

Report to Council

Date of meeting: 20 February 2007

Subject: Overview and Scrutiny

Chairman: Councillor R Morgan



Recommendation:

That the Overview and Scrutiny progress report from September to the present be noted.

Report.

At the start of the year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to the setting up of 5 Standing Panels this year and 5 new Task and Finish Panels. The Standing Panels each have a rolling programme that consider ongoing cyclical issues and are comprised of the Housing Standing Panel under the Chairmanship of Councillor S Murray; the Constitutional and Members Services Standing Panel chaired by Councillor R Morgan; the Customer Services and ICT panel chaired by Councillor Mrs McEwen; the Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel chaired by Councillor Jon Whitehouse; and the Environment and Planning Standing Panel chaired by Councillor Mrs Smith.

An Overview and Scrutiny progress report was submitted to Council in September 2006 and this is the second report.

Task and Finish Panels:

(i) The Leisure Task and Finish Panel, chaired by Councillor Mrs Harding is looking at the Future Management of the Waltham Abbey Sports Centre; a review of the future Management of the Roding Valley Meadows local Nature Reserve, the Panel hopes to get a finished report out for these two topics by the end of February 2007.

A review of Arts Development in the District; and a review of The District Council's Role and involvement in Outdoor and Community Events, these are still ongoing.

Recently the Leisure Task and Finish panel has visited Theatre Resources, Ongar Arts and Education Centre in Chipping Ongar where they given a presentation on Theatre Resources various operations in the District and County.

(ii) The Town Centre and Car Parks Task and Finish Panel chaired by Councillor M Colling is looking at what type of Town Centre we would like to encourage within the district and we could assist and encourage the economies and growth of our town centres and development of the new car parking enforcement contract and the development and future use of car parks.

The panel recently considered a report from Bidwells (Planning and Economic Development Consultants) who were appointed to investigate the development potential of the following five sites: Bakers Lane, Church Hill, Loughton Cornmill, Waltham Abbey, Burton Road, Loughton, Queens Road, Buckhurst Hill. The Panel will be making their recommendations arising from this to the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the near future.

(iii) The Crime and Disorder Task and Finish Panel, chaired by Councillor M Cohen is considering:

- the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) and its effect on Scrutiny in EFDC and how it could be improved;
- the involvement of Overview and Scrutiny in the new 'Scrutiny Plus' arrangements to be conducted with other partner agencies;
- the proposal for a 'Community Call for Action' and its implications for EFDC Scrutiny; and
- the role of EFDC's Crime Reduction Team and the resources available to it.

The Panel has recently consulted with the Police, the Director of Public Health, the Lead Commissioner for Mental Health from the West Essex Primary Care Trust and an Associate Director from the North Essex Mental Health Partnership Trust who specialises in the criminal aspects of mental health.

(iv) The Local Strategic Partnership Task and Finish Panel, is chaired by Councillor Mrs Sartin. Their remit is to consider the set up and operation of the Epping Forest Local Strategic Partnership and formulate recommendations on its future in light of the government consultation paper 'Local Strategic Partnerships: Shaping their Future' and the Local Government White Paper expected in November 2006.

The Panel recently received a presentation from the Community Planning and Regeneration, Essex CC and has sent one of its members to an LSP training session run by the East of England Assembly. Having considered all the information gathered over the preceding months they are now in the final stages of drafting their final report.

(v) Services for Older People and Disabled Task and Finish Panel, chaired by Councillor Mrs Perry considering the services offered by EFDC to older people and disabled people (of all ages); and to consider the services offered by the voluntary sector to older people and disabled people in the district.

After reviewing the current situation in the district and carrying out various visits to gather information, this Panel is currently writing its final report, which should be completed by the end of February.

All these Task and Finish Panels hope to have finished reports by February/March 07.

The Main Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

The main Committee have recently received:

- a presentation from the Waltham Forest Primary Care Trust and the West Essex PCT on the "Fit for the Future" review of the Health Services. Following this, the Council has been approached by Havering Borough Council seeking our involvement in a joint Scrutiny Committee that the four North East London Authorities are establishing in the New Year to review proposals for future options. A report on this issue appears elsewhere on this agenda; and
- a progress report and presentation from Harlow Police on the Neighbourhood Policing Initiative;
- a report from the Town Centre and Car Parks Task and Finish Panel on EFDC

enforcing of Parking Contracts;

- considered a report from the Constitutional and Member Services Standing Panel on the future arrangements of Area Plans Sub-committees;
- and has considered a Call-in on the provision of free Saturday Parking in Council owned car parks. The call-in was not supported by the committee and agreed that the decision be implemented with immediate effect.

The committee has also considered a report on the Cabinet Quorum rules and on Civic Ceremonials procedures.

So far this year, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has met 7 times.

Five Standing Panels

The five Standing Panel are busily ploughing through their crowded rolling programme of work and are meeting on a bi monthly rota. Some Panels such as the Constitutional and Member Services Panel and the Finance and Performance Management have had to convene sub-committees of members to consider some of the more involved aspects of their work programme separately, and to report back to the main Panel with their findings.

At their recent meeting the standing Panels considered the following topics.

Housing Standing Panel – met on 30 January 2007, when it received a verbal update on Choice Based Lettings, considered the Housemark Benchmarking Report on EFDC Housing Service 2005/06, the Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2006/07, a report on the Tri-annual Tenant Satisfaction Survey 2006, the recovery of arrears from Leaseholders report and the Private Sector Housing Strategy – Housing assistance Policy 2006.

Constitutional and Members Service Standing Panel – met on 4 December 2006 when it considered the establishment of an Audit and Governance Committee, reviewed the Area Plans Sub-Committees, and a report on the possibility of extending insurance cover under the Zurich Municipal Councillor's Group Legal Protection Policy.

Customer Services and ICT Standing Panel – met on 27 November 2006 when it considered the Corporate Contact Centre and the Webcasting Pilot.

Finance and Performance Management Standing Panel – met on 15 January 2007 when it considered the Draft Detailed Portfolio Budgets and the revised Four Year Forecast.

Environmental and Planning Standing Panel – met on 16 January 2007 when it considered the Draft East of England Plan – Government Proposals.