

## Scrutiny Annual Report 2016-2017

### What is scrutiny?

It is a process where your elected councillors, sitting in public, can review the work of the council to check that policies and services are meeting the priorities and the needs of local people. Scrutiny committees have the power of influence and are entitled to review and scrutinise the decisions and functions of the council and the Executive. Members of the committees serve as critical friends to the Executive. One of the key areas of work this year was to review the current scrutiny structure to ensure it continues to meet the needs of East Herts residents in a changing environment for local government and enables effective challenge.

### How is it structured in East Herts?

Following a review in early 2017, it was proposed to:

- reduce the number of committees from five (Audit and Governance, Corporate Business, Community, Environment and Health/Wellbeing) to two – an Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OS) and Performance, Audit and Governance Committee (PAG).
  - **OS** - This committee will be ‘forward-looking’, shaping new policies at an early stage of their development, and undertaking major reviews of existing policies or service delivery models in order to make improvements, having recourse to Task and Finish Groups where appropriate.
  - **PAG** – This committee will review progress on delivery of the corporate strategic plan, the medium-term financial plan, key performance targets of the council among other topics. It will also have the opportunity to set up Task and Finish Groups where appropriate, and will also have a sub-committee to deal with Member’s Member’s Code of Conduct issues.
- improve the way scrutiny work plans are developed by establishing a longer term work plan identified by committee members themselves, giving councillors more control and generating more valuable scrutiny outcomes by focusing on issues of significance.

In February 2017, a joint scrutiny committee supported changes to scrutiny arrangements, including a new two-committee system. In addition, the creation of a Community Wellbeing Forum, made up of Members representing various public health areas such as mental health, health and social care support and physical activity, was agreed. Following agreement at Full Council on the 1<sup>st</sup> March 2017, the new arrangements were implemented 1<sup>st</sup> May 2017.

Over the course of 2016-2017, up to 35 councillors scrutinised a wide range of important topics including:

- support for the establishment of a new county-wide Home Improvement Agency (HIA) to help elderly and vulnerable persons to remain living independently at home
- emerging crime trends associated with East Herts' night time economy,
- car park fees and charges
- funding of improvements in the Hertford Urban Design Strategy,
- the feasibility and business plan of a proposed Housing Company owned by East Herts Council,
- the existing leisure facilities contract,
- waste services/street cleansing,
- business support and investment programmes in East Herts; plus
- ongoing scrutiny of the Council's performance, budgets and performance of Network Homes and Circle Anglia South Anglia Housing Associations

Given the pressure on public finances, the scrutiny committees had an increased focus on items related to new ways of delivery, generating new income streams and working with other key public sector organisations to reduce costs, share resources and improve the quality of services delivered to residents.

The annual report highlights significant recommendations made by scrutiny in 2016-2017 and sets out plans for the coming year.

**Corporate Business Scrutiny (CBS)** - This committee has focused on performance and the council's finances, including income via fees and charges. Under the new scrutiny arrangements, most of these topics will be considered at the new Performance Audit and Government Committee. Members of the committee considered the feasibility and business case of setting up a Housing Company to provide revenue income to offset diminishing government grants and meet the council's objectives in terms of providing quality housing opportunities on two occasions (30<sup>th</sup> August and 29<sup>th</sup> November). In November 2016, the committee recommended the item be presented to a joint meeting of scrutiny committees in January 2017 so that the proposal could be considered by all members of scrutiny.

CBS members also considered a new Community Lettings Policy on discounts awarded to voluntary and community services organisations that lease land and buildings from the council. It was recommended that a market rent policy be introduced, whereby as each lease comes up for renewal, there would be a maximum rent discount of 80% on the understanding that Officers would have discretion to make adjustments to this. The level of community use was to be monitored through leases.

Members of the committee received a report on town centre improvements in Hertford and recommended that the Council commits up to a maximum of 50% of the £1m required to implement key improvements to The Wash, Maidenhead Street and Bull Plain, Hertford, as detailed in the Hertford Urban Design Strategy, subject to other partners coming on board.

A report on car parking charges was received and Members were informed that car park charges had remained unchanged for some years and in some cases had been reduced. The committee supported a proposal to increase car parking charges by 7.5% from April 2017.

**Environment Scrutiny (ES)** - This committee has focused on conservation areas, waste management, climate change issues, and parks/open spaces. Under the new scrutiny arrangements, most of these topics will be considered at the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In June 2016, they considered a proposal to share waste services arrangements with North Herts Council and recommended the implementation of a Shared Waste and Street Cleansing Service and procurement of a joint contract. The committee agreed options for future domestic waste collection service and recommended they be incorporated into the new contract going out for tender later in 2017. Members of the committee recommended that two task and finish groups were established to look at Sustainable Transport and Climate Change and bring back reports for consideration by the committee. Fifteen recommendations from the Sustainable Transport Task and Finish Group were supported and referred to the Executive for consideration.

The committee also recommended increasing resources for proactive conservation area work; this was progressed through a wider restructure to the planning service completed in April 2017.

**Community Scrutiny (CS)** - This committee has focused on Hertford Theatre, community safety, licensing and leisure. Under the new scrutiny arrangements, most of these topics will be considered at the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In March 2017, Members of the committee looked at emerging crime trends associated with the night time economy and proposed actions to tackle this. The Committee asked for the Executive Member for Environment and Public Space and the Head of Housing and Health to:

- flag up NTE-related crime issues in the Community Safety Assessment drafted by East Herts Council on behalf of the multi-agency East Herts Community Safety Partnership
- carry out a review of East Herts CCTV to include camera locations and equipment to ensure it is fit-for-purpose with regard to maximising safety during evenings and the night time.

- ensure all town and parish councils are aware of the East Herts Safety Advisory Group (SAG) and the supportive role of partners can play when town and parish council and organised and running events.
- consider new and innovative ways to support the NTE, such as the role of Scannet / Live ID
- assess the benefits of seeking Purple Flag accreditation
- consider how best to promote taxi marshalling schemes
- consider options for promoting the installation of cameras within taxis.

The committee resolved that town councils be approached to negotiate a way forward to manage the markets in Bishop's Stortford, Hertford and Ware and look at the feasibility of transferring the rights to licence other markets in the District to Town Councils. Members also supported a new Physical Activity Strategy to be submitted to the Executive in the summer 2017 for approval.

At its meeting in June 2016, the Community Scrutiny Committee received a report from the Leisure Facilities Task and Finish Group and concluded that the proposed direction of travel should be endorsed. In summary, this is as follows:

**Stream 1 - Joint use Pools:** the development of an outline business cases for the management and operation of the Joint Use Facilities or if this is not feasible, alternatives based on a rationalisation model.

**Stream 2 - Hartham and Grange Paddocks Leisure Centres:** The development of an outline business case for the management and operation of the two Council owned sites based on:

- Capital costs
- Revenue impact
- Contract management arrangements
- Contribution to Health and Wellbeing Objectives
- Risk assessment

**Stream 3 - Health and Wellbeing:** The development of initiatives through the new leisure management contract which enable the operation of leisure facilities to address key issues identified within the Council Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

**Health and Wellbeing Scrutiny (HWS)** - This committee has focused on local health issues, fuel poverty and the Ageing Well agenda. Under the new scrutiny arrangements, most of these topics will be considered at the new Overview and Scrutiny Committee or the Member's Community Wellbeing Forum. The integration of the public health agenda into the council's core services such as planning was an important topic for the committee again this year. It was agreed officers would consult with the Public Health department at Herts County Council (HCC) on planning applications of 100+ dwelling to consider the impact on public health

services. The committee called for a further review of air quality, especially in the Air Quality Management Areas in East Herts. It also recommended a multi-pronged approach to addressing rural isolation, including greater involvement of health professionals, ward councillors and adding it as a priority for grant giving.

**Joint Scrutiny** - During the year, two Joint Scrutiny sessions were held to allow councillors from all committees to discuss significant financial and business/service planning issues. In January 2017, Members of the committee carefully considered a business case to create a Housing Management Company. It was recommended that the Executive give more consideration to the setting up of a housing company; and alternatives to the proposed business plan be explored. On the 4 April, the Executive resolved that in principle approval be granted to develop a property investment company, the incorporation and trading of which be subject to future approval of a full business plan for the company; and that Articles of Association and a Shareholder Agreement be drafted for consideration alongside the business plan at a future date.

### **Task and Finish Groups**

In 16/17, three new Task and Finish Groups were set up and the work of the Leisure Facilities Group continued. Both Leisure Facilities and Waste/Street Cleansing were charged with appraising options on service design, best practice, emerging trends and limitations and considering how these impact on long-term financial sustainability. Members were able to feed in views of the residents who use Council's facilities, or are likely to. Cllr Michael Freeman, chairman of the Waste and Street Cleansing Task and Finish Group, said "Importantly, our backgrounds enabled us to understand and consider the likely financial implications of what we could be proposing, in the overall context of the Council's projected financial position in the years ahead."

- **Waste and Street Cleansing Contract**  
A total of four meetings were held between March and May 2016 to inform ongoing negotiations and updates for a new shared contract with North Herts Council (2018-2024). Officers were pleased to explain the service and receive constructive, probing questions that challenged officers' proposals. In June 2016, the group recommended to Environmental Scrutiny that the council obtain quotes for service options at the procurement stage where improvements were appropriate, viable and acceptable. The group will reconvene in 17/18 to consider the outcome of these negotiations against what was recommended.
- **Developing a leisure facilities strategy for East Herts**  
A total of 10 meetings were held between January 2016 and April 2017 and

evidence was obtained from the East/North Herts Clinical Commissioning Group and the chairman of the Active East Herts Community Sports Network on current and future demand for sports. Members of the group visited five leisure facilities that were examples of good practice. A principal objective has been to develop facilities that address: ageing and deteriorating stock, capital investment, decreasing use and visitor numbers, increased competition and increased revenue support for ageing facilities and maintenance expenditure. The Group worked with officers to develop an outline business case for a proposed mix of facilities to serve East Herts residents over the next 20 years and reported back to Community Scrutiny.

- **Sustainable Transport**  
A total of four meetings were held between October 2016 and February 2017. Information was gathered from organisations representing highways authorities, bus and rail companies, cycling projects and school transport. The group agreed a definition of sustainable transport and recommended actions to Environmental Scrutiny, including ones on the themes of behaviour change (how to actively discourage unnecessary car journeys and promote modal shift), investing in viable alternatives (walking and cycling routes), transport for rural areas (including exploring 'on demand' options), and rail travel (improving east/west connectivity).
- **Climate Change** - It was agreed that this was an important issue for the Council to investigate more closely but it was decided to postpone work until the findings of the Sustainable Transport Group were reported. It is anticipated this group will start in the summer of 2017.

### **How did the committees decide what to scrutinise in 16/17?**

There are some issues 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. However, there is flexibility on what issues Members can ask to consider. These are issues they believe to be:

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

At East Herts, Members believe it is important to spend time scrutinising issues that

- allow us to reduce risk for residents and the council,
- might incur significant costs;
- or could bring substantial savings to the council

During 2016/17, scrutiny tackled some complex and sensitive topics under all these 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. During 2016/17 and until 19/20, the council priorities are:

- Improving the health and wellbeing of our communities
- Enhancing the quality of people’s lives
- Enabling a flourishing local economy

### Work programme for 2017/2018

At East Herts, we look to have work plans for scrutiny to give partners and the public advance notice of topics – but there is always flexibility to review and amend them throughout the year as it is important to keep the work of scrutiny relevant and topical. Topics in the work plans include:

<b>PAG has already agreed to</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Update on the Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS)</li> <li>• Risk Management Monitoring</li> <li>• Asset Management</li> <li>• Budget Report and Medium Term Financial Plan</li> <li>• Treasury Management Strategy 2017-18</li> </ul>
<b>OS has already agreed to</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leisure Facilities Strategy</li> <li>• Parking Enforcement – Task and Finish Group</li> <li>• Fuel Poverty</li> <li>• Integration of public health into the council’s core services</li> </ul>

Members have the ability to review any issue that affects East Herts, not just council-related services. Residents can submit suggestions for the work programme using the methods below.

### How to find out more about scrutiny in East Herts

Scrutiny is strengthened by involving residents and partners. They bring expertise, local knowledge, fresh ideas and external challenge. Members of the public are welcome to attend any meeting of the new Overview and Scrutiny (OS) and Performance Audit and Governance (PAG) committees. Meetings start at 7pm and are held at the council offices in Hertford. Dates in 2017/2018 are published on the East Herts Council website.

Contact us...

Tel: 01992 531481

Email: [scrutiny@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@eastherts.gov.uk)

Agendas, reports and minutes of every council committee are posted and regularly updated – and meetings are open to the public:

<http://democracy.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>