the coming year is:

PEOPLE:
This priority focuses on delivering strong services and seeking to enhance the quality of life, health and wellbeing, particularly for those who are vulnerable.
PLACE:
This priority focuses on sustainability, the built environment and ensuring our towns and villages are safe and clean.
PROSPERITY:
This priority focuses on safeguarding and enhancing our unique mix of rural and urban communities, promoting sustainable, economic opportunities and delivering cost effective services.

10. THE EVOLVING ROLE OF SCRUTINY



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

The Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011, which brought in this change also created Police and Crime Panels (PCPs) – bodies made up of local elected councillors and independent members with the responsibility to scrutinise and support the work of the PCC. These Panels are not local government committees, but they are obliged to meet in public, to publish their agendas and minutes, and to fulfil certain key statutory responsibilities. The East Herts representative on the Hertfordshire PCP is Cllr Malcolm Alexander.

Hertfordshire Police and Crime Panel
will support and challenge your elected Police and Crime Commissioner by:

- reviewing plans and reports
- scrutinising decisions

December 2012 edition

To attend panel meetings or learn more, members of the public can visit www.hertspcp.org.uk, email pcp@broxbourne.gov.uk or call 01992 785650. Alternatively, please write to Member Services, Borough Offices, Bishops' College, Churchgate, Cheshunt, Herts, EN8 9XQ.

Logos for: Broxbourne, East Herts, St Albans, Welwyn Hatfield, Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage, Watlington, Welwyn Hatfield, Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage, Watlington, Welwyn Hatfield, Hemel Hempstead, Stevenage, Watlington.

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

In January 2014 the CfPS published the results of its research into the work of the 41 PCPs across England and Wales - '**Police and Crime Panels: the first year**'. The full document can be found on their web site at <http://www.cfps.org.uk/publications?item=11563&offset=0> .

CfPS's findings indicate that the role of the Panel and relationship with its PCC does seem to vary across the country and they recommend some action might be needed from the Home Office. They specifically recommend the strengthening of the statutory instrument setting out what information PCCs are required to produce around decision-making and ask that more clarity to be given to PCPs and PCCs on their mutual role in ensuring accountability, transparency and good governance. They also

question whether the current level of Home Office resourcing for PCPs is sustainable and adequate to allow the Panel to carry out their own research and evidence gathering and so be fully effective in their 'supportive' role.

It is early days and the CfPS acknowledge that the first year has been one of settling down and finding their feet. The evidence indicates that all the Panels in England and Wales are effective in that they have successfully concluded their statutory duties over the course of 2013 – but it is too early to demonstrate a tangible impact on local communities. The coming year should offer concrete examples of Panels bringing about positive change.



In January 2014 the Local Government Information Unit published a policy briefing '**Local authority scrutiny at a crossroads?**'

Their first three summary points are reproduced below:

- *New legislative powers and changing scrutiny mechanisms have put more pressure and workload on local authority scrutiny arrangements*
- *Despite this, local authority scrutiny has established itself and carried out a great deal of influential work, particularly in areas of policy development and review, and health scrutiny*
- *However, Scrutiny's constitutional raison d'être – holding the executive to account, has not properly materialised. Budget and partnership scrutiny has not fully developed and has actually declined in the last three or four years, yet scrutiny of these areas has never been more important*

This mirrors local feedback and is reflected in the evaluation and action plan sections of this Annual Report.

There were positive findings: *The survey described Scrutiny's impact as substantial. It highlighted a maturing scrutiny function with councillors taking on more responsibilities with increased confidence. The survey concluded that the scrutiny function had had demonstrable impacts during this period with significant successes in engaging and involving non-executive councillors in policy development and policy review.*

This is balanced by a note of caution: *The most recent analysis showed effectiveness at holding the executive to account was still viewed poorly. This evidence is supported by the comparatively rare use of call-in procedures within local authorities. Other areas where scrutiny practitioners felt they have most difficulty in effectively carrying out their work related to finance and partnerships.*

Comment: *In the current local authority climate, the need for sound effective decision making has never been more important. Local authority leadership needs a valid mechanism of challenge and scrutiny to monitor decision making, tackle poor service provision and to ensure value for money is delivered. Unfortunately, this mechanism is faltering. Local Authority scrutiny needs to slow this process by using its resources as effectively as possible and to seek to reverse the process by demonstrating its cost effectiveness to attract more resources.*

11. TRAINING

It is important for elected members to have the knowledge, understanding and skills to undertake their roles as both a ward councillor and as part of the council's decision making structure. A wide training and development programme is on offer (in-house and external) and councillors from East Herts attended the following scrutiny related events during 2013/14:

Date	Scrutiny related event/session	Delivered by ...
16-Apr-13	2012/13 scrutiny evaluation and 2013/14 topic planning workshop	Scrutiny officer
07-May-13	Induction training for newly elected members and information pack	Lead Officers
28-May-13	The role of scrutiny members in the governance of data protection	Lead Officers
05-Jun-13	Chairing Skills	External trainer at WelHat DC
09-Jul-13	CoValent (performance management) tutorial for newly elected members	Lead Officers
17-Jul-13	An Introduction to Local Government Finance	LGiU in London
24-Jul-13	De-mystifying the Medium Term Financial Plan	Director
07-Nov-13	Training for members on Police and Crime Panel	Run by CfPS at Broxbourne BC
26-Nov-13	Council funding and the budget cycle	Director
02-Dec-13	Scrutiny - skills for topic groups and future chairs	External trainer at HCC
09-Dec-13	Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Parliamentary Seminar	Parliament - select committee
14-Jan-14	Finance/Budget Briefing + Drop-in clinic	Director
21-Jan-14	Finance/Budget Drop-in clinic	Director
11-Feb-14	Finance/Budget Briefing + Drop-in clinic	Director
11-Feb-14	Scrutiny - making an impact	ELGH Lambeth
28-Feb-14	Maximizing the Impact of Overview and Scrutiny	Westminster City Council
31-Mar-14	Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Parliamentary Seminar	Parliament - select committee

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

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

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

- Understanding the 'power' of scrutiny and being a 'critical friend'
- Question planning and confident questioning
- Chairing scrutiny.

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



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

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

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

Call-In:

- Whenever a key decision is made by the Executive it is publicised and open to scrutiny for five working days before the decision takes effect. During that time, if four or more councillors object to the decision, it can be ‘called-in’ and heard by the most appropriate scrutiny committee. ***During 2013/14 there were no ‘call-ins’ at East Herts.***

Councillor Call for Action (CCfA):

- Under section 119 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007, councillors may call for debate and discussion at committee, on a topic of neighbourhood concern. These powers are limited to an issue which affects a single council ward and can only be brought when all other attempts at resolution have been exhausted. ***Since the introduction of CCfA, councillors at East Herts have never had cause to bring forward such a case.***

Scrutiny does not make final decisions – it makes recommendations to the Executive (and some then go onto full Council).

Residents and the press are welcome to attend all these meetings and our Executive and Council are also webcast live on the evening. Access to the webcast service is through the button on the 'Quick Links' tab on the home page of our website and from there you can also get to the archive of previous recordings (held for 12 months).

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

There will be a limited print run of this document.

Greater use will be made of signposting interested parties, partners and residents to the Council's website to access the Scrutiny Annual Report. This will minimise use of material resources, distribution costs and gain potential CO₂ efficiencies from on-line provision.

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

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

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