

8 June 2007

Ref: IG/Scrutiny/Jun 07
Contact: Ian Gourlay
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To: The Members of the Scrutiny Committee of the North Hertfordshire District Council

(Councillors Martin Stears (Chairman); R.L. Shakespeare-Smith (Vice-Chairman); David Billing, John Bishop, S. Bloxham, P.C.W. Burt, Paul Clark, Melissa Davey, Sal Jarvis, S.K. Jarvis, David Kearns, H.M. Marshall, Alan Millard and M.R.M. Muir).

[Substitutes: Councillors John Booth, Allison Dear, R.E. Inwood and Lorna Kercher]

You are invited to attend a

MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

to be held in

**COMMITTEE ROOM 1, COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON
ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY**

on

TUESDAY, 19 JUNE 2007

at

7.30 p.m.

**[Note: A Pre-Meeting For Members Of The Committee Will Take
Place At 7.00pm In Committee Room 3]**

Yours sincerely,



David Miley
Democratic Services Manager

AGENDA
PART I

ITEM	PAGE
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	-
2. MINUTES To take as read and approve as a true record the Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee held on 20 March 2007.	-
3. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS Members should notify the Chairman of other business which they wish to be discussed by the Committee at the end of the business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency. The Chairman will decide whether the item(s) raised will be considered.	-
4. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (INCLUDING PARTY WHIP DIRECTIONS) To receive from Members of the Council any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda or any advice from a Member of this Committee concerning a party whip direction. Members should either declare a prejudicial or personal interest and are required to notify the Council of the nature of any interest declared. Members declaring a prejudicial interest should leave the room and not seek to influence the decision during that particular item of business.	-
5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION To receive petitions, comments and questions from members of the public. At the time of printing the agenda, no requests to speak had been received. Public participation requests received within the agreed time will be notified to Members as soon as practicable.	-
6. URGENT/GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS The Chairman to report on any urgent or general exception items which required his agreement. At the time of printing the agenda, the Chairman had not agreed any urgent or general exception items.	-
7. CALLED-IN ITEMS To consider any matters referred to the Committee for a decision in relation to a call-in of a decision. At the time of printing the agenda, no items of business had been called-in.	-

ITEM	PAGE
8. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS	-
9. QUESTIONS To receive and respond to any questions either set out in the agenda or tabled at the meeting.	1
10. NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL – THE DRAFT FORWARD PLAN: 1 JULY 2007 – 31 OCTOBER 2007 <i>To note items on the Council's Forward Plan and to give consideration to any items set out in the Plan prior to a decision being made.</i>	3
11. PRESENTATION BY POLICY AND GREEN ISSUES PORTFOLIO HOLDER <i>To receive a presentation by Councillor Claire Strong, Portfolio Holder for Policy & Green Issues.</i>	11
12. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2007/2008 REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER <i>To consider the issues that the Scrutiny Committee plans to review at future meetings and the activities of its sub-groups.</i>	13
13. SCRUTINY FINANCE SUB-GROUP REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER <i>To receive recommendations from the Finance Sub-Group in relation to financial reports considered.</i>	15
14. TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCRUTINY MEMBERS REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER <i>To inform Members of the training and development opportunities that are available, in order to develop skills and enhance the function and work of the Scrutiny Committee.</i>	17

The following dates have been arranged for future meeting of the Scrutiny Committee:

Tuesday, 28 August 2007
 Tuesday, 9 October 2007
 Tuesday, 11 December 2007
 Tuesday, 22 January 2008
 Tuesday, 1 April 2008

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SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 19 June 2007
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*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No. 9
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TITLE OF REPORT: QUESTIONS

The following questions have been submitted by Councillor Judi Billing:

(A) Election Period – Councillors’ Ward work and Community Leadership role

“During the recent election campaign a number of misunderstandings and ambiguities occurred relating to councillors’ communication with officers, and some officers seemed unclear about the rules which apply to councillors ward work and community leadership role during election periods.

Could the council please publish to all councillors a detailed account of the content and methodologies of the briefings given to officers on conduct and communication with members during these periods, so that officers and members can all be aware of the rules which are being applied, and understand their implications?”

The Head of Communications has supplied the following response:

“The principal requirement during the run up to an election is to ensure that any information put out by the Council is of a factual nature only and does not seek to promote any candidate or party group. Therefore the rules are principally addressed to external communications. There is no bar on normal business between officers and Members dealing with ward issues; as always, any advice must be politically impartial.

The Local Government Act 2000 resulted in the approval by Parliament of a new Code of Practice on Local authority Publicity. This includes the following guidance:

“The period between the notice of an election and the election itself should preclude proactive publicity in all its forms of candidates and other politicians involved directly in the election. Publicity should not deal with controversial issues or report views, proposals or recommendations in such a way that identifies them with individual members or groups of members. However, it is acceptable for the authority to respond in appropriate circumstances to events and legitimate service enquiries provided that their answers are factual and not party political.”

It is standard practice of the council to remind staff of the special communication requirements placed on officers and members by means of the briefing system through *Team Talk* and this was done this year in the issue of 7 March. In that we said:

The period between the notice of election which will be published on 27 March and the election itself on 3 May is colloquially known as “purdah”. During this period we have to be all the more cautious to ensure that our publicity could not be taken to promote any candidate or party. This means that officers will be used as spokespersons unless there is an emergency need for a portfolio spokesperson.

Team Talk is approved by Corporate Management Team and spread to employees via the cascade briefing system.

Normal working relationships between Members and officers are covered by protocol in the constitution. Officers can continue to assist Members with ward casework and on community leadership issues. Section 5 of that protocol concerns advice to party groups and clause 5.7 makes specific reference to the “purdah” period:

Officer attendance at any public meeting will generally be avoided during the period between the announcement and conclusion of any local or parliamentary election affecting the area involved, and will only occur during such a period if all parties supporting candidates in the election have been invited to take part in the meeting

Officers and Members are advised to seek clarification for individual situations to ensure that they are working in full compliance with the Constitution. Officers would welcome a discussion with interested councillors, preferably from all parties, to see whether advice to officers during election periods needs to be clarified and improved.”

(B) Local Government White Paper – Member Development

“What arrangements are being made to brief and develop members understanding of the emerging legislation emanating from the local government White Paper, including the two quite separate and distinct forms of Community Call for Action?”

The Head of Policy, Partnerships & Performance has supplied the following response:

“A formal briefing for all North Herts Councillors on the initial proposals and intent of the Local Government White Paper was held on Monday 8th January 2007. This briefing also included consideration of the specific areas to be addressed through the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Bill, currently undergoing its second reading in the House of Lords and intended to receive Royal Assent by Autumn of 2007, and the potential implications for the district.

This briefing was further supplemented by a specific session with scrutiny and PARC members, on 26th March, in order to look more closely at the implications for overview and scrutiny arrangements for the authority, duty placed on community partners to co-operate, and integration of all the requirements into the relevant committee work programmes etc.

A schedule of the potential consultation dates established by the Government has been drawn up and once relevant consultations on not only overview and scrutiny arrangements, but also changes to performance management, Local Area Agreements and the introduction of the Comprehensive Area Assessments are received, members are notified via the weekly MIS and their views sought to inform any corporate response. Similarly, as the LG and Public Involvement in Health Bill develops and becomes statute, it would be appropriate to provide relevant timely briefings; the LG White Paper and its constituent parts are included in the Performance Audit and Review, and Scrutiny Committee work/training programmes for the current year to ensure that both overview and scrutiny committees receive appropriate information.

The two different approaches required for ‘Community Call for Action’ are currently being considered by officers, especially in the light of new partnership arrangements for community safety. The establishment of locality policing panels has just been finalised, alongside revised guidance on the working practices of the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) itself, so the scrutiny officer and community safety team are to develop a draft proposal of how referrals made under the CCfA can be made to relevant partners, and scrutiny members

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themselves, to be considered and dealt with. A brief report containing these draft proposals for consideration will be available in the Autumn, alongside additional guidance awaited from the Government regarding performance management and reporting arrangements.

Similarly, the second CCfA, that of call- in following the failure of an individual ward councillor to resolve a long standing situation, will require a system to be established in order that the issues raised are indeed within agreed criteria, and background information on actions taken to date is available for initial consideration by the scrutiny committee. The authority's scrutiny officer is currently working on identifying the principles of good practice (provided by the IDeA and scrutiny support agencies) to draft a proposed referral procedure in order to ensure that the call in is used to its best effect, the actions to be taken are agreed with members, officers and partners/residents, resourced and delivered.

In the interim, the Scrutiny Officer has prepared a briefing note for the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Scrutiny outlining the potential for use of the Community Call for Action, a copy of which attached to this response."

(C) Member Intranet / Internet access

"What arrangements are currently available to give full council internet and intranet access to those councillors who do not possess their own personal computers?"

The Head of IT and Transformation has supplied the following response:

- "1. From 2007/08, and as part of their Basic Allowance, all Members receive £300 towards the costs of IT/computer equipment and peripherals. In-addition members in receipt of a Special Responsibility Allowance (Cabinet Members, Committee Chairmen etc.) receive an additional £100. These allowances can be used as a contribution towards an initial purchase, and or upgrade/replacement in future years. Or see (3)
 - 1.1 A dedicated computer is not required to gain full access to NHDC. Systems. please see (2) . The Council intranet is accessible to staff/members who are authorised users, and can be accessed from any computer.
 - 1.2 Broadband capability at your chosen locations i.e home/constituency office is a recommendation due to the size of emails and attached documents issued.
2. All members have had a NHDC email account created for them. This account can be accessed from any computer (personal or 3rd party/ work owned) including using your personal log in to any council computer in locations such as the Members Office, and Committee Services - subject to the following:
 - 2.1) the member has signed compliance with the NHDC email, intranet and Data Protection policy requirements .
 - 2.2) The log-in and password has been issued - (available from IT Help desk during office hours) email ithelpdesk@north-herts.gov.uk or tel 01462 474444
3. Alternatives are a recharge against this members allowance to provide a basic Computer and or a Blackberry type phone, (however a Blackberry may limit the size of files able to be received, and also will incur additional ongoing usage costs)
Blackberry request can also be registered with ithelddesk@north-herts.gov.uk or tel 01462 474444"

The following question has been submitted by Councillor Martin Stears.

(D) Queen Street Cottages, Hitchin

“What has happened to enforcing the planning decision re: putting these cottages in back into a habitable condition. The Inspector upheld the Habitable Order, but the cottages are still boarded up?”

The Head of Planning & Building Control has supplied the following response:

“In September 2005, planning permission was refused for the use of land for the open display of cars for sale following the demolition of cottages for the following reasons:-

- 1 The demolition of Nos 37 and 38 Queen Street would result in the loss of buildings which make a positive contribution to the architectural character of the street scene particularly in relationship to the setting of nearby buildings which are listed and within the conservation area. Furthermore, the extension of area for the display of cars would be likely to detract from the visual amenities of the street scene and would fail to maintain an adequately high standard of environment. The development would be contrary to the provisions of Policies 1, 20 and 22 of the District Local Plan No 2 with Alterations.
- 2 The loss of two dwellings without replacement would be contrary to Policy 35 of the District Local Plan No. 2 with Alterations. Notwithstanding the evidence submitted, the Local Planning Authority is of the opinion that the dwellings are not beyond economic repair and considers that there are no exceptional circumstances which could override the normal presumption against the loss of dwellings in the district.

A subsequent appeal against this decision was submitted and the Inspector in his letter dated February 2006 dismissed the appeal. (hard copy to be provided)

In his letter the Inspector supports the first reason for refusal in that the dwellings contribute to the residential scale and form of the buildings on this side of the road at this point and help to screen the canopy and garage from view.

With regard to the second issue, to which the question relates, the Inspector concluded that on the basis of what is contained in the representations there is no evidence to support the Council's contention that the dwellings can be economically refurbished and could not support the Council's case on the second reason for refusal.

In dismissing the appeal no conditions were imposed or reference made to a 'habitable' order.

In correspondence last year the appellant company was encouraged to proceed with consideration of the grants available at that time (Empty Property Grant) but it is understood that this was not followed up with the appropriate Environmental Health officer.

There is not considered to be any further action that can be taken under the Planning Acts to put the properties back into a habitable condition.”

Briefing for Chairman and Vice-Chairman of Scrutiny Committee
COMMUNITY CALL FOR ACTION



In the run up to the publication of the Local Government White Paper, I thought it would be helpful to brief you about a part of the Police and Justice Bill which proposes a “community call for action” which has potential implications for the Scrutiny Committee.

The Bill places Councillors under a duty to both consider any matters raised by members of the public, and to respond saying what action they will take (if any).

So for example, if a member of the public is dissatisfied with a service within community safety, they can ask their ward Cllr to take their case up. If the issue cannot be resolved by the Cllr through the Council’s normal procedure, the matter can then be referred to the Scrutiny Committee. If this happens, the Crime and Disorder Reduction Partnership (CDRP) will have a responsibility to co-operate and respond to recommendations.

The Scrutiny Committee can co-opt other agencies, such as the police.

The Police and Justice Bill expects Royal Assent at the end of October. Between then and April 2007, regulations and guidance will be drafted. The official implementation date is likely to be early 2008, using the interim to develop local arrangements, identify good practice and refine guidance.

At the moment the community call for action proposals relate only to crime and disorder, but it is likely that this will be extended as part of the Local Government White Paper.

Scrutiny’s involvement is really only to be used as a last resort when matters cannot be resolved by the ward Cllr. The main issue will be the fact that Scrutiny can obtain papers and invite witnesses from the CDRP responsible authorities and the fact that they will be required to respond to Scrutiny recommendations.

The IdeA and the Centre for Public Scrutiny are encouraging Cllrs to submit any questions on the discussion area on the IDEa website.

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***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

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**TITLE OF REPORT: NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL – THE DRAFT
FORWARD PLAN: 1 JULY 2007 – 31 OCTOBER 2007**

To note items listed on the Council's Forward Plan and to give consideration to any items set out in the Plan prior to a decision being made.

The Forward Plan is attached.

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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

DRAFT Forward Plan of Key Decisions - 1 July 2007

The Forward Plan contains brief details of key decisions that the Council is likely to take over the next four-month period. You will also find details of contacts who can provide further information and hear your views.

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
Annual Review of Financial Regulations & Contract Procurement Rules 2007/08 03/07	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	Sep 2007	Portfolio Holder Governance Officer Group	meetings	Audit files	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone barriejones@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474243
Adoption of NHDC Tree Strategy 06/07		Cabinet	Sep 2007	Portfolio Holder Area Committees Officers General Public	Meetings written invitation to comment Committee reports Web based consultation	NHDC Tree Strategy	N/A	Cllr Lynda Needham steve.geach@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474553
Core Strategy / Development Control Policies Preferred Options Consultation 02/07		Cabinet	Sep 2007	Local Groups, Cllrs, Relevant Statutory Organisations and other Herts Partners Member Working Party	Written comments	In accordance with the Statement of Community Involvement	N/A	Cllr Richard Thake Andy.beavan@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474317
Strategic Flood Risk Assessment 10/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Sep 2007	Portfolio Holder Officers	Meetings Briefings	Report	Within Existing budgets	Cllr Richard Thake Andy.beavan@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474317
1st Quarter Revenue Budget 2007/08 Spend Profile 06/07	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	Sep 2007	Budget Holders CMT	meetings	Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
1 st Quarter Capital Budget 2007/08 Spend Profile 06/07	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	Sep 2007	Budget Holders CMT	meetings	Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
Adoption of a new Hertfordshire Supporting People Strategy 04/07	Scrutiny Committee	Council (via Cabinet)	Sep 2007	Consultation will be undertaken by HCC Portfolio Holder Member presentation	Meetings Written Website	Existing Supporting People Strategy	None directly to NHDC	Cllr Bernard Lovewell Andy.godman@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474293
Gender Equality Scheme 07/07		Council (via Cabinet)	Sep 2007	Members of staff Unions	Questionnaires	Gender Equality Scheme	TBA	Cllr John Smith Liz.green@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474317
London Luton Airport Phase1 Planning Application 04/06	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Oct 2007 (Est.)		Written Comments	Phase 1 Planning Application	TBA	Cllr Richard Thake Mark.wilson@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474359
Service & Financial Planning 2007/08 07/07	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	Oct 2007	Budget Holders CMT Portfolio holder	meetings	General Ledger and Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Norma.atlay@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474297
Baldock Town Centre Enhancement Approval of Design Scheme 07/07		Cabinet	Oct 2007	Local Groups, Cllrs, Relevant Statutory Organisations, HCC and other Partners Budget Holders	Exhibition Meetings MIS Written comments	Consultants Report and Design Sketch	TBA	Cllr Richard Thake louise.symes@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474359
Consultation on Draft Royston Town Centre Strategy SPD 07/07		Cabinet	Oct 2007	Local Groups, Cllrs, Royston Town Council, Relevant Statutory Organisations and other Partners	Exhibition Web Meetings Written comments	Draft Strategy and SA/SEA Report	TBA	Cllr Richard Thake louise.symes@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474359

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
Stevenage & North Herts Area Action Plan – Issues and Options Public Consultation 07/07	Scrutiny Committee	Cabinet	Oct 2007	Officers	Written comments / meetings	In accordance with Statement of Community Involvement	N/A	Cllr Richard Thake John.ironside@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474626

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL FORWARD PLAN

PENDING ITEMS

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
Adoption of a revised Housing Allocation Policy 02/07		Cabinet	TBA	Portfolio Holder Common Housing Register partners DCLG	Meetings & written invitation to comment	NHDC Allocation Policy Homelessness Strategy	No cashable savings	Cllr Bernard Lovewell Andy.godman@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474293
Adoption of a revised policy relating to statutory nuisance investigations 02/07		Cabinet	TBA	Portfolio Holder Environment Agency	Meetings & written invitation to comment	Environmental Protection Act 1990 CIEH Best Practice Guide	No cashable savings	Cllr Bernard Lovewell Andy.godman@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474293
Adoption of a range of new or revised licensing policies, e.g. Sex establishments Taxi conditions Pet Shops Casinos Pavement trading 02/07		Council (via Cabinet)	TBA	DMT Portfolio Holder Relevant Trade Reps Licensing & Appeals Committee	Meetings written	Existing Licensing Policies	No cashable savings	Cllr Bernard Lovewell Andy.godman@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474293
Revised Community Strategy for North Herts 11/05	PARC	Council (via Cabinet)	TBA	LSP partners/stakeholders residents visioning groups COMPACT	meetings press release website public event	community strategy draft	TBA	Cllr Tricia Gibbs liz.green@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474230

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
Adoption of a Choice Based Housing Lettings scheme		Cabinet	TBA	Portfolio Holder Common Housing Register partners DCLG	Meetings & written invitation to comment	CBL's; Code of Guidance for LA's (consultation)	TBA	Cllr Bernard Lovewell Martin.lawrence@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474250
Adoption of guidance for Houses in Multiple Occupation		Council via Cabinet	TBA	Portfolio Holder Herts & Beds Housing Group Relevant landlords	Meetings Written	Existing guidance	No cashable savings	Cllr Bernard Lovewell Andy.godman@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474293
Comprehensive Equality Policy		Cabinet Council	TBA	Community Groups Residents LSP members Partners	Meetings and consultation events	Race equality scheme Disability equality Scheme Gender equality scheme	TBA	Cllr John Smith Liz.green@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474317
Site Allocations – Issues and Options consultation 08/07		Cabinet	Nov 2007					Cllr Richard Thake Andy.beavan@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474317
Revised Rural Strategy		Cabinet	Nov 2007	Community Groups Residents Parish Councils LSP members Partners	Meetings and consultation events	Rural Strategy 2004	TBA	Cllr Tricia Gibbs Liz.green@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474317
Strategic Approach to Car Parking		Cabinet	Nov 2007	CMT Portfolio holders	meetings	Draft Report	TBA	Cllr Richard Thake louise.symes@mnorth-herts.gov.uk 01462 474359
Service & Financial Planning 2007/08	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	Dec 2007	Budget Holders CMT Portfolio holder Members and Committees Ratepayers and Partners	meetings	General Ledger and Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Norma.atlay@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474297

Decision required and date first appearing on plan	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision maker	Date of decision	Main consultees	Method of consultation	Relevant documents	Costs or Savings	Portfolio Holder & Contact officer
2nd Quarter Revenue Budget 2007/08 Spend Profile 09/07	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	Dec 2007	Budget Holders CMT	meetings	Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
2nd Quarter Capital Budget 2007/08 Spend Profile 09/07	Scrutiny Finance Sub-Group	Cabinet	Dec 2007	Budget Holders CMT	meetings	Budget papers	TBA	Cllr Terry Hone Clare.fletcher@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474470
Climate Change Strategy		Cabinet	Feb 2008	Community Groups Residents Parish Councils LSP members Partners	Meetings and consultation events	Draft Climate Change Bill 2007 Nottingham Declaration	TBA	Cllr John Smith Liz.green@north-herts.gov.uk 01462 474317

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No. 11
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PRESENTATION BY THE POLICY & GREEN ISSUES PORTFOLIO HOLDER

PRESENTATION BY COUNCILLOR CLAIRE STRONG, THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR POLICY & GREEN ISSUES

This Item will take the format of an oral presentation.

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TITLE OF REPORT: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2007/08

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report gives details about the topics that the Scrutiny Committee plans to scrutinise and gives an update on the work of the task and finish groups.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

3. SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

19 June 07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policy & Green Issues Portfolio Holder (Confirmed) ▪ Training opportunities for Scrutiny Members
28 Aug 07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Leisure Portfolio Holder (Confirmed) ▪ Strategic Flood Risk Assessment (TBC) ▪ Adoption of a new Hertfordshire Supporting People Strategy
9 Oct 07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Planning & Environment Portfolio Holder (TBC) ▪ Affordable Housing Report – <i>Cabinet's response to Scrutiny's recommendations</i> ▪ Stevenage Area Action Plan – Issues and Options Public Consultation ▪ London Luton Airport Phase 1 Planning Application ▪ Neighbourhood Policing - <i>Follow up report re:question asked at March 2007 meeting</i>
11 Dec 07	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Environmental Health, Recycling & Waste Portfolio Holder (TBC)
22 Jan 08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Housing Portfolio Holder (TBC)
01 Apr 08	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Community Engagement & Rural Affairs Portfolio Holder (TBC) ▪ Annual Report

4. SCRUTINY REVIEWS FOR 2007/08

4.1 At the Overview & Scrutiny Workshop on 26th March 2007, Members agreed that the following topics should be considered for scrutiny reviews during 2007/08:

- Town Centre Manager Partnerships
- Social Inclusion
- Local Economic Development (rural/general employment, relationships, housing)
- Joint District Scrutiny (areas of common concern to be identified through the Scrutiny Officer Network)
- Voluntary Sector Partnerships
- Energy Efficiency - impacts of the Nottingham Declaration
- Area level scrutiny (based on CDO / Area Committee feeds)
- Youth facilities in villages
- District Children & Young People's Plan

4.2 Members of the Scrutiny Committee are now asked to chose two items from this list to be included in the work programme, so that the process of setting up appropriate task & finish groups can commence.

5. SUB-GROUPS

5.1 Finance Sub-Group

This Group met on Monday 18th June. Details of this meeting and any referrals are tabled as a separate report.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Members are asked to agree the Scrutiny work programme for 2007/08.

7. REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 To enable the Scrutiny Committee to plan and carry out its workload efficiently and effectively.

8. CONTACT OFFICER

8.1 Grace Crawford
Scrutiny Officer
North Hertfordshire District Council
01462 474612
grace.crawford@north-herts.gov.uk

TITLE OF REPORT: ITEMS REFERRED FROM SCRUTINY FINANCE SUB GROUP – 18 JUNE 2007

The Finance Sub-Group met on Monday 18th June 2007, to consider the Annual Statement of Accounts 2006/07, Financial Management Strategy 2007/08 and the Capital Programme – 2006/07 Outturn Report

1. Annual Statement of Accounts 2006/07:

Members were taken through the report and raised questions around the following areas:

- can overpayments of housing benefit that are as result of the DWP be claimed back by NHDC;
- the amount of deficit on the collection fund and how the future deficits are predicted and why a deficit for 2005/06;
- the process of writing off bad debt;
- auditors and their views on NHDCs debt provision;
- the difference of £1.04million between NHDCs budget and NHDCs outturn;
- outturn query - vacancy control under spend of £38.6k – can these be looked at to forecast under spends, based on past history. *Although it was noted that the target for 2007/08 is slightly higher than that achieved for 2006/07;*
- outturn query - the use of consultants and the reason for the concessionary fares under spend of £56k. Previously, no usage figures were available in relation to the how the work with consultants was carried out with regard to the bus service review;
- the reassessment of the investment interest based on the reduced capital receipts anticipated for 2007/08 and the increase in interest rates. What does the increase per quarter percentage points mean to the General Fund? *It was noted that the increase for 2007/08 is only anticipated to be £78.59k, due to lower capital receipts projected for 2007/08;*
- the reduction in the projected receipts for 2007/08, why is this £4 million lower?
- how NHDC issues summons and the agencies they use and the volume of work done by bailiffs on NHDCs behalf and when a debt is not pursued due to cost outweighing benefit;
- the pension reserve and the factors that influence changes to this reserve and what impact the £24million deficit has on increased superannuation payments;
- whether the pension reserve can be reduced by paying in a lump sum and the treatment of the payment i.e. capital;
- within the debtor total in the Statement of Accounts was 'sundry debtors'. This figure was a large amount with no explanation of what was included (£3.984million). *It was noted that this included accrued income of £1.9million and next year a breakdown of the figure should be included;*
- did the £62million investments arise as a result of the sale of NHDCs housing stock and can it be used?

Members agreed that when producing the next Outturn report, they would like to see figures shown as percentages as well as figures as a variance to the budget.

2. Financial Management Strategy 2007/08:

Members congratulated officers for a very well written and informative report. Members raised questions around the following areas:

- other ways to obtain further grants, perhaps from Europe;
- the membership of the Challenge Board and the possibility of Members from each Party being part of it;
- the process of items getting on an agenda at Challenge Board meetings and whether there is enough challenge as part of discussions. *It was noted that Cllr Brindley would raise this as part of the current Efficiency FSR.*

Members agreed that although it may not be necessary for Members to sit on the board, it would be beneficial for all Members to receive feedback from the board. Therefore, it was also agreed that a member of the Challenge Board would be invited to the next Finance Sub Group meeting to give the group the opportunity to discuss this further.

Members acknowledged the work that has begun around partnership work, but agreed that there were further partnership work opportunities that could be explored.

3. Capital Programme – 2006/07:

Members raised a question around the following area:

- Grants to housing associations and funding from the Housing Corporation.

TITLE OF REPORT: TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR SCRUTINY MEMBERS

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to inform members of training and development opportunities that are available, to develop individual skills and enhance the function and work of the Scrutiny Committee.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key decision and has not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The Local Government & Public Involvement in Health Bill presents some changes to the way overview & scrutiny operates. These changes have been designed to strengthen overview and scrutiny committees of district councils. The training and development options attached are opportunities for members to learn about these new changes and what it will mean for scrutiny in North Hertfordshire.

4. TRAINING & DEVELOPMENT OPTIONS

- 4.1 Attached are options for in-house workshops. The subject matters of each workshop are different, but very relevant. The 'Potential of Scrutiny' workshop includes elements of the other workshops on offer.
- 4.2 There are also a range of other training and development opportunities that individual members can attend, if they wish. If this is the case, please discuss your requirements with the Scrutiny Officer who will be able to advise you of the relevant courses that may match your training need.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There is budget provision for member development and training.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Human Resources are committed to provide help and resource as required to support the ongoing development of members.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 8.1 Members are asked to decide if an in-house workshop is required and if so, decide which workshop would be most suitable.

9. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 9.1 To enable Members of the Scrutiny Committee to develop their skills and carry out the Scrutiny function efficiently and effectively.

10. APPENDICES

- 10.1 Appendix A – Options for in-house workshops.

11. CONTACT OFFICER

- 11.1 Grace Crawford
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APPENDIX A

THE POTENTIAL OF SCRUTINY

1800-2100 (date/venue to be agreed)
in-house workshop for North Hertfordshire Councillors
facilitated by Simon Baddeley, inlogov

A workshop introducing the skills necessary for scrutiny, reviewing local and national developments, holding the executive to account, progressing community calls for action, and the possibilities opened up by the opportunity to apply scrutiny to external agencies. Simon Baddeley will assist participants to agree the purposes and desired outcomes of overview and scrutiny in North Hertfordshire.

GOALS

- to check how scrutiny has evolved and is working here,
- to gain a better understanding of skills required for scrutiny,
- to explore ways of taking scrutiny forward in the community.

TEACHING STYLE: Talks, exercises and discussion to guide analysis and reflection. Handouts will be available. Times on the programme may vary slightly.

PROGRAMME

1750	ARRIVE. REFRESHMENTS
1800	Workshop style and format. Tutor's introduction
1805	Futures for scrutiny: being a 'critical friend' to the executive, scrutinising external agencies, responding to 'calls for action'. Talk & discussion
1820	Stages of scrutiny and the skills deployed – chairing, scoping, questioning and weighing evidence. Tutor
1900	<i>Scoping: selecting, rejecting and filtering from a pool of suitable subjects for scrutiny. Tutor facilitated exercise</i>
1930	Questioning skills: practicing and assessing approaches to asking questions and listening to answers. Tutor facilitated exercise
2000	Evidence based policy and the contribution of scrutiny to learning more about "what works". Talk & discussion
2015	Workshop session on three scenarios: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Call-in- Scrutinising an external body- Community Call for Action Tutor facilitates
2055	<i>Tutor's summary with final Q & A</i>
2100	DEPART

Trainer: Simon Baddeley BA (Cantab) MA (Michigan) Hon Lecturer, Institute of Local Government Studies, Birmingham University since 1973, studies working relations of politicians, managers and professionals and has taught in Sweden, Canada and the UK, most recently, in Lincolnshire, Herefordshire, Colchester, Elmbridge, Shropshire, Woking, Wealden, Walsall, Greenwich and Dudley. He has contributed to the IDeA "Modern Managers Programme" and was a member in 2005 of the SOLACE COMMISSION on "Managing in a political environment".
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SCRUTINY SKILLS DEVELOPMENT WORKSHOPS

WORKSHOP 1: PLANNING & SCOPING

approx 1800-2100 on (date)

facilitated by Simon Baddeley

“Scoping” may involve only 10% of the time of an enquiry but its significance in planning an investigation is inestimable. Scoping can be seen as the means by which those engaged in scrutiny “can get ahead of the game”. This in-house workshop aims to nurture a culture of learning linking this workshop to later workshops on Questioning & Weighing-up Evidence. Simon Baddeley will assist participants explore face-to-face methods appropriate to scrutiny, with emphasis, in this workshop, on agreeing the purpose, range and outcome of a review.

GOALS

- to explain where and why scoping fits into other stages of a scrutiny investigation,
- to help members appreciate the role of scoping in team-building and increasing the influence and reputation of scrutiny,
- to plan selecting and filtering issues for investigation,
- to practice scoping key lines of enquiry, resource needs and timescales for a review.

PROGRAMME

1800	Workshop style and format. <i>Tutor's introduction</i>
1810	“Selection & filtering”. <i>Facilitated scoping exercise</i>
1825	Criteria for selecting & filtering. <i>Tutor uses the exercise to focus on the choices identified by scoping</i>
1845	The form of a scrutiny investigation. <i>Review & plenary discussion with tutor to review & agree proposed scrutiny planning stages</i>
1900	Scoping: <i>tutor facilitated exercise to practice selecting, rejecting and proceeding, having assessed time, place, people, expenses et cetera</i>
2000	The state of planning and scoping: What's been achieved? What needs to be done? <i>Tutored plenary</i>
2015	The implications for member-officer relations. <i>Tutor</i>
2035	<i>In groups flip-chart:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Where do we agree/disagree on planning scoping?• One thing each of us has learned from the workshop• How do we maintain learning?
2055	<i>Tutor's summary with final Q & A</i>
2100	DEPART

WORKSHOP 2: QUESTIONING SKILLS

approx 1800-2100 on (date)

facilitated by Simon Baddeley, Inlogov

This in-house scrutiny training aims to nurture a culture of learning linking this workshop to the earlier workshop on planning and scoping – and a third workshop on weighing-up evidence. Simon Baddeley will assist participants to continue exploring face-to-face methods appropriate to scrutiny, with emphasis, in this workshop, on questioning skills that foster a spirit of enquiry, demonstrate curiosity and allow silences for shared thought. The overall aim of this interactive workshop is to identify and practice habits of intelligent conversation among all involved in the scrutiny process. The tutor is aware that for some this material will be new, while for others these workshops offer an opportunity to fine-tune skills, share experiences and debate the relevance to *Another* of the tutor's suggestions.

GOALS

- to increase familiarity with different types of questions
- to help members appreciate their purpose and effect – alone and in various permutations,
- to practice planning lines of questioning for exploring an issue,
- to increase confidence in the process.

PROGRAMME

1800	Workshop style and format. <i>Tutor's introduction</i>
1810	"Scrutability 1". <i>Facilitated questioning exercise</i>
1850	Questioning skills. <i>Tutor uses the exercise to focus on different approaches to questioning</i>
1915	"Good" & "bad" questions. <i>Group review & plenary discussion with tutor</i>
1935	Building rapport, maintaining trust. <i>Tutor</i>
1950	"Scrutability 2". <i>Facilitated questioning exercise followed by self-review on "how well we did."</i>
2030	<i>In groups flip-chart:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• What questioning approaches suit us in <i>Another</i> ?• One thing each of us has learned from the workshop• How do we maintain learning?
2045	<i>Tutor's summary with final Q & A</i>
2100	DEPART

WORKSHOP 3: WEIGHING UP EVIDENCE

approx 1800-2100 on (date)

facilitated by Simon Baddeley

This in-house training aims to nurture a culture of learning linking this workshop to two earlier scrutiny skills workshops on Scoping and Questioning. Simon Baddeley will assist participants to continue exploring face-to-face methods appropriate to scrutiny with emphasis, in this workshop, on “weighing up evidence”. Scrutiny offers elected members a tool for investigation and evidence gathering, that was previously available, if at all, to lead members of an administration. Overview & Scrutiny has the potential to benefit *Another* by widening the number of well-informed members. But those members need, if they are to get the most from their greater access to evidence, to become adept at weighing it up.

GOALS

- To emphasise the contribution to local services of a reflective, evaluative and evidence-based organisational culture,
- To explore the skills involved in investigating below the surface of policies and strategies,
- To help members evaluate direct and indirect written, visual and verbal evidence.

PROGRAMME

1800	Workshop style and format: <i>Tutor's introduction</i>
1810	“Weighing up evidence – its significance for members, staff and service users”: <i>Facilitated exercise to analyse evidence on the basis of questions provided by the tutor</i>
1835	Questions to be asked in assessing evidence, e.g. qualitative & quantitative data, “hard” & “soft” data, CPA performance measures, witness accounts, evidence from visits, et cetera. <i>Tutor</i>
1900	Drawing conclusions & making recommendations on the basis of the evidence. Exercise in groups to view, review, digest and analyse a body of evidence. <i>Tutor facilitated exercise</i>
2000	How well do we weigh up evidence here : What’s been achieved? What needs to be done? <i>Tutored plenary</i>
2015	Political, managerial & professional data and the tensions between them. <i>Tutor</i>
2020	In groups flip-chart: Where do we agree/disagree on weighing-evidence? One thing each of us has learned from the workshop How do we maintain learning? <i>Tutor's summary with final Q & A</i>
2030	DEPART

TUTOR/FACILITATOR: Simon Baddeley BA (Cantab) MA (Michigan) Hon Lecturer, Institute of Local Government Studies, Birmingham University since 1973, studies working relations of politicians, managers and professionals and has taught in Sweden, Canada and the UK, most recently, in Lincolnshire, Herefordshire, Colchester, Elmbridge, Shropshire, Walsall, Greenwich and Dudley. He has contributed to the IDEa “Modern Managers Programme” and was a member in 2005 of the SOLACE COMMISSION on “Managing in a political environment”. Contact: Simon Baddeley, Inlogov, School of Public Policy, University of Birmingham, B15 2TT 0121 554 9794 mob 07775 655842 s.j.baddeley@bham.ac.uk *Campus support:* Sue Platt 0121 414 5002 s.p.platt@bham.ac.uk