

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 20TH JUNE, 2023 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Adam Compton (Chair) Val Bryant (Vice-Chair), Matt Barnes, Clare Billing, Mick Debenham, Dominic Griffiths, David Levett, Nigel Mason, Ralph Muncer and Daniel Wright-Mason*

In Attendance:

Sjanel Wickenden (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Steve Crowley (Service Director - Enterprise), Sarah Kingsley (Service Director - Place), Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community), Rachel Cooper (Controls, Risk and Performance Manager), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Christine Crofts (Communications Manager), Chloe Hipwood (Service Manager) and Chris Jeffery (Customer Service Manager)

Also Present:

At the commencement of the meeting there was 1 member of the public, and Councillor Claire Strong present.

206 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 20 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Ian Moody.

Having given due notice Councillor Lisa Nash would fill in for the Liberal Democrat vacancy for this meeting.

207 MINUTES - 9 MARCH 2023

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 47 seconds

Councillor Adam Compton, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 9 March 2023 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

208 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 45 minutes

There was no other business notified.

209 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 53 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 section 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution applied to this meeting.

210 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 39 seconds

There was no public participation at this meeting.

211 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 45 seconds

The Chair advised that he had been informed of one item under the Urgent Proceedings regarding the Local Authority Housing Fund Round Two.

212 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 11 seconds

No items had been called in.

213 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 17 seconds

No questions from Members have been submitted.

214 RESOLUTIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Audio recording – 5 minutes 22 seconds

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

- The Task and Finish Group on Community Engagement was still ongoing, Group Leaders would be emailed asking for nominations.
- The Draft Sustainability SPD was still in progress
- The Peer report had been removed as requested at the previous meeting and the new Peer Review was being presented for consideration at this meeting.
- Further details on the Tourism strategy and Town Centre Recovery strategy would be provided in the Q4 Update on the Council Delivery Plan.

The Chair advised any Members wanting to take part in the Task and Finish group to contact their Group Leader.

Councillor Adam Compton, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Val Bryant 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.

215 ANNUAL REPORT OF OVERVIEW OF SCRUTINY 2022/2023

Audio recording – 7 minutes 57 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager presented the report entitled 'Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny 2022/23' and drew attention to the following that:

- This was presented at the last meeting with the decision taken to make some changes to the O&S procedures and agendas and for the Committee to review the report prior to going to full Council.
- The report is compiled from information at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2022/23 and highlighted the following statistics, attendance at meetings, how many referrals were made and how many people viewed the YouTube channel.
- The report was waiting for a foreword from the former Chair, Councillor David Levett, with the intention of being presented to Council on 13 July.

In response to a question from Councillor Matt Barnes, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager stated the number of items adopted and their details could be found on Mod Gov and would be provided at a later date.

Councillor David Levett proposed, and Councillor Ralph Muncer seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee considered and commented on the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2022/2023 as attached at Appendix A prior to consideration by Council.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the 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 2022/2023 Civic Year prior to consideration by Council.

216 3C'S FULL YEAR UPDATE 22-23

Audio recording 11 minutes 46 seconds

The Information Note entitled '3Cs Full Year Update 22-23' was presented by the Customer Service Manager who highlighted that:

- The Information Note provided an update on the full year 2022-23 regarding the comments compliments and complaints, which included contractors.
- Appendix A showed the dashboard of 3Cs and Appendix B highlighted this information by service area and type.
- Compliments and complaints received by the Council had decreased since last year.
- Comments remained the same as last year.
- 77% of complaint were resolved within the 10-day timescale, slightly under the target of 80%, 6 out of the 12 months were above the 80% target.
- Planning Control had the most complaints, but the number had decreased by 48% on last year.

- Percentage of interactions/collections/visitors resulting in a complaint remained at less than 1 %.
- 172 compliments were received directly to the Council.
- LGO received 13 complaints across a range of service areas, five were upheld, however two of these had already been remedied by the Council.

The following Member asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Clair Billing
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Adam Compton

In response the Customer Service Manager stated that:

- Upheld LGO complaints and previous years LGO upheld information would be provided at a later date.
- Urbaser collected their own information every quarter, and that information is then incorporated into our database.
- The majority of customers telephoned Urbaser and they compiled a spreadsheet of issues for the Council.
- The Customer Service Manager shared this information with other Councils and a comparison could be provided at a later date.
- Urbaser had 105 complaints in the full year, 14 of which occurred in May 2022 and the reasons varied.
- Numbers of complaints directed towards Settle would be provided.

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the 3C's full year update 2022-23

217 NORTH HERTS PLACE NARRATIVE

Audio recording – 20 minutes 3 seconds.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis presented the report entitled 'North Herts Place Narrative' including that:

- It is often remarked that there is no such place as North Herts, but from engagement with residents, businesses and those who work in the district it was clear there were things that tied people together.
- The Narrative compiled the different views and interpretations of the district and place so there was one message to promote to industries, as well as promoting North Herts as a place to move, live and engage to drive the local economy.
- The Narrative focussed on the people, culture and businesses that makes North Herts a unique place, consisting of a logo, a strapline and passage of copy.
- It was based on research completed by a partner Council and had been completed at no cost to North Herts Council with funding and support provided by the Local Government Association.
- The Narrative put people at the centre and was aligned to the priorities of the Council, including the People First priority.
- Bold colours were used for the logo and strapline and these deliberately avoided traditional political colours or those of the Council branding, to ensure that it was about the place North Herts, not North Herts Council.
- It showcased what made North Herts a unique place, including our local artists, writers, businesses, residents and greenspaces, and would be key in recovery of town centres and the local economy.

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- It would assist in drawing people into the area, retaining the existing economy, growing local skills, and investing in people.
- The project would be the responsibility of the Communication team to embed the Narrative and initially this would have minimal costs, though more ambitious strategies may be considered alongside partners.
- The Narrative was about evolution not revolution and selling North Herts as a place that exists which is vibrant and unique.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Adam Compton
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Clare Billing
- Councillor Dominic Griffiths

In response to questions, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis clarified that:

- The Narrative could be used when considering other policies and strategies of the Council, such as the climate strategy or town centre recovery, to make North Herts a better place.
- The Herts Growth Board has a workstream looking into town centre regeneration, including understanding and creating place narratives. The progress has been slow and a number of districts and boroughs, including North Herts, have therefore undertaken their own work.
- The comments from Leaders and Chief Executive were based on perception of place, which still had a role in contributing to the Narrative, but Members needed to be mindful of this.

In response to questions the Communications Manager clarified that:

- Royston BID were unavailable when the research was completed but they now have a new manager in place, who would be consulted on the work before rollout. However local Councillors had been involved, as well as representatives from creative and arts groups in Royston.
- Therfield Heath had been directly referenced in the copy produced as part of the Narrative.
- The launch was expected in September 2023 with organic growth expected from key partners following this date.

During the debate, Councillor Muncer noted his support for the work produced, but questioned whether it was overly negative in the copy at Appendix D, specifically the penultimate paragraph. Following comments from other Members, it was agreed that it was important to recognise the challenges and issues that the district faced and therefore should be retained.

Councillor Nigel Mason proposed, and Councillor Dominic Griffiths seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Cabinet approves the North Herts Place Narrative.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- (1) Despite being a district since 1974, North Hertfordshire has no clear identity and needs a point of differentiation within the county. This will help North Herts stand out as the place to invest, live, visit and work in Hertfordshire.

- (2) Currently, the Council and its partners are all telling different stories about North Herts which leads to fragmented communications. A joined up and coherent approach in the future will have greater impact, generate greater engagement and raise the profile of North Herts the place.

218 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE REPORT & ACTION PLAN

Audio recording – 46 minutes and 1 second

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis presented the report entitled 'Corporate Peer Challenge Report and Action Plan' and highlighted:

- The LGA 2020 Peer Review looked at North Herts Council and provided an action plan that was agreed by Cabinet in March 2020. A follow up review took place in 2022, with a focus on Overview and Scrutiny and Finance, Audit and Risk Committees and how these could be improved.
- A number of recommendations were produced from this review, which are detailed in the Action Plan, and Members were asked to consider these actions and whether they were appropriate.
- Any timescales that are not set would be agreed by the Managing Director, Leader and Deputy Leader consulting the relevant Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Matt Barnes

In response to a question from Councillor Ralph Muncer, the Service Director - Legal and Community advised that the Scrutiny Officer role was discussed with Group Leaders, and although a full time role would be ideal, the 17 hour role reflected the funding available. This could be reviewed following the recruitment process and when an Officer was in place.

In response to a question from Councillor Matt Barnes, Councillor David Levett, as former Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, confirmed that the Action Plan was a fair reflection of what was required, especially a dedicated Scrutiny Officer, however he noted that this had been difficult due to resources, recruitment and staff turnover.

The Chair made the following comments:

- Overview and Scrutiny Members had not previously been reviewing the Forward Plan and therefore it was often left for Officers to decide what items to include on agendas.
- Debate at meetings had previously been limited.
- A pre-agenda meeting had been set up with Officers and the Chair and Vice Chair to discuss topics before publication of agenda.
- The Scrutiny Officer role would assist with ensuring agendas were shorter and more focussed.

Councillor David Levett noted that the discussion on this item had been one of the most in-depth at the Committee and this was thanks to the new Members on the Committee who had contributed.

The following Members took part in debate:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Val Bryant

- Councillor Clare Billing

Points raised during the debate included:

- The Action Plan proposed was fair and followed the best practices of the LGA peer report.
- Without the Scrutiny Officer role in place, it was difficult to set timescales for the actions.
- Taking relevant actions from the plan should be a priority, and operational before May 2024.
- Requested that a progress report be provided at the next meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Adam Compton, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the content of the CPC report was noted.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That the draft Action Plan at Appendix A be considered, and proposed action be recommended to Cabinet for approval (as per Appendix A*)
- (2) That, in the absence of timescales, that it be recommended to Cabinet, that these be set by the Leader, Deputy Leader and Managing Director (in consultation with relevant Committee Chairs and Vice Chairs).

REASONS FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that the Council responds to the matters identified within the CPC report, ensuring that the benefits of the CPC process are realised.

219 Q4 UPDATE ON PROGRESS AGAINST THE COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 22-23

Audio recording 1 hour 2 minutes 50 seconds

The Controls Risk and Performance Manager presented the report entitled 'Q4 update on the Council Action Plan 2022-23' and highlighted that:

- The report detailed project risks and performance indicators, as well as a high-level overview of progress made on projects in the Council Delivery Plan.
- Members can request more details of specific projects to be reported to the Committee and are able to log into view projects on Pentana.
- Projects moving to the 2023-24 Action Plan are highlighted in grey in Appendix A, with new milestones and dates.
- Paragraph 8.5 of the report highlighted the four projects have been completed in this period.
- Paragraph 8.6 of the report detailed the projects that will no longer be included in the report.
- The Boundary Review report has now been received the project will be marked as complete and removed from future monitoring reports.
- The further details requested on the Town Centre Recovery and the Tourism Strategy requested at the last meeting can be found in Appendix B at 8.9 of the report.
- The proposed milestones changes are required to be signed off by Cabinet and are highlighted in yellow.
- The Town Centre Recovery plan had moved from a risk factor of 3 to 2 following a review of the risks.
- The risk performers indicators for Q4 show 6 Green, 1 Amber and 2 Red as highlighted in blue in the report.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

In response to questions the Controls Risk and Performance Manager stated that:

- The projects identified for inclusions on the Council Plan are set out by the Leadership team and Cabinet and monitored by O&S.
- Where the milestones have slipped, sometime this is due to resourcing, and an overarching resourcing risk has now been added to projects which is shown in Appendix A.
- An update on the EV Charging project and delivery dates can be provided outside of this meeting.
- There were no quality bids for the Royston Solar Thermal procurement, a feasibility report has been requested so it can be reviewed, and a decision made as to whether to continue with the existing project or roll into a new project on the 2023-24 Council Delivery Plan.
- HR and the Leadership team are looking into the resourcing issues and a more detailed report on resourcing risk could be highlighted at the next O&S meeting.

In response to questions the Service Director – Enterprise stated that a budget had been set regarding the Churchgate project and a consultant had been appointed, with a review scheduled by the July Project Board.

The Chair stated that he would look to prioritise projects for consideration on the agenda from the Council Delivery Plan for future meetings.

Councillor Adam Compton, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Val Bryant seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee determined projects that they wanted to receive more details on as part of the next monitoring report, including the resourcing issues the Council was facing.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That Cabinet notes the progress against Council projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A) including new milestones, deleted milestones, and changes to milestone dates and risks.
- (2) That Cabinet notes the deletion of projects outlined in 8.6, to be replaced by new projects in 2023-24.
- (3) That Cabinet notes the completion in Q4 of the Museum and HTH recovery, Customer Portal, Full review of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, and Green Space Management Strategy Projects.
- (4) That Cabinet notes the reduction in the Town Centre Recovery risk score from a 3 to a risk score of 2.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide Overview and Scrutiny, and Cabinet, with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks, or opportunities

220 WASTE SHARED SERVICE: CLIENT TEAM AND CORPORATE SUPPORT ARRANGEMENTS

Audio recording 1 hour 17 minutes 39 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen presented the report entitled 'Waste Shared Service: Client Team and Corporate Support Arrangements' highlighting:

- That this report related to the support and governance for the new waste, recycling and street cleansing contract.
- This new contract would allow residents to get a consistent service across East and North Herts.
- Each Council would lead their own Customer Services team.
- North Herts would lead on expenditure management on behalf of both Councils, although each Council will remain in charge of their own income management.
- The new service would come into effect in 2025.
- As previously agreed at Cabinet, the Customer Services team will be managed by the in-house corporate team at each Council.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Clare Billing
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor David Levett

In response to questions Councillor Allen stated that:

- The contract would go live in May 2025.
- Bin collections were moved to 6.30am and this was normal across other authorities to account for hotter weather.
- Bigger bins will need to be replaced at the expense of the resident or Urbaser, depending on cause.
- Food caddies and blue paper boxes were free to replace and could be requested online by residents and therefore are not referenced in this document.

In response to question the Shared Waste Service Manager stated that:

- East Herts had considered, commented on, and agreed the recommendations at their Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the waste agreement.
- The transition to a new payment system with online integration was a big project, and consideration had been given to Plan B scenarios but believed there is enough time to get the resources in place for a seamless transition.
- There would not be a joint waste committee, but the partnership would continue, with the only minor change being that the Executive Member for Finance would be invited to relevant meetings.
- The legal implications were included on the Cabinet version of the report and confirmed how the governance arrangements would work alongside the Council Constitution.
- Within the Street Cleansing Policy, rural areas referred to did not mean the villages, but rather rural roads where road closures may be required or where it could be incorporated into already existing schedules.
- The 3-14 days stated did not mean that it would take 14 days for action, and it was normal for action to be taken before the 14-days.

Councillor Nigel Mason proposed, and Councillor Dominic Griffiths seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the draft timeline for transition for customer service provision outlined at 8.7 in the report was noted.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That each Council leads on their own customer service provision with one set of processes for customer interactions being developed and agreed with a focus on resolution at the first point of contact.
- (2) That Cabinet agrees, the proposed updates and changes to financial management and governance arrangements and subsequent necessary changes to the Inter Authority Agreement outlined in Section 8.
- (3) That Cabinet agrees to the updated waste service policy statements contained in Appendix 2 to come into force from May 2025.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: To ensure the effective and efficient administration of the shared waste service.

221 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 1 hour 33 minutes and 27 seconds

Councillor Adam Compton, 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).

222 AN UPDATE OF THE ENTERPRISE DIRECTORATE'S WORK PROGRAMME

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recording is available.

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.

223 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Audio recording – 1 hour 49 minutes and 50 seconds

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

- The supplementary document showed the 2023 -2024 Work Programme, the report cycle had been discussed with the Chair, Vice Chair, and Officers.
- Any member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could request an agenda item for consideration.
- Crime and Disorder matters would be discussed at the January meeting and Members were requested to suggest discussion topics so that relevant presenters could be found.
- The standard Enterprise Update would be removed and focused on specific projects that would be added to the Work Programme.
- The LGA Peer Report action plan could be added to the Work Programme item to review and monitor the progression.

The Chair stated that future agendas would be reduced so that the Committee could scrutinise more efficiently and invited the Members to suggest future items.

The following Member took part in the discussion:

- Councillor Clare Billing
- Councillor Val Bryant
- Councillor Matt Barnes

Points of discussion were:

- Issues of staff safety and abusive telephone calls.
- The implementation of the new Leisure Contract.
- Draft Sustainability SPD report.

In response, Councillor Compton as Chair stated that:

- Safeguarding was on the September agenda, and a request would be made to include staff safety.
- The implementation of the new Leisure Contract would be added.

In response to the discussion, the Committee Member and Scrutiny Manager stated that the Draft Sustainability was already on the work plan as part of the Local Plan.

Councillor Adam Compton as Chair proposed, and Councillor Val Bryant seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee prioritises proposed topics for inclusion in the work programme 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, as attached as Appendix B, suggests a list of items to be considered at its meetings in the coming civic year.

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.

The meeting closed at 9:25

Chair