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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

WEDNESDAY, 19TH NOVEMBER, 2025

SUPPLEMENTARY AGENDA

Please find attached supplementary papers relating to the above meeting, as follows:

Agenda No	Item
6.	<u>ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES (Pages 3 - 10)</u>

Any Items referred from other committees will be circulated as soon as they are available.

- 6A)** Overview and Scrutiny Committee – North Hertfordshire Draft Town Centre Strategy – **to be considered with Item 9.**
- 6B)** Finance, Audit and Risk Committee – Procurement Strategy 2025 – 2028 – **to be considered with Item 10.**
- 6C)** Finance, Audit and Risk Committee – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026 – 2030 – **to be considered with Item 11.**

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Item No	Referred from:	OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
6A	Date:	11 NOVEMBER 2025
	Title of item:	NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DRAFT TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY
To be considered alongside agenda item:		AGENDA ITEM 9

The report considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting held on 11 November 2025 can be viewed here: [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 11th November, 2025, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council](#)

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That the draft Town Centres Strategy (attached as Appendix A to this report) and its associated Appendices be endorsed and approved for public consultation.
- (2) That delegated authority is granted to the Director – Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Place to make any minor non-material corrections, including but not limited to cosmetic additions or presentational alterations, to the draft Town Centres Strategy as considered necessary for the public consultation.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) To allow the draft Town Centres Strategy to be progressed to public consultation so that it may be developed and eventually adopted as a material planning consideration to support developers, landowners and relevant stakeholders when considering developing proposals and to provide policy advice to development management officers when determining planning applications until superseded by any new Local Plan.
- (2) To set key priorities which seek to maintain and enhance the unique character and vitality and viability of the district's four town centres through agreed partnership working.
- (3) To reinforce and deliver the Council's ambitions as set out in the Council Plan (2024 - 2028).

Audio recording – 1 hour 58 minutes 12 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place presented the report entitled 'Draft Town Centres Strategy' and advised that:

- The adopted Local Plan 2011-2031 required the Council to prepare and maintain up-to-date town centre strategies to support their strategic policy approach and respond to any changes since the Local Plan evidence base was first prepared.
- Since the Local Plan adoption, online shopping had continued to increase, and pressures from the cost of living and COVID-19 pandemic had also impacted town centres.
- The Council wanted town centres in North Herts to be welcoming and vibrant for residents.
- An overarching Town Centres Strategy had been prepared with consultants from Lichfields as seen at Appendix A to the report.

- Moving to an overarching model instead of four distinct town centre strategies had saved officer resources and time which had helped the Council to manage speculative planning applications through the Local Plan review period.
- Cross-cutting planning-based thematic policies to guide development and key investment priorities tailored to the needs of each town centre had been identified within the strategy.
- The strategy would act as a bridge between the Local Plan and its future review and would also provide guidance for developers and planning officers when developing and determining planning applications.
- Key Priorities within the Council Plan would be supported through the strategy.
- Other Council strategies such as the Economic Development and Sustainability strategies as well as the Churchgate Shopping Centre Regeneration project would also be linked with the strategy.
- Proposals in the strategy would differ to those in the Local Plan which meant that it would be adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning applications rather than as a supplementary planning document.
- The strategy would also ensure that plans for town centres continued to be carried out through the Local Government Reorganisation process.
- The document had been divided into four sections with the third section focused on the strengths and weaknesses of each town centre and the fourth section on further actions that the Council could consider to effectively deliver the ambitions within the strategy.
- Formal consultation would also be carried out with key stakeholders and partners and feedback from this would shape a clear, action-focused delivery plan in the final version of the strategy which would be regularly reviewed and updated.
- Initial drafts of the strategy had been reviewed by the Strategic Planning Board and the Political Liaison Board had reviewed the final draft in October.
- Subject to Cabinet approval, the strategy would be issued for public consultation in late 2025 with the final version anticipated for presentation in early 2026.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis

In response to questions, the Strategic Planning & Projects Manager advised that:

- As part of the Town Centre Retail Study review, a residential telephone survey was undertaken which also included businesses.
- Workshops were also carried out with key businesses and Business Improvement District (BID) Managers to inform the strengths and weaknesses of each town centre in addition to the key priorities.
- Key stakeholders and businesses would be consulted again as part of the wider public consultation.
- The number of businesses engaged, and the location of these, in the Retail Study would be provided after the meeting.
- The strategy would guide developers on development in town centres and allow them to use the evidence base outlined in the first section as justification for developments going forward.

- Consultants from Lichfields engaged with Royston First BID and the Chief Officer from Royston Town Council and they would continue to work with them to raise the profile of the consultation in Royston to encourage more feedback.
- The strategy aimed to address active travel while recognising vehicle use, however, it was acknowledged that modal shift to active travel would take time.
- They would work to implement measures such as the Walking and Infrastructure Plan to improve links within town centres and improve links between rural villages and town centres using S106 contributions and working with Hertfordshire County Council.
- Protection of Public Realm was referenced in the strategy through measures such as the promotion of community facilities.

In response to questions, Councillor Donna Wright advised that:

- Placemaker would be used in the consultation phase to enable readers to interact with the sections of the strategy that were of interest to them.
- New information was contained within the strategy rather than it being a summary of the sources cited within, particularly in the third section.
- Community and culture within the Public Realm were referenced in the strategy, however, if stakeholders felt that they needed enhancing, they would be able to express their views on this through the consultation.
- Parking in town centres would be looked into as part of the Parking Strategy review, particularly in Hitchin where they would investigate underutilised car parks as part of the Churchgate project.
- The glossary within the strategy was currently a draft and would be expanded over time.

Councillor Jon Clayden suggested that signposting on page 4 of the Draft Town Centres Strategy should be expanded, particularly for residents who might be interested in reading the document.

Councillor Martin Prescott noted that public transport was limited in the villages surrounding Royston, therefore, sufficient parking in the town centre was vital to attract residents and help town centre businesses, who would otherwise be impacted by larger businesses on the outskirts of the town where car parking was available.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis noted that lessons could be learned from Baldock Town Centre which encouraged active travel over vehicle use and was successful with this despite having surrounding villages. It was also noted that the community use of Public Realm spaces in Baldock should be protected within the strategy.

The Chair summarised discussions and outlined that two concerns raised by Members were that the community and value aspects of retaining public realms in town centres was important in the strategy and that consideration should be given to travel to town centres, as well as parking in the centres.

Councillor Martin Prescott proposed and Councillor David Chalmers seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That the draft Town Centres Strategy (attached as Appendix A to this report) and its associated Appendices be endorsed and approved for public consultation.

- (2) That delegated authority is granted to the Director – Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Place to make any minor non-material corrections, including but not limited to cosmetic additions or presentational alterations, to the draft Town Centres Strategy as considered necessary for the public consultation.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) To allow the draft Town Centres Strategy to be progressed to public consultation so that it may be developed and eventually adopted as a material planning consideration to support developers, landowners and relevant stakeholders when considering developing proposals and to provide policy advice to development management officers when determining planning applications until superseded by any new Local Plan.
- (2) To set key priorities which seek to maintain and enhance the unique character and vitality and viability of the district's four town centres through agreed partnership working.
- (3) To reinforce and deliver the Council's ambitions as set out in the Council Plan (2024 - 2028).

Item No	Referred from:	Finance, Audit & Risk Committee
6B	Date:	12 NOVEMBER 2025
	Title of item:	PROCUREMENT STRATEGY 2025-2028
To be considered alongside agenda item:		AGENDA ITEM 10

The report considered by Finance, Audit & Risk Committee at the meeting held on 12 November 2025 can be viewed here: [Agenda for Finance, Audit and Risk Committee on Wednesday, 12th November, 2025, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council](#)

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Finance, Audit and Risk Committee provide comments to Cabinet on the proposed Procurement Strategy (as attached at Appendix A) with a focus on any risk and governance issues.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: Having a Procurement Strategy provides a focus for procurement activity and guidance, so that it can support the delivery of Council priorities.

Audio recording – 46 minutes 23 seconds

The Director – Resources presented the report entitled ‘Procurement Strategy 2025-2028’ and highlighted that:

- The Procurement Strategy needed a refresh after changes to the procurement rules, following the implementation of the Procurement Act.
- The proposed Procurement Strategy, attached at Appendix A, set out our strategic objectives for procurement and therefore had strong links to the Council Plan.
- In section 2 it set out four key aims, delivering value for money, maximising public benefit, transparency in our communications and acting with integrity.
- The remaining sections detailed further goals including, commercial innovation, engaging with Small and Medium sized enterprises (SME) and engaging Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprises (VCSE) and how the Council would seek continuous improvement.
- Annex A outlined the Go Local Policy which aimed to encourage the flow of money back into North Herts.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Independent Member John Cannon

In response to questions, the Director – Resources stated that:

- Under the new Strategy, up to 2 points, out of 100 points, would be awarded for suppliers that met the definitions of being Local. It is a difficult balance to make sure that points awarded to target specific criteria still allow sufficient points for the main quality and price criteria.

- The Council wanted to encourage SMEs to bid for Council contracts to help with the flow of jobs into North Herts.
- When businesses were asked if they met the Go Local criteria the answers would be validated before points were added.
- The Procurement Strategy was one of three sets of documents used for the procurement process, the Procurement rules set out the rules that must be followed, this Strategy provides a policy direction, and they are both incorporated in to internal detailed guidance for Officers.
- It is recommended to Cabinet that the Procurement Strategy should reference the Procurement Rules.
- The Key Performance Indicators in paragraph 6 of the report would be used to measure current Procurement with the aim of setting focused targets in the future.
- Currently, there was no report for procurement outcomes, but this could be added to MIS for Councillor information, or a report could be requested by Cabinet or Overview and Scrutiny.
- This Committee could look at the effectiveness of the Procurement Reporting Process.

Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham proposed and Councillor Paul Ward seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDATION TO CABINET: That Finance, Audit and Risk Committee provide comments to Cabinet on the proposed Procurement Strategy (as attached at Appendix A) with a focus on any risk and governance issues.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: Having a Procurement Strategy provides a focus for procurement activity and guidance, so that it can support the delivery of Council priorities.

Item No	Referred from:	Finance, Audit & Risk Committee
6C	Date:	12 NOVEMBER 2025
	Title of item:	MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2026-2030
To be considered alongside agenda item:		AGENDA ITEM 11

The report considered by Finance, Audit & Risk Committee at the meeting held on 12 November 2025 can be viewed here: [Agenda for Finance, Audit and Risk Committee on Wednesday, 12th November, 2025, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council](#)

REFERAL TO CABINET: That Finance, Audit and Risk Committee note and comment to Cabinet on the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as attached at Appendix A.

REASON FOR REFERRAL: Adoption of a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2026/2027 onwards, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2026/27 in February 2026. Alongside the Council Plan, this will support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.

Audio Recording – 1 hour 1 minute 3 seconds

The Director – Resources presented the report entitled 'Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026-30' and highlighted that:

- The report had been delayed in the hope that there would be more clarity on future funding, however as there had been no detailed announcement from central government on the allocation of future funding, there were still significant estimates.
- The Strategy was included at Appendix A and followed the same format as previous strategies and referred to the Fair Funding 2.0 and the expected new formula.
- By Christmas 2025 the Council would be aware of its funding for the following three years.
- The spread of £2.6 million on table 1 of Appendix A were not worse case and best-case scenario but two possible scenarios that could happen depending on Government decisions. In theory there could be a better positive case and a worse negative case.
- The Council does have reserves, which gave it time to react to potential options outlined in the report.
- Table 6 of Appendix A looked at the current projects in the delivery plan, including two with uncertainty over what could be large costs i.e. Churchgate and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- Table 7 of Appendix A showed the spread of the forecast budget gap. The spread was a prediction and highlighted the huge range of numbers, for example £0.32Million to £2.97Million budget gap in year 2029/30.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Independent Member John Cannon

In response to questions, the Director – Resources stated that:

- There were several options that were possible in relation to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme to help avoid people dying in poverty. This was a campaign promoted by Marie Curie. There was an option that provided full council tax support to everyone who had a terminal illness regardless of financial circumstances. The Council currently offered 100% relief on the lowest income and was waiting for a response from Marie Curie as to whether this was a proportional response. That could be supported by ensuring our discretionary scheme was clear about supporting those with a terminal illness.
- For housing growth (e.g. new housing developments) an increase in the tax base (number of properties paying Council Tax) of 0.5% in Council Tax had been assumed. For any housing growth some of the additional Council Tax income would go on direct costs such as waste collection. For larger developments we would also need to consider the costs of new facilities and whether additional staffing would be required.
- There would be an update to this Committee in January 2026 which would reflect the funding announcement from central government.

As part of the questions, Councillor Paul Ward gave a summary of the questions he asked outside of the meeting and the response which would be circulated to members of the Committee and Cabinet.

Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham proposed and Councillor Paul Ward seconded.

As part of the debate Councillor Matt Barnes stated that Cabinet should be aware of the information around the costs of LGR and the information highlighted by Councillor Ward, and the Chair gave assurance that he would highlight it to Cabinet.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

REFERAL TO CABINET: That Finance, Audit and Risk Committee note and comment to Cabinet on the Medium Term Financial Strategy, as attached at Appendix A.

REASON FOR REFERAL: Adoption of a Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2026/2027 onwards, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2026/27 in February 2026. Alongside the Council Plan, this will support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.