

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES,
LETCWORTH GARDEN CITY
ON TUESDAY, 15TH MARCH, 2022 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor David Levett (Chair), Kate Aspinwall, Mike Hughson, Tony Hunter, Nigel Mason, Jim McNally, Ian Moody and Claire Strong*

In Attendance: *Rachel Cooper (Controls, Risk and Performance Manager), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Sarah Kingsley (Service Director - Place) and Andrew Mills (Service Manager - Greenspace)*

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

78 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 46 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Daniel Allen and Carol Stanier.

Councillors Lisa Nash and Terry Tyler were absent.

79 MINUTES - 18 JANUARY 2022

Audio Recording – 2 minutes

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 January 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

80 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 34 seconds

There was no other business notified.

81 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 39 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio and video recorded.

- (2) 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.

82 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 06 seconds

There was no public participation.

83 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 11 seconds

There were no Urgent or General Exception Items.

84 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 19 seconds

There were no Called-In Items.

85 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Audio recording – 3 minutes 27 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager presented the report entitled 'Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee' and advised of the following:

- There were no substantive updates to the report as written.
- The report mirrors the form and content of previous annual reports and offers a quantitative overview of this Committee.
- Brought to this meeting for Member comments or suggestions for additional items to be included.

Councillor David Levett advised that this would normally be brought to the final Council meeting of the year, but that would not be possible given the proximity to this meeting.

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Jim McNally seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered and commented on the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2021/2022 as attached at Appendix A prior to consideration by Council.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider and comment on the report of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the work of the Committee in the 2021/2022 Civic Year prior to consideration by Council

86 RESOLUTIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Audio recording – 5 minutes 29 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager presented the report entitled 'Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee' and drew attention to the following:

- There were no substantive updates to the report as written.

- Brought to the Committee tonight to seek approval to remove completed items.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager advised that recommendations made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding Harkness Court were taken to Cabinet and these were considered. If Members of this Committee are content with this, then it can be removed as a completed item.

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

REASON FOR DECISION:

87 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Audio recording – 7 minutes 44 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager presented the report entitled Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme and drew attention to the following:

- This was the final Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the civic year, but items could still be added for consideration of the Committee in the next civic year.
- Items under the Yet To Be Scheduled column would need to be brought to the Committee next year.
- Levelling Up White Paper would be brought as a future item now this is available from central government.

Councillor David Levett confirmed Members had received the Forward Plan as an appendix and most of the items on it are coming to Cabinet this month.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor David Levett

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager advised that First Home was an affordable housing product put forward as a new government policy, which the housing team are looking into. This is being brought to Cabinet next week as a recommendation in the Strategic Planning Matters report, seeking Cabinet approval to consider the First Homes Policy in summer 2023.

Councillor Claire Strong suggested that the Commercial Update was useful when previously brought to the Committee and requested it be brought again. Councillor Aspinwall agreed with this and requested that a regularity be added to the Commercial Report to Overview and Scrutiny.

Councillor Levett, as Chair, requested that a Commercial Update be added to all future Overview and Scrutiny agendas. He further suggested the Conservation Areas and Corporate Equality Strategy as items for future Overview and Scrutiny Committee agendas.

Councillor Strong noted that given the Council had been greatly affected over the past two years, it may be worth looking back at the work done and exploring what worked and what did

not. Some good work had come from the pandemic and it was vital this was not lost going forward.

Councillor Levett noted that an Officer at the Council was conducting a review of joint working and summing up actions during the pandemic and it would be useful for this to be reported to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee when available.

Councillor Aspinwall agreed and noted that there was a Recovery Plan to look forward, but it would be important to look at the last two years "in the round". This would allow Officers and Members to learn from good and bad points and further develop good practice. This Committee had taken a more relaxed view of commercial returns during the pandemic, but it was important that this be incorporated back into the Committees work programme.

Councillor Claire Strong proposed and Councillor Mike Hughson seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee prioritises proposed topics for inclusion in the work programmes attached as Appendix A and, where appropriate, determines the high-level form and timing of scrutiny input.
- (2) That the Committee, having considered the most recent iteration of the Forward Plan, suggested the Conservation Areas and Corporate Equality Policy items and a regular Commercial Update to be considered at future meetings and any further suggestions could be made to the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager.
- (3) That the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan Extract as attached was considered.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: 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.

88 3RD QUARTER MONITORING REPORT ON KEY PROJECTS FOR 2021-22

Audio recording – 16 minutes 26 seconds

The Controls, Risk and Performance Manager presented the report entitled '3rd Quarter Monitoring Report on Key Projects for 2021-22' and advised of the following:

- In this report there were 7 green projects, 4 amber and 2 completed.
- The renovation of Howard Park play area and the refurbishment of lists at Lairage Car Park were completed and would be removed from future monitoring report.
- No update had been received on the Local Plan.
- Preparation of the Cycling and Walking Strategy had moved to amber as this was taking longer than expected.
- Consultation was due to be conducted by Herts County Council consultants in March 22, prior to adoption by the HCC Highways and Transport Panel.
- A full list of projects was included at Appendix A.

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Jim McNally seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That delivery against the key projects for 21/22 was noted and commented on by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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

89 3RD QUARTER UPDATE ON PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

Audio recording – 18 minutes 39 seconds

The Controls, Risk and Performance Manager presented the report entitled '3rd Quarter Update on Performance Indicators' and advised of the following:

- Of the Performance Indicators listed in the report, 5 were green, 3 were amber and 1 was red, the others were for information only and did not have targets.
- Sales Ledger collection rates were still being affected by Covid, but seeing improvements on the same period last year.
- The percentage of NNDR collected is highlighted as amber in this report, but has improved in January and has moved to green.
- Absence levels were low in 2020 due to full time homeworking, but in 2021 the levels have started to rise due to Omicron variant and common infections.
- Number of households in temporary accommodation had improved from this time last year, decreasing from 120 to 94.
- The number of visits to leisure centres continues to improve and is performing well against the recovery plan.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor David Levett

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

- A desk booking system has been introduced to allow staff to come into the office and manage social distancing and data around this is monitored by the Leadership Team. At this stage most people are still working from home.
- There was no pressure on staff to return to the office and they were being consulted regarding measures in the Council Offices.
- Customer Service at reception in District Council Offices was still on an appointment only basis.

Councillor Kate Aspinwall commented that she was Chair of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee (JSCC) and the return to the office was discussed at the last meeting. There was generally a relaxed approach to staff returning to the office and JSCC Members were happy with the procedures being followed regarding this.

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the content of the report entitled '3rd Quarter Updates on Performance Indicators' was 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.

90 PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT MEASURES 2022-23

Audio recording – 23 minutes 41 seconds

The Controls, Risk and Performance Manager presented the report entitled 'Council Delivery Plan for 22-23' and advised of the following:

- This is the first version of the new report which sets out projects, risks and PIs in one. This report will also go to Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for comment.
- The report contains detail regarding how the report was put together, with input from Leadership Team and Executive Members.
- The projects are either detailed on the Council Plan 2022-27 or linked to the Council's planned priorities.
- Some further projects will be linked to statutory duties of the Council.
- Risks highlight where delivery of Council Plan, or associated projects, could be impacted and the Performance Indicators show how well targets are being achieved.
- As this is the first report of this structure, it is expected that the process and content may need to be adapted throughout the year, and both Overview and Scrutiny and Finance, Audit and Risk Committees will have the chance to comment on or suggest any changes.
- Performance Indicators have been cross referenced and matched where possible, but some will no longer be monitored in this report but rather by the service area, as detailed in Appendix B.
- The first progress report will be brought to Overview and Scrutiny Committee in September.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor David Levett

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

- The Town Centre Strategies project detailed was part of the Regulatory directorate, but was unsure of information and scope given to the consultants. This would be looked into further and reported back to Members.
- The Town Centre Strategy project had been put together alongside Executive Members, so they should be aware of this, but would look to provide further detail at a future Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.
- The projects were fixed but the risks and mitigations may change as the projects advance and confirmed that the report would show the correct position at that moment in time.

Councillor Tony Hunter requested that information be provided to the Committee on the Royston Town Hall Annexe project, as it had previously been reported to the Committee that the third party was no longer interested.

Councillor David Levett suggested that it may be useful to include in the report which directorate is responsible for the project.

Councillor Claire Strong proposed and Councillor Jim McNally seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: To consider and formally approve the Council Delivery Plan and any associated targets, to be monitored throughout 2022/2023 by Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

REASON FOR DECISION: An approved Council Delivery Plan provides the Cabinet with assurance that progress against achievement of the Council Plan objectives, will be monitored throughout 2022/23

91 **SHARED WASTE SERVICE GOVERNANCE**

Audio recording – 35 minutes 44 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen, Executive Member for Recycling and Waste Management, presented the report entitled 'Shared Waste Service Governance' and advised of the following:

- The report detailed the aims and principles of the new service, recommends that a cross party joint working group with East Herts Council and recommends that alternative governance arrangements be explored.
- Legislative changes were expected in the coming years and it was prudent to look at the services and prepare these for the future.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions the Service Director – Place advised:

- This is to begin looking at how a Joint Waste Committee could be established and to consider governance possibilities in principle.
- It was expected that a Joint Waste Committee would be set up in the future, but at this stage a working group would be set up alongside East Herts Council to look at where services differ and explore ways to align services.
- It was expected that there would be work carried out over the summer, with a hope to report back to both Cabinets by late 2022.
- By establishing a working group to look at future service design options, it would allow Officers to develop business plans and put actions in place to align services. There may be some areas where transitional alignment would be needed after the start of the contract, but getting agreement on alignment of most areas ahead of time would ensure that the Councils were in a more competitive position when it came to contract renewal.
- The main change to the shared objectives was the inclusion of green credentials.
- It was not expected that the aligning of the two Council's services would be easy and that was why the work would need to start now to be as prepared as possible at contract renewal.

Councillor Kate Aspinwall commented that it was positive to see this report and the beginning of looking at the waste service in a more holistic way. From the outset, there would need to be clear scrutiny and governance details in place and that this should be as formal as possible.

Councillor Tony Hunter commented that the issues needed to be fixed at this stage, not in three years' time when contract expires. Both parties and the service provider should work at this stage to remove inefficiencies in the service, which would benefit all involved.

Councillor Claire Strong noted that there was a list included of areas where services are not currently aligned, but there are far more in reality than listed in the summary.

Councillor David Levett noted that although the original aim of the joint contract was financial, a large part of this was so that services could be offered by pooling resources. He suggested that two further recommendations be added to ensure that the Joint Working Group was established and the framework for governance and scrutiny in place as soon as possible, but certainly prior to the start of the Shared Service.

The Executive Member for Recycling and Waste Management highlighted that this a huge task in itself and there should be a pragmatic approach to this as the service progresses and any further issues are identified. Within the Waste Service there are several things that are not controllable and therefore changes should be expected in line with these circumstances.

The Service Director – Place advised if, following the service design process, there are any changes which are feasible to implement prior to commencement of a new contract, then steps will be put in place to try to achieve this.

Councillor Levett highlighted that a Joint Working Group would identify areas where services cannot be aligned and these can be brought up much earlier and prevent issues occurring upon the start of the contract.

Councillor Aspinwall requested that Overview and Scrutiny Committee see the commercial arrangements, as this was not provided last time.

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Kate Aspinwall seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) To agree to the new overarching aim of the shared services and principles outlined in 8.10 and 8.12.
- (2) To endorse the formation of a joint cross party working group. The terms of reference for which are outlined in Appendix A and the outline work programme described in 8.19.
- (3) To agree to explore the future options for governance of the Shared Waste Service, including consideration of a joint committee consisting of representation by both East Herts Council and North Herts District Council.
- (4) To establish the Joint Cross Party Working Group prior to the start of the new contract negotiations.
- (5) To ensure that relevant Governance and scrutiny processes are in place prior to the start of the new contract negotiations.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) Waste services are one of the largest services provided to residents in both Councils, a “one service” approach promotes resilience and flexibility ensuring residents and customers receive a high-quality service. The recommendations are being made to enable the further alignment of services, through joint decision making, and consequently the long term efficient and optimal management of the services.
- (2) A new aligned governance structure would promote a unified, stable and long-term strategic vision for the shared service and ensures:
 - a service that is agile and responsive to changes
 - reduction in customer confusion
 - better engagement/ use of skills/talent and retention of staff and therefore service delivered to customers
 - continuous improvement within the services
 - improved resource visibility and flexibility
 - aligned timeframes and increased speed for decision making
 - greater consistency and stability leading to greater interest and competitiveness from the market.

- (3) To identify areas where there may be difficulties or issues faced with the merging of the services in East and North Herts.

92 GREENSPACE MANAGEMENT STRATEGY 2022-27

Audio recording – 60 minutes 22 seconds

Councillor Steve Jarvis, Executive Member for Environment and Leisure, presented the report entitled 'Greenspace Management Strategy 2022-27' and advised of the following:

- The strategy detailed in the report is about understanding how to make best use of green spaces for leisure and the environment.
- This strategy increased the emphasis on the environmental contribution of the green spaces in the district, whilst continuing to provide a community facility.
- Detail was provided of how areas would be renewed and maintained, with a move to an annual assessment instead of 5-year planning.
- The new green spaces outlined in the proposed Local Plan would be maintained by NHDC under this strategy, so long as developers are willing to make a financial contribution.
- This strategy has been developed in line with Climate Change Strategy, proposed Local Plan and Biodiversity Strategy, amongst other Council strategies.
- Extensive public consultation had taken place, which received a good number of responses. Some of the comments were related to the Green Belt land, rather than the Greenspaces in the district.
- Litter has been a constant challenge and publicity campaigns around this had taken place and would continue.
- This is a strategy to delivery Greenspaces across the district, with good facilities for the community and contribute to environmental objectives of the Council, within financial constraints.

Councillor Tony Hunter noted that the recommendation 2.1 outlined that the Vision, Objectives and Aims of the were detailed in 7.5 of the report, but this should be point 7.4 of the report.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure advised that the Ranger position at Howard Park, Letchworth was not part of this strategy, but was a decision taken in the summer of 2021. While the Ranger had formed good relationships with the users of the park, the position was not central to the management or security of the park and there was not a Ranger position at any other park in the district. Whilst this was regrettable, the work can be amalgamated into other roles at the Council, with no impact on the users of Howard Park.

The Service Manager – Greenspace advised the Ranger had an element of audience development within the job description, but this was extended by the person in the position to cover areas within their own interest and beyond the job description.

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Mike Hughson seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMEND TO CABINET:

Tuesday, 15th March, 2022

- (1) Adopt the Vision, Objectives and Aims for managing Greenspace as detailed at 7.4 below.
- (2) Review and adopt the Greenspace Management Strategy 2022-27 at Appendix A.
- (3) Agree the delegation for creating an Action Plan arising from the GSMS and an annual review of the Action Plan to the Greenspace Manager in consultation with the Executive Member for Environment and Leisure and the Service Director - Place.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) These recommendations are put forward to ensure there is an ongoing proactive and pragmatic approach for the future management and maintenance of Greenspace within North Herts for the period April 2022 – March 2027.
- (2) Additionally, the GSMS 2022 – 2027 provides the strategic link between the previous Greenspace strategies and the future demands placed upon North Herts District Council, specifically; managing the environment and biodiversity, finance and planning while delivering high quality greenspace services to our existing and newly developed infrastructure.

93 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 75 minutes 53 seconds

No questions had been submitted.

The meeting closed at 8.47 pm

Chair