

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH
ON TUESDAY, 24TH JANUARY, 2023 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor David Levett (Chair), Councillor Val Bryant (Vice-Chair), Adam Compton, Alistair Willoughby, Claire Strong, Nigel Mason, Phil Weeder, Tamsin Thomas, Terry Hone and Tony Hunter*

In Attendance:

James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Caelan Ballard (HR Apprentice), Steve Cobb (Licensing Manager), Steve Crowley (Service Director - Commercial) and Christopher Robson (Senior Estates Surveyor)

Also Present:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately 5 members of the public, including registered speakers.

171 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 06 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Raj Bhakar and Ian Moody.

Having given due notice Councillor Terry Hone substituted for Councillor Moody.

172 MINUTES - 6 DECEMBER 2022

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 26 seconds

RESOLVED: That the Part 1 Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 6 December 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

173 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 01 seconds

There was no other business notified.

174 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 05 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.

175 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 34 seconds

N.B. Councillor Phil Weeder entered the Chamber at this point at 19.34.

There was no public participation at this meeting.

176 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 36 seconds

The Chair advised that he had agreed to one urgency proceedings since the last meeting and this was with regard to the “Careline In House Provision” item that was presented to Cabinet in December, as the Part 2 notice was not posted publicly within the required timeframes.

177 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 04 seconds

There had been no items called-in by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

178 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 09 seconds

No questions had been submitted.

179 CRIME AND DISORDER MATTERS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 15 seconds

The Chair invited Sergeant Chris Adshead, from Hertfordshire Constabulary, to provide Members with a presentation on Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) and the recording of these types of crimes. Sergeant Adshead thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided a presentation, accompanied by slides, which advised of the following:

- The most widely used definition of Anti-Social Behaviour in the UK is the definition contained in the Crime and Disorder Act (1998). There was not previously an absolute definition of Anti-Social Behaviour, so this legislation formed a definition which the College of Policing follows.
- The Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act (2014) also describes anti-social behaviour as ‘conduct that has or is likely to cause harassment, alarm or distress to any person; conduct capable of causing nuisance or annoyance to a person in relation to that person’s occupation or residential premises; or conduct capable of causing household related nuisance or annoyance to any person’.
- Local Authorities often use the Anti-Social Behaviour Crime and Policing Act (2014) to create district legislation.
- The College of Policing Guidelines suggest detecting and recording ASB through a system of:
 - scanning police recorded crime figures and local service-provider data, and evaluation of victim reports and incidents. Scanning can evaluate ASB incidents either as a general, local issue or as individual incidents which form a pattern of behaviour.
 - Monitoring hotspots, with use of CCTV, community audits, surveys, and street audits to gather the public perception of local Anti-Social Behaviour.

- Evaluating the findings through policing systems, such as SafetyNet which records incidents of ASB and actions taken by Police to resolve incidents.
- During an incident of ASB, members of the public can call the non-emergency Police Number 101 or call 999 to speak to Force Control in an emergency/when immediate danger is present. There is also an online reporting service which will also send submissions straight to Force Control. After Force Control Room is contacted, Police will create an Incident Reference Number (ISR). The Risk of the anti-social behaviour will then be assessed and graded. If the incident is a non-emergency but the informant wants police contact, the informant will be given information on officer availability for the following days. Where an incident is not isolated or is recognized as a pattern of anti-social behaviour, it may get an Officer response.
- There is a team within the Force Control Room called the Community Focus Desk. Reports of anti-social behaviour will be passed to them to be routed out to an appropriate service area. Community Focus Desk is responsible for ensuring the correct risk assessment has been applied and that the report is routed appropriately. Police will respond immediately if a report requires an immediate response.
- Herts Police use a dynamic risk assessment tool called THRIVE to assess the risk of reported incidents and make decisions. The six factors considered in THRIVE are Threat, Harm, Risk, Investigation, Vulnerability and Engagement. The decision Police make on a case is then documented on the Incident Reference (ISR).
- Other schemes Herts Police have implemented to monitor ASB include SafetyNet, Streetmeets, Power Bi, and Echo. These schemes do not just monitor patterns of anti-social behaviour but offer a way for members of the public to further discuss the issue and how it has been dealt with by Police. Streetmeets are especially important for victims of anti-social behaviour to feel heard by Police and for Police to assess how effective the incident response was.
- Additionally, every time a 24 Intervention Team start their shifts, they go through a briefing to notify front line officers of current anti-social behaviour and individual cases of note.
- Police also implement Special Operations to achieve targets communicated through other systems such as Echo and StreetMeets.

The Chair invited Inspector James Lant, from Hertfordshire Constabulary, to provide Members with a presentation on safer streets, with a focus on women and girls. Inspector Lant thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided a presentation, accompanied by slides, which advised of the following:

- Herts Police had been working to increase a perception of safety in North Hertfordshire, particularly for Women and Girls'. Echo is a new HertsWatch Initiative which serves as a community tailored-survey platform. Responses inform the Police on local perceptions of safety and prioritize actions against anti-social behaviour which will ease public concerns and make a positive difference in the community. Streetmeets also provide a way for members of the public to share feedback with the Police in person.
- Echo survey submissions are also used to determine whether women and girls feel safe in their area, particularly at night. Where women and girls report that they do not feel safe in a particular area, or they are aware of antisocial behaviour in the area, the information is used to direct patrolling Police.
- North Hertfordshire is one of the safest areas in Hertfordshire and offences against women and girls are low, but there are many women and girls who still feel unsafe and perceive danger in local areas.
- There is a VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) partnership subgroup of the Joint Action Group between Herts Police, North Hertfordshire Council, Herts Fire and Rescue, and local housing associations which meet to address issues in the area and suggest actions. Security measures are often proposed, such as installing new CCTV cameras and better lighting in areas of North Hertfordshire which women and girls have reported feeling unsafe.
- Quarterly, Echo collates all the received feedback from the 'Women's Feelings of Safety'

survey, which Herts Police then use to inform new patrol plans. Echo also collects suggestions from women on additional measures which would increase their feelings of safety. Recently, there have been several requests for more Police patrol on foot in Hitchin, particularly at night. Some participants also suggested better street lighting would make them feel safer walking home at night.

- Herts Police then analyse these responses to identify any specific road names or times of day which can directly influence future Police patrols. These responses are then overlaid with hour-by-hour crime reports from Power Bi, which further informs Police which areas and times of day need more Police presence.
- Herts Police hosted their first Women's Safety Talk in Hitchin Town Hall on Sunday 15 January 2023. The talk was the first of its kind in North Hertfordshire and saw a very good turnout, with around 60 attendees, and received very positive feedback. Herts Police expect to repeat these events in different locations across North Hertfordshire.
- There are several Specialist Operations in place around North Hertfordshire. OP Urban addresses aggressive begging through checking in with local homeless people in public spaces and referring them to shelters and homeless charities. The operation aims to divert homeless people from getting into confrontations with members of the public.
- OP Gallican is North Hertfordshire's night-time economy police operation, increasing Police presence around higher-risk license premises on Friday and Saturday nights, and interacting with door staff and security at different premises to ensure they are operating safely. Police checks involve making sure premises have adequate staff numbers and working CCTV cameras. These measures also help to increase women's feelings of safety as they act as a preventative measure against antisocial behaviour and VAWG.
- OP Sargus is another Specialist Operation in place to prevent VAWG, trafficking and sexual exploitation. Volunteers from North Hertfordshire College teamed up with Police Officers to visit different hotels in North Hertfordshire. Officers would be in plain clothes and would attempt to book a room with a young female to detect whether hotel staff would challenge this as a safeguarding concern. Disappointingly, every hotel visited failed to challenge the officer. Through this operation Herts Police have been able to identify a learning need for staff in hotels across North Hertfordshire and will put educational courses in place. If hotels in North Hertfordshire fail to improve their safeguarding measures, Police will have to review their licenses with North Hertfordshire Council.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Terry Hone
- Councillor Alistair Willoughby
- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Adam Compton
- Councillor Tony Hunter
- Councillor Val Bryant

In response to questions, Sergeant Adshead, Inspector Lant and DCI Hannah Treadwell advised of the following:

- Herts Police acknowledged that the issue of women and girl's safety is not limited to young women, and older women feel particularly vulnerable to harm. This is evidenced in Echo survey responses where older women have consistently felt perceptions of danger in their local areas.
- While Herts Police hold Women's Safety Events to inform women with ways, they can make themselves safer, the root of VAWG lies with the behaviour of some males, so as such it is men that also need to be encouraged to attend these events, which we will promote more in future. Unfortunately, there are often few men attending these events,

and are simply there with their female partners. Herts Police would need to continue developing a communications strategy to direct these future education events to men.

- The Hate Crime Officer for North Herts Police had recently been into schools with troubled young men, giving presentations to educate these men on women's issues and prevent misogynistic behaviours.
- It was important for Police to have strong relationships with local Councillors at ward level and it is actively encouraged that Councillors come and talk to our Police Community Support Officers and share the concerns of local people with them. Police would also like to potentially propose a joint surgery within North Hertfordshire to allow Herts Police and local Councillors to collaborate further.
- Herts Police would support a Councillor and Police walkabout.
- The 'Ask for Angela' scheme is currently active in some premises within the North Hertfordshire district, but the licensed premises must promote it in conjunction with Police for it to be effective. It also needs to be advocated for by these premises to other premises, so that if someone came into a bar and asked for Angela, the staff would know what was being referred to. The scheme is also not a Police-driven incentive, but it is covered and supported by Police.
- Priority setting in-person consultations were sadly found to be far less effective than Echo surveys, with an extremely low uptake. A review was carried out at the end of 2022, which found there was little justification to continue with the in-person consultations. For now, Herts Police will hold online consultations instead.
- North Hertfordshire Council is still leading a CCTV review in Knebworth. Herts Police have been invited to several meetings and asked for statistics on crime and antisocial behaviour in Knebworth to determine if any of the CCTV cameras need to be moved. Without crime reports and statistics to hand, it is difficult to determine whether there is enough justification to bid for new mobile cameras for Knebworth, but this can be discussed further after the Committee meeting.
- Herts Police are keenly aware that not everyone has access or ability to use online services and is therefore able to fill in Echo surveys, which is why it was hoped there would be a better uptake in the priority setting in-person consultations last year. Safer Streets meetings are still ongoing, however, which will present anyone the opportunity to speak to an officer, give suggestions or report information about antisocial behaviour in their local area. Safer Streets meetings also give Officers opportunity to help members of the public sign up to Echo and give them crime prevention and personal safety advice in person. It is hoped that these in-person meetings will be more frequent and cover all areas of North Hertfordshire in the future.

The Chair thanked the Officers who had attended the meeting to provide Members with a presentation and answer questions.

The Chair invited Christine Adams, from North Herts Citizens Advice, to provide Members with a presentation on scams, with a focus on telephone scams. Ms Adams thanked the Chair for the opportunity and provided a presentation, accompanied by slides, which advised of the following:

- A scam is defined as a dishonest scheme, a fraud, a means to erode one's confidence, or a means to extract a money from a person.
- There are many types of scams nowadays besides dishonest advertising, and many of these scams are designed to play on people's fears – such as the Cost-of-Living Crisis. Many scammers also contact members of the public, pretending to be a trusted organization such as HMRC. These scammers almost always contact people via telephone or text, and most often pretend to be a Bank. Other kinds of common telephone/text scams include membership scams, parcel delivery scams, repair or virus scams, or pension investment advice. These scams are also particularly malicious because instead of hacking a social media account, they will trick people into sending their banking details and then will steal as much money from those accounts as possible.
- Text and telephone scams can often appear legitimate, as they take advantage of

technology which lets them 'spoof' a commercial number. They can then appear in someone's phone using a familiar company name.

- Banking scams usually attempt to scare people with messages such as "unusual activity on your bank account" or "your account is frozen". If the scammer has been able to spoof a phone number of a real Bank, the message will appear legitimate at first glance. A bank scam will then ask for a person's bank details to confirm their identity, or they may be directed to a fake website to input this information. However, your Bank's real phone number is almost always found on the back of your debit or credit card. A Bank will also never text or phone someone with a different number to phone them on.
- There are scams currently circulating which take form as a text or email from HMRC promising a refund. The text will link someone to a fake website which will then ask for their personal details including their NI number, date of birth and banking details.
- Another recent text scam is a message claiming to be from Ofgem, asking people to apply for the £400 energy rebate scheme. However, the Government will pay this to people automatically and never needs to be applied for.
- Scam texts can also sometimes be identified by the website link they are directing people to, such as claiming to be from GOV.UK, but the link goes to the address "bill-uk-gov.com".
- Some text scams claim to be from loved ones in trouble, often a WhatsApp message supposedly from a family member saying that they've got a new phone number and need money to pay a bill urgently or have broken their phone and need money for a new one. These messages often start quite vaguely, with "Hello Mum" or "Hello Dad", aiming to target parents. The scammer will then provide bank details for the victim to send money to.
- Rates of fraud fell during the first half of 2022, which may be explained by consumers returning to their normal routines after the pandemic.
- Criminals stole a total of £608.8 million in the first half of 2022, a decrease of 13% from the first half of 2021. The total amount of money stolen in 2021/2022 through scams was £2.35bn.
- Focus has recently been on Authorized Push Payments (APP) fraud – whereby victims are tricked into authorizing payment on an account within the fraudsters control.
- Romance scams increased by 31% in 2022, with 38% of dating site users stating that they had been asked for money. Out of those 38%, 57% obliged and were scammed into giving money.
- Scams made up 41% of total crime figures for 2022.
- There has also been an increase in purchase scams – for example, buying a product which does not really exist and does not turn up. However, the financial loss from this type of scam has decreased compared to previous years.
- Investment scams remain the area of greatest concern, accounting for the largest proportion of losses of any APP scam types.
- Disconcertingly, scammers appear to be targeting many different demographics, including the young, the elderly, people with disabilities, social renters, people on benefits, as well as lonely people.
- Citizens Advice recommends steps to avoid cold calls, such as registering with the Telephone Preference Service. This is a free service which allows you to opt out of any unsolicited live telesales calls. This should reduce the number of cold calls people get but will not protect them against scammers.
- Anyone who is bothered by cold calls should speak to their phone provider to see what other privacy services are available. It is also possible to block numbers on a smartphone to stop them from calling again. If someone is unsure how to do this, they could take their phone into their local mobile phone shop for assistance.
- Citizens Advice also advises that it is best practice to call a bank or company on their customer number, a legitimate bank or company will always be pleased to talk to their customers to prevent fraud or scams.

In response to questions from Councillor Nigel Mason, Ms Adams advised that it was hard to tell how scammers are able to spoof numbers from recognized organisations, but it is very

clever software designed to target people of any age, because they think it is a trusted organisation contacting them.

The Chair thanked Christine Adams for her presentation this evening and for taking the time to answer questions from Members.

180 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE RESOLUTIONS

Audio recording – 75 minutes 27 seconds

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

- An email had been sent to Group Leaders to request nominations to be appointed to the Task and Finish Group. No responses had yet been received.
- An update on the timescales for the SPDs had been provided to Cabinet in January, which detailed the Sustainability SPD would be drafted by March 2023 and the Design Code SPD was scheduled for Autumn 2023.
- The glossary as part of the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy had been removed following consideration at Cabinet.
- The new Peer Review document would be shared with Members when confirmed with the LGA and Officers.

In response to a question from Councillor Claire Strong, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager advised that following final confirmation of the updated Peer Review document, it could be presented as an agenda item at a future meeting of the Committee.

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

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That Council continues to support the work of Community Safety Partnerships and other partner agencies and work on the delivery of a Women's Safety Charter alongside these agencies.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: To highlight and enable Full Council to consider the important work of the Community Safety Partnerships and other partner agencies as well as the delivery of a Women's Safety Charter alongside these agencies.

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

RESOLVED: That the document 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.

181 ENTERPRISE UPDATE - PART 1

Audio recording – 109 minutes 18 seconds

The Chair presented the report entitled 'Enterprise Update – Part 1' and there were no questions from Members.

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Alistair Willoughby 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 Enterprise Directorate work programme and is for information only.

182 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 81 minutes 53 seconds

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).

183 ENTERPRISE UPDATE - PART 2

Details of minutes 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.

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Phil Weeder 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 Enterprise Directorate work programme and is for information only.

184 PART 2 MINUTES - 28 SEPTEMBER 2022, 6 DECEMBER 2022

Details of Minutes 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.

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

RESOLVED: That the Part 2 Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 28 September and 6 December 2022 were approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

185 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Audio recording – 110 minutes 00 seconds

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

- The report of Chair on the Call to Account was due to be presented at the March meeting of the Committee.
- The Strategic Housing Manager was expected to present an update to the Committee in March.

Councillor Claire Strong requested that the Strategic Housing Manager provide an update not only on Lord Lister, but on other strategic housing matters around the district, including the new Baldock site, whether there had been any development on the new facility and the situation of the shelter on Grove Road.

Councillor Adam Compton noted that the Work Programme had listed the Strategic Housing Update and Call To Account Report under 'To Be Scheduled' and the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manger advised this would be updated following this meeting.

Councillor Terry Hone questioned what the Annual Report was listed on the Work Programme, and it was confirmed that this was the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor David Levett, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Adam Compton 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, with the additional agenda item:
- (2) That the Strategic Housing Update be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny on 9 March 2023.
- (3) The Committee, considered the most recent iteration of the Forward Plan, as attached as Appendix B.

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.

The meeting closed at 9.28 pm

Chair