

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



DRAFT

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT
2014 - 2015**

Foreword from the Chairman

This has been a positive year for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee building on the changes and achievements of previous years.

The Committee:

- is entitled to review and scrutinise the decisions and functions of the Council and the Cabinet;
- can make reports or recommendations on matters affecting the authority's area and inhabitants;
- had six regular meetings this year along with a special meeting on Hitchin Town Hall;
- has seen17.....members of the public attend this year;

As well as its Committee meetings, the Committee establishes a number of task and finish groups each year to look at topics in more depth.

- Three reviews are scheduled to be completed in 2014/15;
- The Committee continued with its approach of holding short, focussed task and finish groups by holding them over one or two evenings;
- This year's topics were:
 - parking in North Hertfordshire;
 - the options for the commercialisation of services in North Hertfordshire;
 - the quality of the Council's reports to committees.
- Once a review is complete, a report is prepared which is considered by the Committee and is then sent to Cabinet for its consideration and response.
- ...11/12(tbc)....different members have taken part in its task and finish groups this year.

I would like to thank the Cabinet for their continued co-operation and support, along with the Council's officers who have assisted and supported our work this year. I would also like to thank my vice-chairman Cathryn Henry, along with the members of the Committee and those members who have sat on the task & finish groups this year.

Councillor Ray Shakespeare-Smith
Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Overview and Scrutiny in North Hertfordshire District Council

1.1 The depth and breadth of the Council's work means that the Scrutiny Committee has to use its resources efficiently in order to scrutinise as many topics as possible in the time available. It does so by:

- considering a number of issues during its committee meetings and making recommendations to Cabinet;
- appointing dedicated task and finish groups which can examine issues in depth and make recommendations to improve services;

2. Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

2.1 The full Committee held six scheduled meetings last year. It considered a range of topics including scrutinising key decisions going to Cabinet, checking whether the Council has met its performance indicators as well as reviewing other issues which the Committee has decided would benefit from closer scrutiny.

2.2 The Committee scrutinises issues in a number of ways:

- by considering reports from, and questioning officers about different aspects of the Council's business;
- by submitting written questions which require a written answer, and which members can follow up by asking supplementary questions in Committee;
- by interviewing and questioning Cabinet members about their portfolios;
- by calling in decisions which are of great concern to members or to the public;
- by inviting representatives from outside bodies to talk about topics of interest to the public in North Hertfordshire.

2.3 The call in process allows the Committee, or five members of the Council, to call in a decision of Cabinet or Council which has been made but not implemented; and allows the Committee to ask Cabinet or Council to reconsider it. No items were called in this year.

2.4 The Committee did hold a special meeting on 18 December to consider the Development Agreement between the Council and Hitchin Town Hall Ltd. As well as the members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, five members of Cabinet attended – Cllrs Needham, Burt, Cunningham, Hunter and Levett – along with seven other councillors and seven members of the public.

2.5 The Committee has taken a close interest in safeguarding matters this year. As well as receiving an annual update on the Council's safeguarding performance, the Committee reviewed the Council's policy on Disclosure and Barring Service (formerly CRB) checks, and held a dedicated briefing session to look at the role of district councillors in safeguarding children and vulnerable adults.

2.6 In total, the Committee has considered43.....items in its meetings this year. It has madeXX.....recommendations onXX.....topics to Cabinet. ...XX..... of the Committee's recommendations were supported,X.... were rejected andXX..... were noted. A full list of the topics considered by the Committee can be found in Annex A to this report.

2.7 No written questions were asked by members during the year.

2.8 As well as attending the special meeting on Hitchin Town hall, the Leader of the Council, Cllr Lynda Needham, attended the Committee on 17 March 2015 to review the civic year 2014/15, and to outline the Council's plans for 2015/16.

2.9 Three Portfolio Holders attended the Committee's regular meetings this year to present areas of their work, highlight progress and challenges in their areas and hear the Committee's discussions on topics within their portfolios. As in previous years, the Committee values their support and contribution. The portfolio holders who attended this year were:

- Cllr Tony Hunter – Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement & Rural Affairs;
- Cllr David Levett – Portfolio Holder for Planning and Enterprise;
- Cllr Bernard Lovewell – Portfolio Holder for Housing and Environmental Health, who attended the Committee three times this year.

2.10 The Committee was also grateful to Chief Inspector Julie Wheatley and Sergeant Simon Turner of Hertfordshire Constabulary who attended the Committee to explain the work of the police and answer questions. The Committee had a very useful meeting and was pleased to hear the Chief Inspector say that community engagement will be one of her top priorities.

3. Task and Finish Groups in 2014/15

3.1 Task and finish groups are an opportunity for members to scrutinise a topic in much more depth than is possible in a single Committee meeting. Each group usually consists of five members, and can appoint external members who have particular areas of expertise which can assist the group's inquiries.

3.2 The task and finish groups take written and oral evidence, quiz witnesses, conduct surveys and consider a good deal of other evidence through literature review. A report is produced at the end which makes a number of recommendations for improvements. This is considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee before being sent to Cabinet or to other public service partners. Three task and finish groups are scheduled to take place/.....took place.....in 2014/15. These are summarised below.

3.3 Review of Parking in North Hertfordshire

3.3.1 The review took place on two evenings on 4 November and 9 December 2014 and made the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: The Council should review its policies to ensure adequate provision of parking for town centre residents.

Recommendation 2. The Council should consider outsourcing the management and maintenance of its car parks, or sharing the costs with another authority, provided there is a good business case for doing so.

Recommendation 3. The Council should consider acquiring land in order to provide new car parks when there is a need and a good business case for doing so.

Recommendation 4: The Council should keep the problem of verge parking under review.

Recommendation 5. The Council's Parking Strategy should contain a section on parking for rail commuters.

Recommendation 6. The Council should review the opening hours of its car parks.

Recommendation 7. In order to do so, the Council should gather sufficient data about the usage of car parks, particularly at times when there is no charging, so it can make an informed decision about opening hours.

Recommendation 8. The Council should talk to its local MPs to see if they can facilitate a dialogue with Network Rail and the train operating companies about provision of more parking around stations in North Herts.

Recommendation 9. The Council should review its policy on season tickets, including ways of boosting their sales. This could include better publicity; making sure the process of buying them is as straightforward as possible; using alternative outlets such as shops; and allowing season tickets to be transferable in some circumstances.

3.3.2 Cabinet considered the report on 24 March 2015.....section to be completed.....

3.4 Review of the Commercialisation of Council Services

3.4.1 This review took place over two evenings on 25 February and..... Its remit was to examine the feasibility and desirability of commercialising some of the Council's services or undertaking new commercial services. A report will be prepared which will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.....[dates to be confirmed].

3.5 Review of Council Reports

3.5.1 The review took place / will take place on Its remit was to improve the quality of the Council's reports by making them shorter, clearer, jargon-free and more focussed on key areas. A report will be prepared which will be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet.....[dates to be confirmed]

4. Scrutiny in 2015/16

4.1 To be completed

5. Public Participation

5.1 The scrutiny process is open to involvement by local people and the Committee encourages public participation. The Committee made public participation and community engagement a priority this year. It used *Twitter* and the Scrutiny webpage to publicise its meetings.

5.2 ...17..... members of the public attended the Committee's meetings this year. Some of the ways for the public to get involved include suggesting a topic for investigation as a task and finish group; providing evidence to or at a meeting; and being co-opted on to a topic group. The Committee is keen see more public participation both in its task and finish groups and in its committee meetings.

5.3 For further details about the work of scrutiny, please contact the Scrutiny Officer using any of the methods below:

- Write to: Scrutiny Officer, NHDC, Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City, SG6 3JF
- Tel: 01462 474612
- Email: brendan.sullivan@north-herts.gov.uk

MEMBERSHIP OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2014 – 2015

Cllr Ray Shakespeare-Smith (Chairman)
Cllr Cathryn Henry (Vice-chair)
Cllr Bill Davidson
Cllr Jean Green
Cllr John Harris
Cllr Steve Hemingway
Cllr Sal Jarvis
Cllr David Kearns
Cllr David Leal-Bennett
Cllr Ben Lewis
Cllr Sandra Lunn
Cllr Gerald Morris
Cllr Michael Muir
Cllr Frank Radcliffe
Cllr Mike Rice
Cllr Deborah Segalini

Cllr Alan Bardett (substitute)
Cllr John Bishop (substitute)
Cllr John Booth (substitute)
Cllr Steve Jarvis (substitute)
Cllr Ian Mantle (substitute)
Cllr Alan Millard (substitute)
Cllr Adrian Smith (substitute)
Cllr Michael Weeks (substitute)

APPENDIX A

ANNEX A

DETAILED LIST OF TOPICS CONSIDERED BY THE COMMITTEE IN 2014/15

<p>17 June 2014</p>	<p>Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA) Update Performance Indicator Monitoring Report – April 2013 to March 2014 Year End Monitoring Report on Projects in the Priorities for the District 2013/14 Corporate Business Planning Timetable 2015/16 Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3cs) Full Year Update - 1 April 2013 to 31 March 2014 Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme</p>
<p>29 July 2014</p>	<p>Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Safeguarding Performance Update for April 13 – March 14 Grants Policy Review Task and Finish Group Report on Employment Partnerships in North Herts Health Scrutiny Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme Safeguarding Children And Vulnerable Adults – The Role of the District Councillor*</p>
<p>16 Sept 2014</p>	<p>Presentation by the Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Asset Disposal Strategy and Community Asset Transfer Policy/Framework RIPA Update and Annual Review Performance Indicator Monitoring Report – First Quarter 2014 DBS (Disclosure and Barring Service) Checks for NHDC Councillors – Policy Position Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme</p>
<p>09 Dec 2014</p>	<p>RIPA - Quarterly Update The Community Trigger – Anti-Social Behaviour, Crime and Policing Act 2014 Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Performance Indicator Monitoring Report - Second Quarter 2014 Mid Year Monitoring Report on Projects in the Priorities for the District 2014/15 Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme Update on Negotiations for New Leases for Three Community Centres</p>
<p>18 Dec 2014</p>	<p>Development Agreement: North Hertfordshire District Council & Hitchin Town Hall Ltd</p>
<p>20 Jan 2015</p>	<p>Information Note: Task and Finish Group on the NHDC Website – Update Information Note: Task and Finish Group on Citrix – Update</p>

APPENDIX A

	<p>Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3cs) Half Year Update – 01 April 2014 To 30 September 2014</p> <p>Implementation of the New Common Housing Allocation Scheme – Update</p> <p>Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme</p>
17 Mar 2015	<p>Presentation by the Leader of the Council</p> <p>RIPA Update and Annual Review</p> <p>Key Projects for 2015/16</p> <p>Performance Indicator Monitoring Report - Third Quarter 2014 - 2015</p> <p>Task and Finish Group Report on Parking</p> <p>Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report</p> <p>Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee</p> <p>Overview & Scrutiny Committee Work Programme</p>

*Committee briefing item separate from regular agenda