

## NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

### OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF  
ON TUESDAY, 3RD SEPTEMBER, 2024 AT 7.30 PM

#### MINUTES

**Present:** *Councillors: Matt Barnes (Chair), Tom Tyson (Vice-Chair), Tina Bhartwas, Jon Clayden, Elizabeth Dennis, Ralph Muncer, Louise Peace, Martin Prescott, Laura Williams, Claire Winchester, Donna Wright and Daniel Wright-Mason.*

**In Attendance:** *Georgina Chapman (Policy & Strategy Team Leader), Ian Couper (Service Director - Resources), Christine Crofts (Communications Manager), Sarah Kingsley (Service Director - Place), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Jeevan Mann (Scrutiny Officer), Louise Randall (Leisure and Active Communities Manager) and Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community).*

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

*Councillors Ian Albert, Val Bryant and Daniel Allen were also in attendance as Executive Members.*

#### 26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

*Audio recording – 1 minute 26 seconds*

*N.B. Councillor Laura Williams entered the Chamber at 19.32.*

There were no apologies for absence received.

#### 27 MINUTES - 18 JUNE, 2 JULY 2024

*Audio Recording – 1 minute 37 seconds*

Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Tom Tyson seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 June and 2 July 2024 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

#### 28 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 16 seconds*

There was no other business notified.

**29 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

*Audio recording – 2 minutes 19 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.
- (4) The Chair advised Members of the ongoing Community Governance Review survey which was being conducted to look at parish arrangements. The survey was open until the 7 October 2024 and posters had been provided to Members to distribute in their wards.

**30 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 35 seconds*

There was no public participation at this meeting.

**31 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS**

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 39 seconds*

No urgent or general exception items were received.

**32 CALLED-IN ITEMS**

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 46 seconds*

There have been no called-in items.

**33 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS**

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 50 seconds*

No questions had been submitted by Members.

**34 COMMUNITY SURVEY ROUND TWO RESULTS (MARCH-MAY 2024)**

*Audio recording – 3 minutes 56 seconds*

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Leader of the Council, presented the report entitled 'Community Survey Round Two Results (March-May 2024)' and advised that:

- The first digital residents survey was conducted last year by Zencity.
- Digital surveys were able to be conducted more regularly than phone surveys, to provide 'of the moment' opinions from residents.
- As this was the second survey conducted in this way, the current satisfaction levels of residents can be directly compared with the results from last year.
- The sample size aimed to be representative of the North Herts population as possible by using the 2021 Census population data to guide who their digital adverts targeted.

- It was noted that satisfaction scores were often lower on digital surveys than those conducted by phone, where interviewers can explain questions in more detail and build a relationship with the interviewee.
- Surveys were just one method of receiving feedback from residents, with Councillor surgeries and forums offering in-person opportunities to provide feedback.
- There had been a 3% increase in satisfaction with waste and recycling services, the Council provided value for money, and how the Council involved, consulted, engaged and listened to residents.
- Residents had continued to be satisfied with North Herts as a place to live (74%), and around two thirds had said they would recommend it as a place to live.
- There had been a 3% increase in trust in North Herts Council, with a 22% increase in Royston and a 12% in Southern Rural areas compared to 2023.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Tina Bhartwas
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason
- Councillor Louise Peace

In response to questions, Councillor Daniel Allen advised that:

- The digital survey was one way of receiving feedback from residents and there were other non-digital methods, such as Councillor surgeries, Community Forums, Ward Walks and customer complaints and contact via the website.
- The Council had two further rounds of surveys to be conducted by Zencity, and it was felt that a new approach should be taken in future, which would allow for more targeted and specific questions.
- There had been a 'who does what' poster produced to try and provide detail on which services were provided by District and County Councils, which had been promoted online and in print.
- He was confident that the Communications team were able to put out the information, but it was difficult when you try to engage but this is not listened to.
- There had been an increase in direct communication with the public through increased surgeries and forums.
- Whilst there were some issues the Council could not improve, such as roads, there would be a focus on the issues which could be addressed, such as housing, car parking, provision of activities for young people and teenagers and listening to residents.
- Further questions directed at young people and teenagers could be added to the next survey to scope out what provisions or support they would require from the Council.
- Letchworth was an outlier where several levels of government or charitable organisations existed which was contributing the specific concerns raised in the town.
- The Council wanted to make sure that Councillors were visible to residents, which was being done through increasing the number of surgeries and forums which residents could attend and speak to Councillors.

- The demise of local press had also been a factor in declining communication with residents. However, the Council was exploring different ways of engaging with residents, such as using YouTube videos, as had been recently demonstrated with a recruitment video which increased traffic to the recruitment page.
- The number of responses from an area was based on the most recent census population data.
- Ward walks were an opportunity for Councillors to discuss Ward issues which affected their residents with the Managing Director. They were not publicised in advance but often involved talking to residents too.
- Surgeries were already provided for direct contact by residents and ward walk were to look at specific issues within a ward, not to attract public to raise specific issues, therefore it would not be suitable to advertise these.

In response to questions, the Communications Manager advised that:

- It was unclear why the Royston scores had a red exclamation mark note next to them and this would need to be clarified after the meeting.
- One of the limitations of Zencity was that the survey was owned and managed by them. Previous internally conducted surveys were provided in different ways and could be promoted using various methods to reach more people, including those without digital means.
- The contract with Zencity was until March 2025, with two further surveys planned between September and November 2024 and January and March 2025.
- The 'who does what' services artwork had been shared across digital channels, was published in the most recent Outlook magazine and had been used by Councillors in conversations with residents.
- Communicating to residents that the Council had listened to feedback from community surveys and were taking action required a whole Council approach and more work was required to find out why messaging was not getting through and what else needed to be done.
- A free text question asking 'How can the Council improve the running of North Herts' had been included in this survey, as with previous surveys.
- Any future surveying alternatives would need to provide value for money, reach a wider number of residents, allow for flexibility and be able to reach people without digital means.
- As outlined in the Community Survey 5-point action plan included in the appendix to the report, some actions were already being taken to address issues raised, however there would need to be more focus on developing the understanding of what Councillors do.
- There was the ability to drill down into demographics of the Zencity results, however just the headlines were presented within the report.
- She had received results from a similar size council who had conducted surveys through Zencity, but these had not yet been made public and therefore could not be shared. However, North Herts was roughly 10% above the other council.
- A specific session with Letchworth residents could be set up to help understand specific concerns from residents of the town.
- The Budget Hub had been established to raise awareness of the financial situation that local authorities are in and to allow residents to provide feedback and thoughts on proposals.
- The hub process was new to the Council. The Climate Hive had been active for around 18 months and had around 400 subscribers, the Budget Hub had around 200 in a shorter period, which was a good start.
- Herts County Council conducted an annual survey with residents.
- The results of the survey could be shared publicly on the Council website.

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that the Police were conducting a trial in schools in Hitchin in autumn to get young people to engage with the priority setting for the area, where previously no input from this group had been provided.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis

The following points were raised as part of the debate:

- Some of the questions included were not very actionable and it would be difficult to know how to address these with such broad terms. Consideration should be given to whether questions were posed in the most useful way and whether the response received could be turned into actionable policies.
- It was important that previous results continue to be used to benchmark for future surveys when the contract with Zencity came to an end. If there were significant differences, it would make it difficult to monitor trends over time and compare against previous performance.
- The 5 point plan should be a live and agile document which should be revised and refreshed. Actions should not only be ticked off but should be reviewed to consider the effectivity of the action at improving results.
- Ward walks could be used more effectively to become a genuine outreach option.

Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Tom Tyson seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Committee commented on and noted the key findings and observations from round two of the Community Survey and commented on the approach to future surveys (as detailed in section 8.7.2).

**RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:** That Cabinet consider the recommendations and comments from Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**REASONS FOR DECISION:** To ensure that Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet are aware of the round two results of our digital Community Survey and how they compare to both our round one (2023) results and the Local Government Association (LGA) February 2024 Resident Satisfaction phone survey results.

## 35 COUNCIL PLAN 2024-2028

*Audio recording – 47 minutes 02 seconds*

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Leader of the Council, presented the report entitled 'Council Plan 2024-2028' and advised that:

- The Council Plan sets out the vision and priorities of the administration over the next four years, as well as outlining key projects to support these.
- The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) and Medium Term Financial Strategy would align with this Council Plan.
- There was a workshop held in June for members of the administration where aspirations for the next four years were discussed, and previous achievements were considered.
- Following this a smaller working group was established to develop this, which included Officers and members of the administration, which was then followed up with two further administration workshops in July.
- Officers from the Policy and Communications teams had been involved in the development of the Plan.

- The version presented was a plain text version and further graphics and design would be added at a later stage.
- The overarching theme was 'Working with you for a fairer, greener North Herts', with the four priorities being 'Thriving Communities', 'Accessible Services', 'Responsible Growth' and 'Sustainability'.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Laura Williams
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Tom Tyson
- Councillor Matt Barnes

In response to questions, Councillor Daniel Allen advised that:

- These four priorities had been chosen following evaluation of other Council Plans, consideration of national changes and what the Council wanted to offer. These were decided as achievable priorities over the next four years.
- The Council had reopened the Council offices to the public, were available on the phone and Councillors were available in the community to engage with residents without, or with limited, digital access.
- An annual review of the Plan could be brought to the Committee, should that be requested.
- Finance was the biggest issue facing the delivery of the Plan.
- A response on whether there were areas that would be reduced, with the adoption of the new Plan and its priorities, would be provided outside of the meeting.

In response to questions, the Policy and Strategy Team Leader advised that:

- Responses from Round Two of the Community Survey had not been directly considered with the Plan, but the concepts and ideas have been addressed by some policies and actions within it.
- The Plan did not include everything that would be done over the next four years, but the administration wanted to highlight the key areas where priority would be given, with further detail to be provided in service plans.
- Projects to improve provision for young people had been addressed in the Plan.
- The Plan noted that not all residents had digital access and the Policy team would flag any concerns regarding consultations or reviews where inadequate consideration to non-digital methods existed.
- Support for businesses was included within the 'Responsible Growth' priority, which covered both developments, as well as economic growth. This included the Tourism and Town Centre strategies for engagement with business.
- There were many projects which could fall within multiple priority areas and the most suitable had been chosen.
- The Plan could be reviewed, when requested, and the working group could look at the publication and monitoring of the Plan.
- An explanation could be added to provide context to 'net zero'.

In response to questions, Councillor Ian Albert advised that:

- The CDP sat under the Council Plan and ensured that the key aspects of the Plan were being managed well and reviewed.
- Overview and Scrutiny could review the CDP and make judgements on performance against the Plan.

- It was not always easy to measure performance, but the CDP helped to reflect what was being done to address the areas within the Council Plan.
- Resources would continue to be an issue, not just finance, but staffing, including the retention and recruitment of staff, was important to deliver on many projects going forward.
- The production of an Economic Development Strategy and Tourism Strategy would be hugely valuable, and the input of Overview and Scrutiny would be key to developing these.
- The Council Plan offered an overarching theme, but other strategies and policies would be developed outside of those listed in the report.
- It was vital that this was communicated to residents through different means.

In response to questions, the Service Director – Place advised that reference to increased opportunity to recycle had been included as changes to the waste collection service would include soft plastic recycling, as well as the introduction of a new bin for paper and cardboard, which would overall increase volume capacity for recycling.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Tina Bhartwas

The following points were raised as part of the debate:

- The process for the production of a Council Plan was always tight, but this felt unfinished, with some priorities lacking clarity and would be difficult for residents to know what they meant in reality. It would be helpful to include some commentary on each to outline what the aim was and what would indicate having achieved it.
- Where timeframes for projects and initiatives were known, these should be included within the Plan.
- There was a lack of tangibility with some of the priorities and they needed to be tied down to actionable content.
- Achieving net zero was already an aim of the Council and strategies had already been developed to help achieve this. Where things had not been achieved, it was important to be honest and open about these areas.
- It was a good start, but needed further development to be a strong, strategic, priority setting document.
- Some areas still had multiple tasks which required completion and there was too much included, with more focus on key areas needed.
- An annual review of the Plan, presented by the Leader, at Scrutiny would be helpful in monitoring performance.
- Would be a good idea to include some of the challenges that local authorities face and make this clearer to set the scene for residents.
- The district council was one layer of government in North Herts, and it would be useful to explore the relationship with others and reflect that in this document.
- More emphasis should be placed on the link to the Citizens Panel, which would be a good way to encourage engagement.
- It would be useful to have some key performance indicators or measurable content against which performance could be judged.
- This was a good Plan with substance that was meaningful. It contained clear objective and whether they were achievable was for the Executive to consider.

In response to a point of clarification, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager advised that this Committee was making recommendations to Cabinet on the Council Plan and comments at the meeting would be provided at the Cabinet meeting where the item was to be considered.

Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Tom Tyson seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:**

- (1) That Cabinet reviews and recommends the approval of the Council Plan to Full Council (Appendix A) with the four new Council Priorities as outlined below:
  - Thriving Communities
  - Accessible Services
  - Responsible Growth
  - Sustainability
- (2) Delegate authority to the Managing Director and Leader of the Council to approve any minor amendments to wording required as a result of the design process.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION:** The Council Plan is a key element of the corporate business planning process, as a high level strategic document it sets out the Council's Priorities for the next four years. As an overarching policy framework document, it guides and influences the use of Council resources; providing a focus for activities, plans, and services that the Council provide. The introduction to the plan highlights the link between the Council Plan and the Medium Term Financial Strategy and service delivery plans.

*N.B. Following the conclusion of this item there was a short break in proceedings, and the meeting reconvened at 21.05.*

**36 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2024-25 (QUARTER 1 UPDATE)**

*Audio recording – 95 minutes 14 seconds*

The Service Director – Resources presented the report entitled 'Council Delivery Plan 2024-25 (Quarter 1 Update)' and advised that:

- The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) had been shortened following comments from Overview and Scrutiny Committee in during the 2023/2024 Civic Year.
- Projects could be added into the CDP to reflect the new Council Plan, if required.
- A report around KPIs was brought to the Committee in June 2024 to agree what would be included and regular updates were agreed.
- The quarter 1 update is to end of June 2024, but some further information had been added to around mid-August.
- All milestones were new, and as there were now fewer projects, the aim was to provide more detail on the milestone for each project.
- There were 5 amber rated performance indicators, and these were outlined, alongside contextual commentary, at paragraphs 8.3 and 8.4 of the report.
- The County Council had previously funded the flu vaccine for staff but had confirmed they would not continue to do that this year, so options for funding would need to be explored to support this.
- It was difficult to establish comparative staff turnover data with other authorities, but there was some general data provided by the LGA. However, this covered all authority types, where some may run services in house and would not be a fair comparison.



- Leisure centres visits were doing well against performance indicators, but target was set against the target from last year, not the actual number achieved last year, which exceeded the target.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Donna Wright

In response to questions, the Service Director – Resources advised that:

- The biggest issue with staffing was where the vacancies were and if a number existed in one team, then contractors were required to fulfil the service. It could be explored whether the position vacancy rate could be provided and whether it would add context.
- Staff surveys were conducted infrequently so would not be reported on a quarterly basis. The recent survey was still being reviewed.
- Some KPIs of third party contractors had been included where it was deemed most relevant.
- A piece of work could be conducted to look at the rise in alarm calls to Careline and further information could be provided. This could be supplemented by a presentation from Careline, or the Executive Member.
- Numerical changes in trends could be provided rather than up or down arrows, may help to add context.
- Major projects would have a project board in place, and, at end of project, a lesson learnt report would be compiled and presented to the Officer Leadership Team. This can come to Scrutiny, if requested, and is shared with other project managers to help with the learning of lessons.
- Clarity would need to be provided on the Local Plan Review project from the Executive Member.
- Details on the number of EV charging points to be installed could be provided outside of the meeting.

In response to questions, the Service Director – Place advised that:

- The Letchworth depot lease assignment had now been completed.
- The appointment of a quantity surveyor to oversee the Leisure Centre Decarbonisation Project was in progress, with an appointment expected shortly.
- The first waste mobilisation project board was due to meet tomorrow. There was a work programme in place, but due to delays in the completion of the depot leaser, the milestone dates had not yet been published.

Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Donna Wright seconded and, following a vote, it was:

***RESOLVED:***

- (1) That Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented on the Council Delivery Plan Quarter 1 monitoring report, including the recommendations made to Cabinet.
- (2) That Overview and Scrutiny Committee determined any project that they want to receive more detail on as part of the next monitoring report.

**RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:** That Cabinet notes the progress against Council projects as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A) including the new milestones that have been set for the current year.

**REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION:** 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.

### 37 LEISURE MANAGEMENT CONTRACT PROCUREMENT - END PROJECT REPORT

*Audio recording – 114 minutes 50 seconds*

The Service Director – Place presented the report entitled 'Leisure Management Contract Procurement – End Project Report' and highlighted that:

- The project closure reports were produced to identify lessons learnt and achievements of a project.
- The leisure contract procurement followed a robust process, which included a competitive bidding negotiation. This meant that bids could be tested before the final specification was produced.
- The outcome was a 10 year contract with Everyone Active, with a possible additional 5 year extension.
- Throughout the project there had been a project board and team established, which included specialist consultants and lawyers, where required.
- This ultimately led to significant financial and quality achievements of the contract, which included capital investment from Everyone Active as part of their bid, alongside Council investment.
- The use of specialist consultants and lawyers provided good value for money, as they produced a robust specification which achieved strategic aims and it was unlikely the same outcome would have been possible without them.
- The procurement timeline was challenging, but this had been largely down to the impact of Covid on the leisure market nationally and time was needed to ensure the leisure markets recovered sufficiently.
- The contract award date was met ahead of the expected deadline.
- The competitive procurement process was valuable, as it allowed the Council to consider what it wanted to realistically include within the final tender.
- Everyone Active had a communications plan in place, however there were some teething issues experienced at the start of the contract. This was compounded by the first day of the contract being on a bank holiday weekend during the Easter school holidays, when demand was higher than usual.
- Everyone Active had accessed the sites prior to handover and started signing people up to the app and had contacted existing members in advance.
- Concerns from the public regarding the booking system, and whether booking was required, were initially underestimated. However, Everyone Active and the comms team at the Council worked together to address these initial issues and communicate with users.
- Following these initial issues, lessons had been learnt by the time the outdoor pools opened and this process was much smoother.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Matt Barnes
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Louise Peace

In response to questions, the Service Director – Place advised that:

- Performance indicators were in place to monitor achievements against goals, including total members, number of casual users and frequency of activity. This data was also provided monthly broken down by demographic.
- There was also data provided on customer and partner satisfaction, retention of users and mystery visit scores. The first quarterly report containing performance indicator data was included in MIS.
- Some of the issues identified on the issue log included consideration as to whether the Letchworth Outdoor Pool would be included in the contract, or whether this could be run through a community group, and also whether all year opening was possible.
- Further issues included whether the living wage would be provided, and whether this was affordable.
- Investment in Royston Leisure Centre had already been included in the capital programme, however the bidding process was used to test whether there was a market case for this investment.
- In previous contracts the Council retained a say in fees and charges at the centres, however under the new contract the operator was free to set their own prices.
- Following discussions with Everyone Active, it was apparent that issues were normal in handovers, but it was difficult to identify what these might be as they varied by site. Early engagement and discussions on this had been identified as a lesson learnt and was already being implemented on the waste contract service changes.
- FAQ documents needed to be updated and pushed through all channels.
- Everyone Active had staff on site prior to the start of the contract and there were also extra staff on site at the beginning of the contract to communicate with users, including those without internet access.
- A competitive dialogue process had been used on the waste contract, rather than competitive bidding, which allowed the Council to negotiate with bidders to test the market and ensure the best value for money was achieved.
- Communication had been the biggest lesson learnt from the leisure contract process and the waste and communications teams at East and North Herts Councils were already engaging on this for the waste contract process.
- An extension to the 10 year contract was not currently being actively considered.
- The end date of the contract was a risk, as the 31 March was when contracts ended with the financial year and instead for future would look for a September or October start date instead.

Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Tom Tyson seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That Overview and Scrutiny Committee commented on and noted the Leisure Management Contract Procurement End Project Report.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To enable Overview and Scrutiny to consider lessons learned from the major procurement project.

### 38 SAFEGUARDING ANNUAL REPORT 2023-24

*Audio recording – 136 minutes 07 seconds*

Councillor Val Bryant, as Executive Member for Community/Partnerships, presented the report entitled 'Safeguarding Annual Report 2023-24' and advised that this report provided detail of the background on safeguarding over the past year.

In response to a question from Councillor Matt Barnes, Councillor Bryant advised that:

- The training provider had confirmed that increased training did increase confidence of staff to raise concerns and led to a rise in information being shared and discussed, and ultimately referrals increased.
- Feedback was requested after training sessions by the training provider, including a question on whether confidence had increased to raise concerns. From the sessions held in June and July the average response for the courses were; Basic Child 4.1 out of 5, Basic Adult 4.5 out of 5, Advanced Child 4.8 out of 5 and Advanced Adult 4.5 out of 5. Overall, the average was 4.4 out of 5, from 72 responses received. Therefore, there can be confidence that cultural change had taken place following training.

In response to a question from Councillor Jon Clayden, the Service Director – Legal and Community advised that:

- There was context regarding domestic abuse reporting figures within the table in the report.
- The number of child referrals relating to domestic abuse would generally be higher than the number of adults, as adults referred could have multiple children.
- All staff at the Council were trained on raising safeguarding concerns, but the front facing services were most likely to report these, such as housing, who represented the majority of referrals made.

Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Jon Clayden seconded and, following a vote, it was:

***RESOLVED:***

- (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 regarding children, adults with care and support needs, modern slavery, Prevent and domestic abuse.
- (2) Noted the SIAS Audit Action Plan tracker (Appendix A).
- (3) Agreed that sufficient and robust processes were 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:*** The recommendations made, contained within paragraphs 2.1 to 2.3, are 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.

Following the outcome of the vote, Councillor Val Bryant noted that:

- Councillor safeguarding training completion was very low for 2023 and efforts had been made to address that this year, including training provided before a Full Council meeting.
- All Councillors had been provided the documentation required to be signed via email.
- The aim was to achieve 100% of Members having completed the safeguarding training and this would be tracked in future years.
- To date, 27 Members had attended the session before Council in July, 17 Members had returned their signed form and 3 Members had completed the GrowZone e-learning module.

**39 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME**

*Audio recording – 146 minutes 44 seconds*

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report entitled 'Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme' and advised that:

- The Enterprise Portfolio update and Museum Storage Options items had been included for November 2024 meeting, and Members should raise any specific areas of interest ahead of this meeting, so detail can be provided by Officers.
- The Crime and Disorder Matters item was scheduled for January 2025 with a view to look at violence against women and children in the district.
- Planning and Transport portfolio updates had been scheduled for February 2025 and Members should provide detail of any specific areas of interest.
- Health matters was proposed for March 2025.
- Several topics had been included as candidate topics to be scheduled, including Waste Contract Mobilisation, Digital Transformation and Corporate Peer Challenge report.
- A form had been developed to assist Members with raising topics for a Task and Finish Group, and this would be included on the Scrutiny intranet pages once this was made live.
- Several topics had been included as candidate topics for Task and Finish Groups, including Staff Recruitment and Retention, Impact on Grant Policies, Impact of Council Tax Reduction Scheme, Tackling Homelessness in North Herts and Effectiveness of Section 106 Funds.
- Peer review actions were included at Appendix C and had been discussed with the Chair and Vice Chair.

The following Members took part in a discussion on the Work Programme:

- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Daniel Wright

The following points were raised during the discussion:

- A key theme from this meeting was communication with residents and this could be explored further as a Task and Finish Group.
- That the Crime and Disorder Matters item cover overarching themes of crime across the district, which could include detail on violence against women and girls.
- The LGA Peer Review to take place in November, should be reported at meetings in January or February, as this was an important piece of work for the Committee to consider.
- Health provisions were important to look at, specifically with regard to new developments, and a representative of the Integrated Care Board should be invited to provide detail.
- The effectiveness of Section 106 money should be explored further.
- Concerns had existed for a while that Section 106 contributions were not being spent and allocations of money were not put into schemes. Regular updates on Section 106 had been requested at Planning Control Committee, but a further in-depth look by the Committee would be worthwhile.
- Information on Task and Finish Groups processes in general was required.

In response to points raised in discussions, the Scrutiny Officer advised that:

- It was unlikely the Peer Review report would be ready for presentation to the Committee by the January 2025 meeting.

- A Member would need to take a lead on developing the concepts of Task and Finish Groups, including considering what evidence was required, which Officers would be included, what the objectives of the group were and expected timescales.
- A lot of information on Task and Finish Groups would be included on the intranet pages being developed, including case studies of where these had been successfully used.

In response to points raised, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager advised that:

- A previous Task and Finish Group looking at communications had been developed but was significantly delayed due to Covid restrictions and it was eventually agreed with the then Chair that it was no longer suitable.
- Should Members want to move forward with a topic, this may be suitable as some of the documentation had been produced and could be revised.
- The historic documents on this could be shared with the Committee.

Following discussions, Councillor Muncer advised that he would take forward work around scoping out possible work on a Section 106 Task and Finish Group, alongside the Scrutiny Officer.

Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Tom Tyson 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, 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 at Appendix B, suggested a list of items to be considered at its meetings in the coming civic year.
- (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.

**40 SCRUTINY CHARTER**

*Audio recording – 162 minutes 17 seconds*

Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair, presented the report entitled 'Scrutiny Charter' and advised that:

- This Charter had been developed following the Corporate Peer Challenge action to better define what scrutiny wanted to achieve at the Council.
- It was also felt necessary to consider scrutiny in the context of the administration change which had taken place.
- Further input to the Charter had been taken from Members following training provided and it had been devised with the support of the Scrutiny Officer and colleagues.

- The intention was that the Charter would be published on the Scrutiny intranet pages being developed and would be included on each agenda.

During the debate, Councillor Ralph Muncer thanked the Scrutiny Officer for the work in supporting the production of this Charter, and that it would help not only members of this Committee, but Members across the Council, to understand their roles.

Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Tom Tyson seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee adopted the Scrutiny Charter for Scrutiny at North Herts Council, attached as Appendix A.

**REASON FOR DECISION:** To ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee members have a clearly defined purpose, objectives, and expectations of Scrutiny at North Herts Council.

## 41 DECISIONS AND MONITORING TRACKER

*Audio recording – 164 minutes 34 seconds*

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report entitled 'Decisions and Monitoring Tracker' and advised that:

- This tracker replaced the report on resolutions which had been previously presented to the Committee.
- It would enable more consistent recording of decisions and recommendations made in one place, although only open decisions or recommendations would be included.
- All recommendations made by the Committee at its meeting on 25 June 2024 and extraordinary meeting on 2 July 2024 were approved by Cabinet and would be marked as complete on the tracker.

Councillor Matt Barnes, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Jon Clayden seconded and, following a vote, it was:

**RESOLVED:** That the report entitled 'Decisions and Monitoring Tracker' 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.

The meeting closed at 10.17 pm

Chair