

130NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 12TH MARCH, 2024 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Val Bryant (Chair), Matt Barnes, Mick Debenham, Dominic Griffiths, David Levett, Nigel Mason, Ian Moody, Ralph Muncer and Daniel Wright-Mason.*

In Attendance: *Rachel Cooper (Controls, Risk and Performance Manager), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Callum Reeve (Democratic Services Apprentice) and Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager).*

Also Present: *There were no members of the public present.*

291 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 45 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Clare Billing.

292 MINUTES - 9 JANUARY 2024 AND 29 JANUARY 2024

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 9 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ralph Muncer seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 9 January 2024 and 29 January 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

293 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 4 seconds

There was no other business notified.

294 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 9 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be 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 for the purposes of clarification clause 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution does not apply to this meeting.

295 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 58 seconds

There was no public participation at this meeting.

296 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 3 seconds

No urgent or general exception items were received.

297 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 10 seconds

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

298 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 15 seconds

No questions had been submitted.

299 RESOLUTIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Audio recording – 4 minutes 22 seconds

The Democratic Services Manager presented the report entitled 'Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee' and highlighted:

- The 'Empty Homes Strategy' and 'Council Tax Premiums for Empty and Second Homes' reports were both approved at the meeting of Cabinet on 6 February 2024 following on from the recommendations from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 29 January 2024.
- It had been agreed at the meeting of Full Council on 29 February 2024 to increase Council Tax for 2024/25 and to also increase the council tax premium on empty and second homes.

Councillor Matt Barnes proposed and Councillor Nigel Mason 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.

300 DRAFT ANNUAL REPORT OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY 2023-2024

Audio recording – 6 minutes 0 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant, as Chair, presented the report 'Draft Annual Report of Overview and Scrutiny 2023-24' and advised that:

- This report was still in draft form and was therefore missing the meeting statistics from the meeting this evening.
- The Call to Account – Harkness Court - Chair's Report was missing from the report and that all Call to Accounts should be referenced in future Annual Reports of the Committee.

The following Members took part in a debate:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Val Bryant

Points raised in the debate included:

- Call to Accounts played an important part in the way that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee gave advice to the Council.
- The Peer Review of the Local Government Area (LGA) advised the Committee to continue to hold the Council to account and to develop policies which were beneficial to the residents of North Hertfordshire.
- New Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee need to be made aware of the differences between Task and Finish Groups and Call to Accounts and which one was best suited to be used in a particular set of circumstances.

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 2023/2024 as attached at Appendix A prior to consideration by Council.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS: That the Committee considered and commented on the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2023/24 as attached at Appendix A prior to consideration by Council, noting that the Call to Accounts should be referenced within the Annual Report.

NB. Councillor Dominic Griffiths entered the Chamber at 19:38

301 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN Q3 UPDATE AND PROJECTS FOR 2024/25

Audio recording – 11 minutes 40 seconds

The Controls Risk & Performance Manager presented the report entitled 'Council Delivery Plan Q3 Update and Projects for 2024/25' and advised that:

- This report was the Q3 update on the Council Delivery Plan and it also included a list of projects for 2024/25, which once approved, would be reported on a quarterly basis.
- 15 projects had proposed changes to milestone dates and these changes were highlighted in yellow in Appendix A.
- The new prioritisation tool had been used to identify projects to be included in the Council Delivery Plan for 2024/25.

- As part of the moderation process, it had been determined that the Council Delivery Plan would focus on projects where there was a defined plan of how projects would be delivered which as highlighted in Table 1.
- A project met the criteria to be included in the Council Delivery Plan if it achieved 2 or more green scores against the following key criteria:
 - Impact of non-delivery
 - Council Plan alignment
 - External benefits
 - Contribution towards financial sustainability
- Projects with green lines would be included in the Council Delivery Plan, projects with orange lines might be included and all others would not be included.
- The moderation process had allowed the reduction in the number of projects from 27 to between 11 and 14 based on the current list being reported on, which would ensure quarterly updates were more focused.
- The Council Delivery Plan was a live document and projects could be added back on at any time if they met the required criteria.
- There were currently two over-arching risks for cyber security and resourcing and a new risk relating to the availability of financial resources would be added to that list.
- A quarterly update on the projects highlighting the 14 projects that had green status and 13 with amber status could be found in Appendix A.

The following Members asked questions:

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

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

- Matters of health inequalities working documents were not publicly available, but there were currently 3 projects being worked on between North Herts Council and Hertfordshire County Council.
- The size of the Waste contract meant that the risk remained high, but this project would be subject to a high level of project management and would be overseen by a project board.
- The experimental Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO's) for Hitchin and Royston became permanent on 18 August 2023. No further works were required regarding the TRO's in Hitchin but works in the High Street, Royston were due to take place in June 2024.
- The Enterprise Strategy had been removed from the Council Delivery Plan, but Officers would still be working on this project.
- It was hoped to be able to provide risk training for Members through video guides on SharePoint.
- The reduction in the number of projects on the Council Delivery Plan would enable Members to receive a more detailed overview of each of the remaining projects.
- Projects removed from the Council Delivery Plan would not be reported to the Committee, but investigations would still be continued into those projects.
- Other lower priority projects within service areas would not be reported through the Council Delivery Plan, but work would continue on them. They would only be ceased if resources were scarce and a decision had been made to remove it.
- The Committee had the right to call in a Member and to bring an item to Overview and Scrutiny where there was a concern.
- Recruitment and retention of staff was an ongoing concern and an update from Human Resources would be included in the next report.
- Performance indicators only started once a project was up and running.

In response to questions, the Democratic Services Manager agreed to look into providing training on Pentana and Ideagen for new and current Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to enable Members to gain more in depth understanding of the Council Delivery Plan. The Committee agreed that any training sessions should be carried out prior to the start of an evening Committee meeting.

The following Members took part in a debate:

- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

Points raised in the debate included:

- The new Waste contract commenced in May 2025 and this would need to be significantly prioritised for correct monitoring.
- The Committee should have oversight of all projects of the Council, rather than just those being reported in the Council Delivery Plan.

Councillor Matt Barnes proposed and Councillor Dominic Griffiths seconded and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee noted the progress against Council projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A) including changes to milestones, performance indicators and risks, and makes any recommendations or comments to Cabinet.
- (2) That the Committee identified any project(s) for which they would like to receive a more detailed update.
- (3) That the Committee recommended to Cabinet the scope of the 24-25 Council Delivery Plan as detailed in paragraphs 8.8-8.10.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) 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.
- (2) Making a recommendation on the 24-25 CDP means that the Q1 report will provide the information that the Committee wants. It also helps set the priorities for the Council, as those projects that form part of the CDP will be prioritised.

302 SAFEGUARDING INFORMATION NOTE

Video recording – 50 minutes 48 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant, as Chair, advised the Committee that this item was for noting.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Dominic Griffiths
- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Val Bryant

In response to questions, the Democratic Services Manager advised that she would seek advice from the Safeguarding Department and report back to Members regarding their queries about safeguarding training undertaken through outsider providers and GrowZone.

Councillor Nigel Mason proposed and Councillor Mick Debenham seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Safeguarding Information provided was noted.

303 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Audio recording – 55 minutes 0 seconds

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

- The most recent version of the Forward Plan uploaded on 16 February 2024 was still the most recent version ahead of Cabinet meeting in March.
- Members should advise the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager, or email the Scrutiny inbox details of any items for consideration by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- The Strategic Housing Policy had been removed from the Work Programme following agreement with the Vice Chair, as this information had already been provided to Members in a briefing held in December 2023 and the slides from this had been circulated to Members.
- After this meeting all items on the Work Programme had now been considered apart from the Call to Account – Harkness Court – Chairs Report.
- The new Scrutiny Officer would start work on Tuesday 26 March 2024 and would be working on a Tuesday, Thursday and Friday.
- Training run by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny would be held on 5 June 2024 and this was available to all Members of the Council.
- Members had discussed and requested a new item be included on the Work Programme which was regarding recruitment and retention of staff at the Council.
- Bitesize training for Members before meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be looked at for introduction in the autumn.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor David Levett
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

In response to questions, the Democratic Services Manager, advised that a recommendation from the LGA has been that evening committee meetings generally started too late and this meant that decisions were sometimes made very late in the evening.

Councillor Daniel Wright Mason proposed and Councillor Matt Barnes seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee prioritised 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, as attached at Appendix B, suggested a list of items to be considered at its meetings in the coming civic year.

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- (3) That the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan as attached at Appendix C was considered.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To allow the Committee to set a work programme which provides focused Member oversight, encourages open debate and seeks to achieve service improvement through effective policy development and meaningful policy and service change.
- (2) The need to observe Constitutional requirements and monitor the Forward Plan for appropriate items to scrutinise remains a key aspect of work programming.

The meeting closed at 8.36 pm

Chair