

East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 15 September 2020

Report by: Scrutiny Officer

Report title: Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Draft Work Programme

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

- This report reviews actions included in the committee's existing Work Programme and seeks Members' views on any proposed amendments to the ongoing Work Programme.

RECOMMENDATION FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, that:

(A) the proposed Work Programme, as included in Appendix A, be approved.

1.0 Proposal(s)

1.1 Items previously required, identified or suggested for the Overview and Scrutiny (OS) work programme as set out in **Appendix A**. The Appendix is now presented as a consolidated report to include those issues for consideration by Audit and Governance Committee. It was felt that consolidating the work of both Committees in one report would give all Members of both committees a better perspective from the viewpoint of scrutiny.

1.2 Scrutiny committees have the power of influence and are

entitled to review and scrutinise the functions of the Council and the decisions of the Executive. The Committee serves as a 'critical friend' and is not a decision-making body but can make recommendations to the Executive and who must respond formally to recommendations within a given timeframe.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 The draft agenda for 2020/21 meetings of Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Audit and Governance Committee is shown in **Appendix A**. The timing of some items shown may have to change depending on availability of essential data (e.g. from central government) external sources and officers.
- 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.
- 2.1 Members are welcome to submit a scrutiny proposal at any time by completing a Scrutiny Proposal Form (Available from the Scrutiny Officer) which will provide officers with sufficient information to assess if it is appropriate for Scrutiny and to ensure their specific questions are addressed. The Scrutiny Officer will then liaise with officers and the Scrutiny Chairman to consider the best way to address the subject and complete a scoping document.
- 2.2 Members are also asked whether there is any training relevant to scrutiny or to the function and remit of the OS Committee that they wish to suggest.
- 2.3 At the request of the Leader and the Chief Executive the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) was asked to undertake a Review of Scrutiny at East Herts. The Draft Report has been received and is being reviewed by Key Officers before the CfPS produce a Final Report.

3.0 Report to the Executive – Review of East Herts Parking Policy: Report of the Parking Task and Finish Group

3.1 Members will recall that, following a substantial review of East Herts Parking Policies a Parking Task and Finish Group reported their findings to the Executive on 11 February 2020. At that meeting, Members received the findings of the Parking Task and Finish Group and agreed that the Head of Operations, in consultation with the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Chairman of the Parking Task and Finish Group, and with the Executive Member for Environmental Sustainability, would assess the full viability of the recommendations by the Executive and report back to the Executive setting out cost implications. This was included on the Forward Plan published on 21 May 2020 as “deferred”.

3.2 The Head of Operations has subsequently advised that the report back to the Executive was due to be presented in the context of the Medium Term Financial Plan (i.e. a £200k uplift in parking income). However, owing to COVID-19 the Council ceased parking charges and has lost a significant level of income (approx. £900k). Furthermore, parking behaviour has changed in the short term with less commuters in the Council’s car parks. The matter is being reviewed weekly with the portfolio holder and the Council now needs to explore how best to respond to these changes. Officers are working with the chairman of Overview and Scrutiny to revisit this work.

4.0 Reason(s)

4.1 This report provides an update on the current situation in relation to issues raised by Members.

5.0 Options

5.1 The Work Programme will be kept under review by the

committee throughout the coming year.

6.0 Risks

- 6.1 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).
- 6.2 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.

7.0 Implications/Consultations

- 7.1 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.
- 7.2 The proposed Work Programme has implications for Members’ time and the resources of the council devoted to scrutinizing the issues included.

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

Yes – scrutiny of the services provided eg 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 (the Local Government Act 2000) as amended by the Localism Act 2011.

Specific Wards

No

8.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

8.1 Appendix A – Draft Work Programme

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