

East Herts Council Report

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 22 March 2022

Report by: Scrutiny Officer

Report title: Overview and Scrutiny – Draft Work Programme 2021/22

Ward(s) affected: All

Summary

- This report considers actions for inclusion in the committee’s existing Draft Work Programme and proposes amendments to the ongoing Draft Work Programme in the light of the recent refresh of the Corporate Plan and “SEED” Priorities.

RECOMMENDATION FOR OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE, that:

- (A) The main agenda items for the next meeting be agreed;**
- (B) A Rapid Review group of four Members be established to review affordability of housing in the District on the Terms of Reference outlined in paragraph 1.4. Additionally that the Head of Housing and Health be asked to determine whom to invite as expert witnesses.**
- (C) The proposed Work Programme, included at Appendix A, be approved.**

1.0 Proposal(s)

- 1.1 The Appendix setting out the draft work programme is presented as a single report.
- 1.2 In deciding what items the committee should consider, Members' should have regard to the Corporate and Forward Plans and what is due to be considered at the next Executive.
- 1.3 Specifically, Members' agreement is sought in relation to:

a) The establishment of a Rapid Review comprised of four members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, from all political parties, to review the affordability of housing in the district, to be held over half a day with expert witnesses to be determined.

b) Agreement to the proposed terms of reference below:-

To explore options on providing more properties with or without opening a Housing Revenue Account;

Explore where the Council can secure funding to build homes without opening a HRA and could this come from a Homes' England via a Grant?

Review the current arrangements around S106 agreements and what could be done to provide more affordable housing;

Explore how the Council can secure more properties with lower rents; and

What is in the housing strategy which makes provision for more units at lower rents?

c) To seek nominations from the four selected Members for who should Chair the Rapid Review. In chairing the Rapid Review, the Member will be responsible for consolidating the views expressed and prepare and present a report with

recommendations as appropriate to the 21 June O&S Committee and then on to the Executive.

d) Agree who might be invited as expert witnesses following advice from the Head of Housing and Health

1.4 Members have been asked for their questions and potential topics on affordability of housing in a separate email and those questions or topics that do not fit within the terms of reference contained at 1.3 (b) above will be responded to separately.

1.5 Members will also recall that the Executive recently agreed to a refresh of the Corporate Plan and its “SEED” Priorities. Looking forward, there are a number of new issues which have been included on the Work Programme into the next civic year. Members’ views are sought on the issues included and guidance sought in terms of timescales.

2.0 Background

2.1 The draft agenda items for 2022/23 meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny 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 The draft agenda at Appendix A is not a final document, and it is for Members to decide which items they wish to scrutinise, and which they do not, for the various meetings.

2.3 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.

2.4 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.

2.5 Members are also asked whether there is any training relevant to scrutiny or to the function and remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee that they wish to suggest.

3.0 Reason(s)

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

4.0 Options

4.1 The Work Programme will be kept under review by the committee throughout the coming year. It is worth noting that this is a draft work programme which is continually reviewed and will evolve as the work programme develops triggered by external and internal influences

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.

Community Safety

No

Data Protection

No

Equalities

Yes – scrutiny of the services provided e.g. 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

7.0 Background papers, appendices and other relevant material

7.1 Appendix A – Draft Work Programme

Contact Officer: James Ellis, Head of Legal and Democratic Services, Tel: 01279 502170.

james.ellis@eastherts.gov.uk

Report Author: Lorraine Blackburn, Scrutiny Officer, Tel: 01279 502172. lorraine.blackburn@eastherts.gov.uk