

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY
ON TUESDAY, 14TH SEPTEMBER, 2021 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Daniel Allen (Vice-Chair), Tony Hunter, Nigel Mason, Jim McNally, Lisa Nash, Sue Ngwala and Claire Strong*

In Attendance: *Jo Dufficy (Service Director - Customers), Rachel Cooper (Controls, Risk and Performance Manager), Chris Jeffery (Interim Customer Service Manager), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and Anna Gouveia (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 2 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

32 WELCOME

Audio recording – 9 seconds

The Vice-Chair welcomed everyone to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting that was being held in the Council Chamber and advised that the meeting was being streamed live on the Council's YouTube channel and some Officers and Guest Presenters were joining online.

The Vice-Chair invited the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer to explain how proceedings would work.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer undertook a roll call of those officers and guests joining the meeting online to ensure that they could hear and be heard and gave advice regarding the following:

- Rules of Debate;
- Voting; and
- Covid Risk Assessment Measures.

The Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Daniel Allen started the meeting proper.

33 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 13 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Levett, Kate Aspinwall, Ian Moody, Carol Stanier and Terry Tyler.

Having given due notice, Councillor Morgan Derbyshire advised that he would be substituting for Councillor David Levett.

34 MINUTES - 22 JUNE 2021 AND 13 JULY 2021

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 34 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen proposed, Councillor Lisa Nash seconded, and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 22 June 2021 and 13 July 2021 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

35 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3 minute 31 seconds

There was no other business notified.

36 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 34 seconds

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded as well as filmed. The audio recording would be available on the Council's website and the film recording via the NHDC YouTube Channel;
- (3) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

37 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 58 seconds

Mr Gavin Cansfield and Ms Penny Metcalf, settle, were in attendance to give a presentation under Item 9.

38 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 3 seconds

The Vice-Chair advised that the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, had agreed the following:

- an item regarding Community Lottery New Policies not previously notified to be considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on 20 July 2021,
- a delegated decision be made regarding Allocation of Homelessness Funding, not previously notified, and;
- an item regarding the future of the Wilbury Hills Crematorium Project not previously notified to be considered by Cabinet on 21 September 2021.

39 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 36 seconds

Since the last meeting, no decisions had been called-in by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

40 PRESENTATION FROM SETTLE

Audio recording – 4 minutes 40 seconds

Mr Gavin Cansfield and Ms Penny Metcalf, settle, thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee, and gave a PowerPoint presentation entitled 'Delivering more homes', followed by a question and answer session with the Committee.

Mr Cansfield included the following points in his presentation:

- Settle was a housing association which helped people who were struggling to find a place to live. Its purpose was to help people live comfortably in their homes;
- Its plan was to contribute to solving the housing crisis, to be a trusted landlord and a place where colleagues loved to work;
- It was delivering new, good quality homes in North Hertfordshire and investing in existing neighbourhoods with a focus on sustainability and working with partners;
- It hoped to build 1500 homes by 2024, and thereafter 400 each year;
- There were a number of ways in which settle and the Council could work together in future to meet the shared objective of delivering affordable housing for residents.

The following Councillors asked questions:

- Councillor Sue Ngwala;
- Councillor Morgan Derbyshire;
- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor Tony Hunter;
- Councillor Nigel Mason.

Comments and questions included:

- There was a perception that moving from shared ownership could be expensive in terms of the fees which the resident had to pay;
- How many of the new homes intended to be built would be achievable without the Local Plan being passed in North Herts?
- It was good to see that some rural areas were getting affordable housing, such as the development in Holwell village;
- How many of the 1500 homes intended to be built would be within North Herts?
- The new playground in Westmill Estate was very good and popular with local residents.

Mr Cansfield and Ms Metcalf replied to questions as follows:

- Shared ownership household costs were on average 70% of that of the open market. The shared ownership model was being adapted by government policy to help it be accessible to as many people as possible. By way of further information, Members could be provided with a note on the recent scheme in Royston and how that helped households there;
- The supply of new homes coming through the planning process at the moment was lower than required to meet settle's house building targets; settle was looking at ways to unlock the delivery of more new homes;
- 1000 homes had currently been identified to build, 300 of these were in North Herts. It was hoped that as more houses were identified, more of these would be in North Herts to increase the percentage from 30%;
- Settle had delivered around 9,500 homes to date;

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- Members would be provided with a list of contacts in case of queries from members of the public on operational matters. Walkabouts would also be arranged if Members wished;
- Market sales were rare - the only reason for them was to cross-subsidise the affordable product;
- One in four of the homes settle developed was for social rent, i.e. the supply of social rent homes had been increasing;
- 20-25 homes were lost each year through the statutory Right to Acquire scheme.

The Chair thanked Mr Cansfield and Ms Metcalf for their interesting and informative presentation.

- **RESOLUTIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

Audio recording – 29 minutes 9 seconds

The Vice-Chair introduced William Edwards as the new Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager presented the report entitled Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and advised of one amendment to the report as follows:

- Cabinet re-considered the item concerning the Community Lottery – New Policies at its meeting on 20 July 2021, and agreed the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, therefore this item could be marked as complete and removed from the list.

Councillor Jim McNally proposed, Councillor Lisa Nash seconded and upon being put to the vote it was:

RESOLVED: That the report entitled Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review and comment on actions and feedback received regarding resolutions previously made.

- **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

Audio recording – 30 minutes 58 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager presented the report entitled Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme together with the following appendices:

- Appendix A - Work Programme;
- Appendix B - Forward Plan - 31 August 2021;
- Appendix C - Corporate Peer Challenge Extracts from Action Plan.

He drew attention to the following:

- The presentation from settle had now been received so this could be removed from the future work programme;
- The proposed topic of the Recovery of Our Town Centres following the Pandemic had been scheduled to be considered by the Cabinet Panel on Community at its meeting of 8 November. This had been agreed by the Chair and any Member was welcome to attend to participate in the meeting which would be held online;

- Members were requested to inform the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager via the Committee Services email address if they had any topics for the Crime and Disorder Matters meeting in January 2022, so that the information could be prepared;

The following Members asked questions and commented on the report:

- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor Morgan Derbyshire.

Councillor Claire Strong expressed disappointment that the Recovery of the Town Centres would not be considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and undertook to discuss this further outside the meeting with the Chair of the Committee.

Councillor Morgan Derbyshire asked why the regular Commercial Update was not presented to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee as it covered income generation. The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager undertook to discuss this further with the Chair of the Committee, in consultation with the Service Director – Commercial.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report entitled Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme be noted;
- (2) That Members be requested to inform the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager of any items to be considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of 14 December 2021 and beyond;
- (3) That Members be requested to inform the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager via committee.services@north-herts.gov.uk of any particular themes which they would like to consider under the annual Crime and Disorder item at the meeting in January 2022;
- (4) That all Members be invited to attend the discussion on the Recovery of the District's Town Centres at the Cabinet Panel on Community meeting on 8 November 2021;
- (5) That consideration be given to providing the regular Commercial Update to the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

REASON FOR DECISION: To allow the Committee to set a work programme which provides focussed Member oversight, encourages open debate and seeks to achieve service improvement through effective policy development and meaningful policy and service change.

43 QUARTER 1 2021/22 PERFORMANCE AGAINST PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Audio recording – 36 minutes 56 seconds

The Controls, Risk and Performance Manager presented the report entitled 2021/22 Quarter 1 Performance Indicators and drew attention to the following:

Status Summary

- This first quarter report showed the status of 21 indicators to the end of June 2021;
- There were six green, one amber and two red indicators;
- The rest of the indicators were for information only, with no targets set.

MI P&R 001 – Sales Ledger Collection Rates

- Collection rates continued to be affected by Covid but collection rates were improving month on month.

REG 1 and REG 2 – Homelessness Prevention and Relief

- North Herts was performing well in this area against other Hertfordshire authorities.

LI035a – Number of Households in Temporary Accommodation

- This was up compared to the previous year.

REG 3 – Number of Environmental Health Inspections Completed

- This indicator had been temporarily suspended due to resources being diverted to Covid-related work and also covering long-term sickness in this service area.

MI LI 015 – Number of Visits to Leisure Centres

- This continued to perform well against the agreed Recovery Plan.

NI 191, NI 192, FW1 and GW1 – Waste Indicators

- The overall tonnage of waste collected and recycling levels were both showing an improvement on this time last year but were still under target. Analysis showed that food waste was still being placed in residual waste and officers would be concentrating efforts on communications in this area.

Missed bin statistics had been provided for information.

The following Members commented and asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor Jim McNally.

In response to questions and comments, the Controls, Risk and Performance Manager advised that:

- Targets had not been considered useful for some indicators and therefore the target column showed as 'Not Applicable'. Targets were set each year in January by the Executive Members in conjunction with the service areas. Members would have the opportunity to feed into the next round of target setting as the report would be provided to the Committee before going to Cabinet;
- The possibility of including repeated table headers on each page of future reports would be looked at.

Councillor Jim McNally proposed, Councillor Claire Strong seconded and it was unanimously:

RESOLVED: That the 2021/22 1st Quarter Update on Performance against Performance Indicators be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To update the Committee on the performance indicators as well as other indicators that officers have updated and activated on Pentana Risk.

44 1ST QUARTER MONITORING REPORT ON KEY PROJECTS FOR 2021/22

Audio recording – 44 minutes 17 seconds

The Controls, Risk and Performance Manager presented the report entitled 1st Quarter Monitoring Report on Key Projects for 2021-22 together with the following appendix:

- Appendix A – 1st Quarter Monitoring against Key Projects for 2021/22.

She drew attention to the following:

- The Status Report showed 10 projects with green status, 3 with amber and 1 red;
- The play equipment for the Howard Park play area had now been received and was in storage. Renovation of the play area would begin in Autumn, once the paddling pool had closed for the season;
- The Crematorium project had moved from amber to red following the planning appeal being dismissed. Options for a way forward would be considered by Cabinet on 21 September;
- The full list of all 14 projects was included in Appendix A;
- With regard to the project to provide housing at market rents – the utility companies had still not completed the necessary works due to high workload and scheduling issues;
- The latest position with the Local Plan was that the representations received in response to the consultation had been processed and were available to view via the online portal. Depending on the points that had been raised in the representations, it was the Inspector's intention to issue his final report to the Council in early Autumn;
- With regard to the development of a long-term museum storage solution – the officers had received cost plans on different ways to develop the site which would be presented to PLB. The approvals process would be initiated once further investigations on potential returns had been completed. Grant funding for this project had so far proved unsuccessful.

Councillor Nigel Mason proposed, Councillor Lisa Nash seconded, and it was unanimously:

RESOLVED: That delivery against the key projects for 2021/22 be noted.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To enable achievements against the key projects for 2021/22 to be considered.

45 CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGY

Audio recording – 47 minutes 56 seconds

The Service Director - Customers introduced the report entitled Customer Service Strategy 2021 - 2026, together with the following appendices:

- Appendix A – Customer Service Strategy 2021 - 2026;
- Appendix B – Customer Care Standards

She drew attention to the following:

- The report was being presented to the Committee ahead of consideration by Cabinet;
- The Strategy pre-emptively referred to the 'People First' priority set out in the draft Council Plan, due to be considered by Cabinet and Council in September 2021;
- The Strategy set out how NHDC would put its customers at the heart of everything we do and reflected changes which had been brought about as a result of the pandemic, e.g. increased use of digital support services;

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- It was recognised that, for some customers, traditional contact methods remained essential and these would continue to be provided;
- A Target Operating Model had been adopted, as recommended in the Peer Review.

The following Members took part in discussion:

- Councillor Morgan Derbyshire;
- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor Tony Hunter.

Comments from Members included:

- This was an enlightening and necessary document;
- Council had not yet agreed the NHDC rebranding/new logo – a presentation to Council on this would be appreciated before the official launch.

The Service Director – Customers, replied to questions from Members as follows:

- Emails to the Customer Service Centre were automatically acknowledged; there was also a target to reply to emails in full within two days;
- The new NHDC logo was due to be officially launched in October, and had therefore been included on this new document;
- Members would be updated on the status of the re-branding;
- The Councillor Portal was currently being piloted by a group of 15 Councillors before being rolled out to all Councillors – it will allow Councillors to raise and track a case, and send things through to departments and teams directly on behalf of constituents – there were also links to useful information such as crime data and a link to mod.gov.

Councillor Jim McNally proposed, Councillor Claire Strong seconded, and it was unanimously:

RESOLVED: That the report entitled Customer Service Strategy 2021 - 2026 and appendices be noted.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to comment on the report entitled Customer Service Strategy 2021 - 2026 prior to consideration by Cabinet.

46 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 57 minutes 50 seconds

No questions had been submitted.

The meeting closed at 8.29 pm

Chair