

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH
ON TUESDAY, 12TH JULY, 2022 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor David Levett (Chair), Councillor Val Bryant (Vice-Chair), Adam Compton, Alistair Willoughby, Claire Strong, Phil Weeder, Raj Bhakar, Tamsin Thomas, Sean Nolan and Tony Hunter*

In Attendance: *Jeanette Thompson (Service Director – Legal and Community), William Edwards (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Steve Crowley (Service Director - Commercial), Chloe Gray (Commercial Manager), Robert Orchard (Operations and Facility Manager), Helen Rae (Community Health and Wellbeing Team Leader) and Christopher Robson (Senior Estates Surveyor)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting Councillor Ian Albert and Councillor Keith Hoskins, there were no members of the public in attendance.*

108 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minutes 52 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Nigel Mason, Carol Stanier and Ian Moody.

Having given due notice Councillor Sean Nolan substituted for Councillor Nigel Mason.

109 MINUTES - 13 JUNE 2022

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 14 seconds

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Adam Compton seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 13 June 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

110 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 52 seconds

There was no other business notified.

111 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 55 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio 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.
- (3) The Chair advised that Item 11, regarding the Lord Lister Hotel/Keystage Housing Grant call to account, had been withdrawn following advice from the Monitoring Officer and would be brought back to the Committee as soon as practicable following the conclusion of the planning process.
- (4) The Chair highlighted a change to the agenda order and advised that Agenda Item 10, Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme, would be taken as the final item.

112 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 33 seconds

There was no public participation.

113 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 37 seconds

The Chair advised that he had approved one Urgent Item and this was regarding the Council Tax Rebate for properties in bands E to H, so this payment could be made promptly.

114 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 05 seconds

There were no Called In Items.

115 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 08 seconds

There were no questions submitted by Members.

116 RESOLUTIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Audio recording – 5 minutes 14 seconds

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

- The resolutions had been updated as normal following the last meeting of the Committee.
- He would circulate draft Terms of Reference for the Task and Finish group to Members by mid-August ahead of the September Committee meeting.

In response to a question from Councillor Claire Strong, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager advised that the terms of reference to be circulated would be a proposed draft version for consideration, comment and approval by the Committee members.

Councillor Raj Bhakar proposed and Councillor Claire Strong seconded and, following a vote, it was:

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

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

117 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Audio recording – 57 minutes 08 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 standard report, with the most recent Forward Plan published as a supplementary document.
- There were two suggested items on the Forward Plan which may be of interest to Members, these were the Consultation Strategy and the results of the District Wide Survey, which were both due to be presented to Cabinet in September.
- There was the possibility of two extraordinary Committee meetings, one for the call to account procedure regarding Lord Lister Hotel and one in late September to look at the Future Waste Arrangements.
- The Local Enterprise Partnership had agreed to send a representative to give a presentation at the September meeting and encouraged Members to advise of suggested areas to cover.
- The annual Crime and Disorder Matters was scheduled for January 2023 meeting, but topics for focus were required now to allow for time to contact relevant external groups to report.

Councillor David Levett noted that the LEP had been invited for a while, but due to various reasons this had never materialised. He advised that he felt a general overview of what the LEP is and what it does would be most beneficial for Members.

The following Members suggested topics for the Crime and Disorder Matters item:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas

Topics suggested by Members included:

- Scams.
- The legal status of Ring doorbell cameras.
- Safe walking at night.
- Anti-social behaviour.
- Herts/Beds cross county border issues.

The Chair noted that there was a Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan update due in the next few days, following the last review immediately prior to Covid restrictions.

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Alistair Willoughby seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee prioritised proposed topics for inclusion in the work programme attached as Appendix A and, where appropriate, determined the high level form and timing of scrutiny input.
- (2) That the Committee, having considered the most recent iteration of the Forward Plan suggested a list of items to be considered at its meetings in the coming civic year, including the Consultation Strategy 2022-2027, District Wide Survey 2022, Crime and Disorder and consideration of terms of reference for the Task and Finish group.
- (3) That the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan Extract as attached as Appendix B be considered

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.

118 ANNUAL SAFEGUARDING REPORT 2021/22

Audio Recording – 7 minutes 45 seconds

The Community Health and Wellbeing Team Leader presented the report entitled 'Annual Safeguarding Report 2021/22' and advised Members of the following:

- As NHDC was a two-tier authority, the Council itself has no responsibility to take concerns from other organisations. The figures in the report relate only to those raised by NHDC Officers or Members, which are then passed onto the relevant statutory body for investigation.
- The figures of referrals from the last 3 years were included in table 8.1. Since reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee there has been a slow increase in referral rates.
- Following staff training in 2014, there was a strong rise as Officers became more aware of what signs to look out of regarding safeguarding concerns and improved corporate oversight.
- Following the lockdown in March 2020, there was an increase in referrals regarding mental health and domestic abuse, which was reflected nationally. There were some areas where figures dropped, again similar to the national picture, which was primarily due to the lack of face-to-face interaction with healthcare professionals.
- Since the end of lockdown figures across all referral types had increased. This was attributed to the return of face-to-face visits which allowed Officers to spot signs for concern.
- Officers continued to have to deal with difficult cases on a daily basis.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Adam Compton
- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, the Community Health and Wellbeing Team Leader advised:

- The figures in the report detail the number of concerns reported by Council staff – statutory agencies will always investigate but some concerns may not turn out to warrant any further action.
- Provided an example of potential modern slavery signs from the Environmental Health Team, who frequently visit premises and identify signs of concern (i.e. a mattress in a

storage cupboard) and will report this. This is usually regarding food based establishments or car washes.

- The bulk of referrals were from the Housing team, due to the nature of their work and the people they are engaging with, but a significant number come from Environmental Health and Customer Services.
- There is the Employee Assistance programme in place to support these staff and designated Safeguarding Officers provide support.
- There were not enough new starters to run a bespoke safeguarding training session last year, but that may now be possible following the elections in May 2022, and any training for Members would be advertised in the MIS publication.

Councillor Claire Strong requested that the training be circulated to Members by email, as well as MIS.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Finance and IT, advised that there was a Delegated Decision due to be published which would appoint a procurement champion to look at the Council's suppliers. He advised he would share details with Members when available.

Councillor David Levett noted that the Safeguarding Team was working at reduced capacity, but this has been identified and plans were being put in place to address the issue.

Councillor Phil Weeder proposed and Councillor Adam Compton seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- (1) Received and commented on the annual report of progress made against the Council's fulfilment of the statutory duty to maintain an effective safeguarding function with regard to children.
- (2) Received and commented on the annual report of progress made against the Council's fulfilment of the statutory duty to maintain an effective safeguarding function with regard to adults with care and support needs.
- (3) Received and commented on the annual report of progress made against the Council's fulfilment of statutory duties in relation to specific areas such as radicalisation and counter terrorism, modern slavery and human trafficking and domestic abuse.
- (4) Agreed that sufficient and robust processes are in place at the Council for application and review of safeguarding processes, and that an annual review and presentation to this committee should continue.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: This is the best course of action that can be accommodated within the approved budget and officer resources, that will fulfil our statutory and lawful obligations but also ensure that a regular, corporate review exists.

119 LORD LISTER HOTEL/KEYSTAGE HOUSING GRANTS

Audio Recording – 21 minutes 38 seconds

This item was withdrawn from this agenda.

120 UPDATE OF THE COMMERCIAL DIRECTORATE WORK PROGRAMME

Audio Recording – 21 minutes 58 seconds

Councillor Keith Hoskins, as Executive Member for Enterprise and the Arts, presented the report and advised Members of the following:

- There were no substantial updates to the report and it was similar to the verbal update provided to the Committee at the meeting in June.
- The work tracker had been included as an appendix to put ongoing projects by the Commercial team into a concise and understandable form for monitoring by Officers and Members.

The Service Director – Commercial advised that the target for lottery tickets sold in the report was wrong and should be 530 not 803 as written, which meant that the project was ahead of target at 716.

In response to a question from the Chair, the Commercial Manager advised that the lottery was not advertised in the most recent Outlook magazine, but had been previously and were scheduled for future publications, and the team had increased its use of promotion through Facebook adverts. There had also been additional promotion from the good causes supported by the lottery to date.

The Chair thanked the Service Director – Commercial and his team for producing the work tracker spreadsheet included in the report and for its comprehensive look at the work ongoing in the department.

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the report.

REASON FOR DECISION: The report is following the request of the committee for an update on the progress of the Commercial Directorate work programme and is for information only.

121 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio Recording – 26 minutes 30 seconds

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following report will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

122 UPDATE OF THE COMMERCIAL DIRECTORATE WORK PROGRAMME

Details of decisions taken on this item are restricted due to the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of Section 200A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972.

The meeting closed at 8.39 pm

Chair