

Scrutiny Annual Report 2017-2018

What is scrutiny?

Scrutiny is a process where elected councillors can review the work of the Council to check that policies and services are meeting the priorities and the needs of local people and consider policy and proposals at an early stage when the views of the Scrutiny Committees can be fed back to officers and the Executive. Scrutiny committees are not decision making bodies but they have the power of influence and are entitled to review, scrutinise and challenge the functions of the Council and the decisions of the Executive. Scrutiny serves as a 'critical friend' to the decision-making Executive.

This report highlights the work of scrutiny at East Herts Council in 2017-18 and sets out plans for the coming year.

Scrutiny at East Herts

Following a review in early 2017, the current system was implemented, where scrutiny is carried out by the following two Scrutiny Committees:

- **Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OS)** - This committee is '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 and commissioning recourse to Task and Finish Groups to focus on specific subjects in greater depth where appropriate.
- **Performance, Audit and Governance (PAG) Scrutiny Committee** – This committee reviews progress on delivery of the corporate strategic plan, the medium-term financial plan, key performance targets of the Council and

incorporates the Council's audit committee function. Task and Finish Groups can be set up by this committee to focus on specific subjects in greater depth, where appropriate. This committee has a sub-committee to deal with councillors' code of conduct issues (the Standards Sub-Committee.)

Over the course of 2017-2018, councillors scrutinised a wide range of topics, as detailed below:

Performance, Audit and Governance (PAG) Scrutiny Committee:

- Leisure Contract
- Emergency Planning
- Scott's Grotto Asset Transfer
- General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR)
- Charrington's House and proposals to address the depressed income

- Delivery of Housing and Health strategy – 1 year review
- Shared Anti-Fraud Service update
- Risk Management strategy, update and monitoring
- New Business Incubation Space in Bishop's Stortford
- Shared Internal Audit Service updates

Overview and Scrutiny (OS) Committee

- Leisure Strategy
- Planning Enforcement
- Parking Enforcement Contract
- Grounds Maintenance Contract
- Portfolio Updates from each of the Executive Members
- Economic development vision/strategy – business engagement
- Communications

- Night Time Economy (NTE) Licensing and impact on Police and Public Health
- Corporate Service Plans
- Draft Health and Wellbeing Strategy
- Council Tax Support 2019 – 2020
- Community Governance Reviews

Given the continued pressure on public finances, the scrutiny committees had a strong 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.

Overview and Scrutiny (OS) Committee

Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been very active over the year establishing a number of Task and Finish Groups to facilitate the work of the Council. June 2017 saw the establishment of a T&F Group to review a new approach to Parking Enforcement and its recommendations reported to the Executive. A Task and Finish Group established in September 2017 to review the Grounds Maintenance Contract provided its final report to the Members in June 2018 and made a number of recommendations to the Executive. After substantial work on Climate Change, the Task and Finish group provided an updating report to Members in April 2018 on a proposed strategy including the need to review renewable energy investment opportunities, to lead on climate change agenda locally and to disseminate information to the business Community locally and further joint working with environmental groups on climate change activities. Members will consider their final report at its meeting on 18 September 2018. Additionally a Task and Finish group was established to review leisure provision and its future direction of travel and reported to Overview and Scrutiny Committee

on 13 June 2017 when Members made a number of recommendations to the Executive including the endorsement of the investment proposed.

Performance, Audit and Governance (PAG) Scrutiny Committee

PAG is more regulatory in terms of form and function receiving reports both externally and internally. Members have scrutinised a number of issues such as: Charrington's House (Rental Income) and the development of New Business Incubation Space at Bishop's Stortford, the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR), Budget Performance, and the Emergency Plan to name some. It has also scrutinised issues in relation to the Castle Weir Hydro Scheme, Decent Homes Grants, and Shared Service Arrangements, The above list is not meant to be an exhaustive list but illustrates its contribution to the work of the Council.

Joint Scrutiny

After reviewing the work of Scrutiny Committees in 2017-18 and in response to feedback, a joint scrutiny committee meeting has been added to the scrutiny work programmes for 2018-19, to ensure that all members of both scrutiny committees can participate fully in scrutinising the Council's medium term financial plan for 2019-20. This meeting will take place in January in order to allow comments from scrutiny to feed in to the budget setting process.

Task and Finish Groups

In 17/18, three new Task and Finish Groups were set up to consider the Grounds Maintenance Contract, the Climate Change Strategy, and the Parking Enforcement Contract; and the work of the Leisure Facilities Task and Finish Group continued.

Grounds Maintenance Contract

A total of 7 meetings were held between October 2017 and May 2018 to inform ongoing negotiations and updates for a new shared contract with North Herts Council (2018-2024). The group examined detailed information from officers, consultants and other local authorities and considered various contract and service standard options and the potential impact on residents. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee supported all the recommendations of the task and finish group, which will be put forward to the Executive and include a recommendation to make savings to offset the increase in costs by no longer funding a 'top up' to cut Hertfordshire County Council grass to the East Herts Council standard.

Climate Change Strategy

A total of 6 meetings were held between October 2017 and July 2018 and evidence was obtained from officers in Planning and representatives of a number of climate change/carbon reduction groups. An interim report was provided for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 24 April 2018 and the final report, which will include the draft climate change strategy is due to be considered by the Committee in September 2018. The Chairman of the Climate Change Task and Finish Group, Councillor Deering said, " I am sure I can say on behalf of the Group that this work is important and that there is clear scope for EHDC to take a leadership role which we hope it will do." Interim findings of this group were considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in April 2018 and it was agreed that EHC officers facilitate the establishment of a forum to enable local environmental groups and other interested organisations to co-ordinate climate change activities and undertake joint working with the Council.

Parking Enforcement Contract Procurement

The Council's parking enforcement contract is being re-tendered with a start date of January 2019. To assist in this process a Member task and Finish Group was constituted in 2017 to identify and recommend the Council's enforcement priorities for the next contract term. Care was taken to appoint Members from each of our major towns to ensure a balanced and representative range of views. The group worked well and within its agreed scope and terms of reference. A wide range of issues were discussed, a number of external experts gave evidence and the Group made a number of recommendations as to how the next contract could meet the changing needs of our communities, including increasing attendance around schools at the start and end of the school day to promote safety, and a greater focus of enforcement on highways rather than car parks. These recommendations were supported at Overview and Scrutiny Committee and adopted in full by the Executive on 16 October 2017.

How did the committees decide what to scrutinise in 17/18?

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, scrutiny committees aim to be responsive and flexible in order to ensure the topics they examine are relevant and meaningful.

Members of the Scrutiny Committees are encouraged to submit proposals for scrutiny at any point throughout the year and a work planning workshop was held for each committee in June 2018, where members discussed and prioritised topics for scrutiny in 2017/18.

The proposed topics are currently being scoped by officers. The topics selected are issues Scrutiny Committees believe to be:

- Of local public interest or concern
- Linked to the council's corporate priorities
- Holding the potential of having an impact on the lives of residents
- Not being scrutinised by another body

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

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

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 2017/18 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 2018/2019

The Scrutiny Committee work programmes are planned in advance and published at each Committee meeting, allowing the public and partner organisations notice of topics but they are working documents and subject to change, ensuring the flexibility to review and amend them throughout the year in response to scrutiny requests and relevant topical issues. Topics in the work programmes include:

<p>Topics for scrutiny by the PAG Scrutiny Committee in 2018-19</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Update on the Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) • Risk Management Monitoring • Asset Management • Treasury Management Strategy 2018-19 • Annual Leisure Performance Report 2017 • Insurance Options for 2019 • Shared Internal Audit Service – update on Annual Assurance and Audit Plan • Quarterly finance and performance ‘healthcheck’ • Asset Management Update
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Topics for scrutiny by the OS Committee in 2018-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Findings of the Climate Change Task and Finish Group • Shared Service (IT, CCTV, Revenues and Benefits) • Update on Economic Development Vision and assessment of Launchpad Pilot • Community Transport Strategy
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Topics for scrutiny by Joint Committee (OS and PAG) in 2018-19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget Report and Medium Term Financial Plan • Corporate Plans 2018-19
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The Scrutiny Committees at East Herts Council have the ability to review any issue that affects East Herts, not just council services.

How to find out more about scrutiny in East Herts

Scrutiny is strengthened by involving residents and partner organisation, who can bring valuable 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 in the Council Chamber, Wallfields, Hertford. Dates in 2018/2019 are published on the East Herts Council website.

Contact us...

Tel: 01992 531481

Email: 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>