

# East Herts Council Report

## Overview and Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 4 February 2020

**Report by:** Scrutiny Officer

**Report title:** Task and Finish Group Update and Work Programme

**Ward(s) affected:** All

---

### Summary

- This report reviews actions included in the committee's existing Work Programme and proposes amendments to the ongoing Work Programme.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, that:**

- (A) the proposed Work Programme, as included in Appendix A, be approved, which has been amended in line with progress on:**
- (i) the Task and Finish Group (Parking);**
  - (ii) consideration of issues relating to Hertford Town Centre and Bircherley Green, Hertford**
  - (iii) implementation of the Committee's previous recommendation to establish an Environmental and Climate Forum**
  - (iv) consideration of cycle storage provision in Bishop's Stortford**

## **(v) the Task and Finish Group (Social Housing)**

**(B) scrutiny of Section 106 allocations be removed from the Work Programme as it was considered in detail at a previous Committee meeting.**

### **1.0 Proposal(s)**

1.1 The purpose of this report to consider an update in on what action has been taken in relation to OS requests for Task and Finish Groups to review / research scrutiny proposals and the action taken.

1.2 The report also seeks Members' views on items for inclusion in the ongoing draft of the Overview and Scrutiny work programme.

### **2.0 Background**

2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme is a continually updated programme. The latest update, in draft form, is presented at **Appendix A** for consideration. Any Member wishing to include an item on the Work Programme is required to submit their request via a Scrutiny Proposal Form which is evaluated against the Scrutiny Flow Chart (**Appendix B**).

2.2 Members are reminded that for a topic to be valid for Scrutiny it needs to be relevant to the work of the council and impact on a number of residents / or the wider area. In addition, there needs to be evidence, whether readily quantifiable or anecdotal, that this is an issue requiring investigation.

2.3 The following paragraphs provide updates on work to date on items in the Work Programme.

### **2.4 Task and Finish Group (Parking)**

2.5 Members will recall that a Task and Finish Group (Parking) submitted a detailed report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 10 December 2019 with a number of recommendations. The Head of Operations will be reporting on these recommendations and other related matters to the Executive on 11 February 2020 and then to the next ordinary meeting of Council for decision.

## 2.6 **Hertford Town Centre / Bircherley Green Hertford**

2.7 Concerns were raised by a Member at a previous meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee about the economic viability of Hertford Town Centre (HTC) / Bircherley Green. A review of two independent reports on the areas showed that HTC was economically stable, there are no empty shops and there is general praise for the area. Therefore, although there remain concerns about progress at Bircherley Green, as summarised in **Appendix C**, it has been determined not to scrutinise this matter further at this stage; the new owners of the Bircherley Green site will be given time to bring forward their proposals.

## 2.8 **Implementation of Climate Change**

2.9 Council on 24 July 2019 made a Climate Change Declaration and agreed to a range of climate change actions. Following on from this, the council has established an East Herts Environmental and Climate Forum to drive forward and oversee action on Climate Change locally. The first meeting of this group was held on 15 January at Fletchers Lea in Ware with over 120 people attending. Further Forum meetings will be held throughout 2020/21 at locations across the district.

2.10 Establishment of the Forum derives directly from the recommendations of the Task and Finish Group. Reports from, and issues raised by, the Forum will be presented to future Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings.

**2.11 Cycle Storage Provision in Bishop's Stortford (in particular around the railway station)**

2.12 A Member raised the issue of the lack of storage for cycles at the Bishop's Stortford railway station and more generally in the town and beyond. As a result, the issue has been raised with Greater Anglia and a number of partner organisations including Bishop's Stortford Town Council and Hertfordshire County Council. A range of options for improving cycle storage were identified with partners leading on implementation. The Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability had also been involved in research in relation to cycle storage and provision.

2.13 Members may be interested to learn that Greater Anglia explained there had been difficulties with the software used to operate the fobs at the station which was compromising access to the 200 storage spaces available. The Chairman and Vice-Chairman felt that there was sufficient evidence on cycle storage and provision in the area and that a Task and Finish Group was not needed.

**2.14 Social Housing Event**

2.15 Members will recall that a Task and Finish Group was requested to explore the relationship between the council and registered providers of social housing, often referred to as housing associations. The Task and Finish Group met on 19 December 2019. Members agreed an approach to the investigation and, with Officers' assistance, articulated a series of questions to be posed to tenants and senior Officers of the main register providers operating in the district. Meetings with tenants and Officers are currently being arranged.

**2.16 Update on Section 106 Allocation**

2.17 At the meeting of OS Committee (10 December 2019)

Members noted that Performance Audit and Governance Oversight Committee (24 September 2019) had received a detailed report on allocations in relation to the current position of Section 106 contributions and actions taken. Members agreed to take no further action. Members' agreement is sought to remove this report from the current work plan.

### **3.0 Reason(s)**

- 3.1 This report provides an update on the current situation in relation to issues raised by Members.
- 3.2 Para 4E (1.1.4) provides that Scrutiny Committee *"may appoint a task and finish group which shall be given a brief to consider a specified subject area and report back to Committee on a regular basis"*.

### **4.0 Options**

- 4.1 Retain the existing Work Programme – NOT RECOMMENDED as this will not enable the committee to take forward the issues previously identified by Members.
- 4.2 The Work Programme will be kept under review by the committee throughout the coming year.

### **5.0 Risks**

- 5.1 The establishment of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee is enshrined in the Local Government Act 2000 (section 9). The 2000 Act obliges local authorities to adopt political management systems with a separate Executive. Various sub sections (of the 2000 Act), set out the powers and duties for Overview and Scrutiny Committees including the right to investigate and make recommendations on anything which is the responsibility of the Executive. Legislative provisions can also be found in the Localism Act 2011 (Schedule 2) with

options to retain or re-adopt a “committee system” (section 9B).

- 5.2 Potential risks arise for the council if policies and strategies are developed and/or enacted without sufficient scrutiny. Approval of an updated Work Programme contributes to the mitigation of this risk by ensuring key activities of the council are scrutinised.

## **6.0 Implications/Consultations**

- 6.1 Scrutiny is an important part of the local democratic process and represents the interests of residents. It holds the Executive to account on behalf of residents and helps review and improve services and functions run by the Council and its local partners.
- 6.2 The proposed Work Programme has implications for Members’ time and the resources of the council devoted to scrutinizing the issues included. The work can be accommodated within the council’s existing budgets.

### **Community Safety**

No

### **Data Protection**

No

### **Equalities**

Yes – scrutiny of the services provided by registered providers of social housing will investigate how some of the most vulnerable people in the district, including those with protected characteristics, receive housing services.

### **Environmental Sustainability**

Yes – although not subject to a further Task and Finish Group, the proposed Work Programme envisages the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receiving reports on the progress of the council’s

Environmental and Climate Forum.

**Financial**

No

**Health and Safety**

No

**Human Resources**

No

**Human Rights**

No

**Legal**

Yes - scrutiny is enshrined in Statute and the Work Programme will ensure robust scrutiny of the council's work.

**Specific Wards**

No

**7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material**

7.1 Appendix A – Draft Work Programme

7.2 Appendix B - Scrutiny Flow Chart

7.3 Appendix C – Task and Finish Document : Update

**Contact Officer:** Jonathan Geall, Head of Housing and Health and Acting Head of Legal and Democratic Services. [jonathan.geall@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:jonathan.geall@eastherts.gov.uk)

**Report Author:** Lorraine Blackburn, Scrutiny Officer  
[lorraine.blackburn@eastherts.gov.uk](mailto:lorraine.blackburn@eastherts.gov.uk)