

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 24 APRIL 2018

REPORT BY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE UPDATE FROM 17 APRIL MEETING

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WARD(S) AFFECTED: All

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**Purpose/Summary of Report**

- This report details the comments and recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 17 April 2018.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

<b>(A)</b>	<b>That Executive notes the contents of the report.</b>
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**1.0 Background**

1.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 17<sup>th</sup> April 2018 and considered the following items:

- Update from the Leader of the Council
- Presentation on Council Tax Support 2019-20
- Night Time Economy and Public Health: Impact of Alcohol Use
- Climate Change: Update from the Task and Finish Group
- Community Governance Review: Bishop's Stortford
- Community Governance Review: Buntingford
- Community Governance Review: Eastwick and Gilston
- Scrutiny Work Programme 2018/19

## **2.0 Update from the Leader of the Council**

- 2.1 The Leader of the Council was invited to provide a presentation and update on her portfolio. Prior to the meeting taking place, the Executive Member was provided with some key questions from Scrutiny Members on areas they would like to be included in the update.
- 2.2 The Committee welcomed the presentation, which covered the main functions of the role of Leader of the Council (including the overview of all portfolios and the District Plan; leading on the development of Masterplanning principles and initiatives; Chairing the Old River Lane delivery group and the Gilston delivery board) and involvement with a range of authorities that influence the future and opportunities for East Herts (including the London Stansted Cambridge Consortium (LSCC), the East of England Growth and Infrastructure group, the Greater London Assembly (GLA), the Hertfordshire Infrastructure Planning Partnership (HIPP); the A414 working group, the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP); the Hertfordshire Health and Wellbeing Board, the New Communities Group at the Town and Country Planning Association (TCPA) and Transport East.)

## **3.0 Presentation on Council Tax Support 2019-20**

- 3.1 The Committee received a presentation from the Head of Revenues and Benefits Shared Service which provided an introduction to plans to significantly review policy in this area in anticipation of the impact of Universal Credit 'full service' going live in October 2018. Due to the nature of the Universal Credit system, a significant increase in workload for the Council would be expected if the current Council Tax Support (CTS) scheme remains in its current format. The Committee noted that it was the right time to propose a move from a means tested benefit system to a simplified income and

circumstance Council Tax discount system. Data modelling work was due to commence to establish appropriate income bands for the potential new system. A full consultation with taxpayers in the district and preceptors would be carried out and if the new system was agreed, it would be implemented in 2019/20. The Committee noted that if a suitable new model could not be found, the default position would be to remain with the current system until a suitable system was found.

- 3.2 Members welcomed the idea of a banding scheme and noted that there was no national scheme because this function had been devolved to local authorities from central government, although it was highlighted that the aim would be to ensure the East Herts Council scheme was as similar as possible to the Stevenage Borough Council scheme as they had a shared Revenues and Benefits service. Members highlighted the need to ensure residents were aware of any changes and it was noted that officers would be contacting clients and ensuring the message was communicated effectively.
- 3.3 The Committee noted the presentation and welcomed the proactive attitude and supportive approach of officers.

#### **4.0 Night Time Economy and Public Health: Impact of Alcohol Use**

- 4.1 The Committee considered a report providing an update on the key points arising from the recent consideration by the Licensing Committee of the impact of alcohol use on Public Health in East Herts. The report also provided extracts from the draft Position Statement on 'Licensing Decision Making relating to the Night Time Economy' for the Committee to consider.
- 4.2 Members noted that the Council wished to take a broad and inclusive view of what constitutes stakeholders in the development and operation of a successful night time economy in East Herts and the licensing decisions related to

this. Members enquired about consultation with Parish councils and noted that the relevant town/parish clerk would be informed whenever there was an application for licensed premises in the area. Members highlighted the opportunities to provide/engage in training with those working in licensed premises such as door staff and it was noted that officers were planning to pursue such opportunities.

- 4.3 The Committee recommended that the views of Hertfordshire County Council's Public Health team on the impact of alcohol misuse on Public Health were noted and views on how the Council and Public Health colleagues could work together to mitigate these impacts are passed to the Head of Housing and Health for consideration; and the Committee's views on the key aspects of the draft Position Statement on 'Licensing Decision Making relating to the Night Time Economy' given in Essential Reference Paper B of the report are provided to the Head of Housing and Health for consideration.

## **5.0 Climate Change - Update from the Task and Finish Group**

- 5.1 The Committee considered a report providing an update on the work undertaken so far by the Climate Change Task and Finish Group, following its review of Climate Change activity within East Herts and identification of potential key strategy areas.
- 5.2 The Chairman of the Climate Change Task and Finish Group provided the Committee with an outline of the work undertaken by the Task and Finish Group and highlighted that the Group would like to explore the subject of batteries further as this could hold potential commercial opportunities for the Council and also be a useful energy source; and that proactive communications from the Council would play a key role in ensuring that the message is received widely.
- 5.3 The Committee welcomed the work of the Climate Change Task and Finish Group and wished to support it going forward.

Members discussed the potential for the Council to influence Housing Associations in the district to include features such as solar roof panels and it was noted that the Council was engaged in an ongoing dialogue with Housing Associations and the forum proposed would provide further opportunity for influence in this area. Members highlighted the eco house in Aldbury that had been successful in the past and noted that the Council may look to do something similar possibly in a shop unit rather than a full house. There was discussion of whether the government targets on Climate Change would still stand after Britain leaves the European Union (EU) and it was noted that this would not make any difference as the targets were UK law. The possibility of using solar glass window panels was suggested by Members and it was noted that the cost was still high so they would not be chosen by developers but officers would monitor this and report back to Members.

#### 5.4 The Committee recommended:

- The task and finish group meets further to complete its review of climate change activity within the district;
- The Group prepares a draft Strategy for discussion at the September meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- Officers facilitate the establishment of a 'forum' that meets periodically to enable local environmental groups and other interested organisations to coordinate climate change activities and undertake joint working with the Council;
- Officers ensure opportunities continue to be explored for carbon reduction and energy efficiency measures to be reflected within relevant policy areas such as planning policy;
- Officers develop a draft communications strategy to effectively promote Climate Change resilience activities, energy efficiency and carbon reduction demonstrating the community leadership role of the authority.

## **6.0 Community Governance Review: Bishop's Stortford**

- 6.1 The Committee considered a report providing the responses received during the initial consultation period for the Community Governance Review of Bishop's Stortford Town Council. It was noted that 125 responses were received directly from individuals and organisations, of which 8 were in favour of the proposal and 114 against the proposal. In addition to this, a 960 signature petition and 394 pro forma letters had been received against the proposals.
- 6.2 Councillor I Devonshire read out a summary of residents' concerns from the Rural Ward of Thorley Parish to the proposal, rejecting the proposal for boundary change and the need for a Community Governance Review (CGR). The summary questioned how the voice of Thorley Rural Ward parishioners could be adequately represented under the proposed boundary change and challenged whether the proposals met the principles of democracy, localism and good governance. Concerns that any potential boundary change would impact the distinct sense of village community negatively were raised. In addition to this, concern regarding whether the CGR was linked to obtaining planning permission for the Bishop's Stortford South development in the District Plan was raised. Cllr I Devonshire requested a temporary cessation of review procedures to allow town and parish councillors to work together and it was noted that a determination needed to be made within 12 months of the review starting but one possible outcome would be to take no action at this point and defer for further consideration. With regard to the question of the viability of Thorley Parish Council if change was made, it was noted that, on a statutory basis, an existing parish with less than 150 people does not need to be abolished.
- 6.3 In discussion, a number of Members made the point that many of the objections received related to the Bishop's Stortford South development and felt that clarification on this

issue and whether or not there is a connection to the CGR would be of benefit to residents and may not have been sufficiently clear in the initial consultation information. Members made the point that Thorley residents use the facilities of Bishop's Stortford.

- 6.4 Officers agreed to amend the wording of option D to specify that "inclusion in another parish" could relate to Bishop's Stortford.
- 6.5 In discussion Members highlighted the fact that the response to the consultation was significant but also noted the number of pro-forma letters which made up part of an organised response, and the fact that most of the comments did not relate directly to the CGR but to other issues such as the impact of potential development.
- 6.6 Members acknowledged the strong feeling from residents and the significant public response. In discussion, the importance of the Parish maintaining a sense of identity was noted. Some Members expressed the view that there should not be a boundary change.
- 6.7 In response to a Member question regarding the potential for re-consultation, it was noted that there would be a second round of consultation after the Council had considered the proposal but as currently planned, this would be after the draft recommendations had been agreed.
- 6.8 The Committee recommended that the responses received to the initial consultation on the Community Governance review of Bishop's Stortford Town Council be received; and Members' comments be forwarded to the Executive for their consideration as part of the Community Governance Review.

## **7.0 Community Governance Review: Buntingford**

- 7.1 The Committee considered a report providing the responses

received during the initial consultation period for the Community Governance Review of Buntingford Town Council.

- 7.2 In discussion, Members noted that the proposal came from Buntingford Town Council but noted that East Herts Council may wish to apply a consistent rule regarding the ring road, in terms of a natural boundary. There was discussion of potential new development and it was noted that new housing development was planned on part of area 'A' of the map.
- 7.3 The Committee recommended that the responses received to the initial consultation on the Community Governance review of Buntingford Town Council be received; and Members' comments be forwarded to the Executive for their consideration as part of the Community Governance Review.

## **8.0 Community Governance Review: Eastwick and Gilston**

- 8.1 The Committee considered a report providing the responses received during the initial consultation period for the Community Governance Review of Eastwick and Gilston Parish Council.
- 8.2 The Committee recommended that the responses received to the initial consultation on the Community Governance review of Eastwick and Gilston Parish Council be received; and Members' comments be forwarded to the Executive for their consideration as part of the Community Governance Review.

## **9.0 Scrutiny Work Programme**

- 9.1 The Committee received a report which provided an update on the current status of the Committee's Work Programme for 2018-2019, including Task and Finish Groups.
- 9.2 The Committee approved the draft Work Programme for Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Background Papers

None

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