

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNOH ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 9TH SEPTEMBER, 2025 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Claire Winchester (Chair), Jon Clayden (Vice-Chair), Tina Bhartwas, Sadie Billing, David Chalmers, Elizabeth Dennis, Ralph Muncer, Martin Prescott, Paul Ward and Daniel Wright-Mason.*

In Attendance: *Faith Churchill (Democratic Services Apprentice), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Jeevan Mann (Scrutiny Officer), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive), Nigel Smith (Director - Place) and Louise Symes (Strategic Planning and Projects Manager).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting there were no members of the public.*

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, Councillor Val Byrant, as Deputy Leader of the Council, and Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place.

13 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 6 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Cathy Brownjohn and Dominic Griffiths.

14 MINUTES - 10 JUNE 2025

Audio Recording – 1 minute 18 seconds

Councillor Claire Winchester, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Jon Clayden seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 10 June 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

15 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 1 minute 54 seconds

There was no other business notified.

16 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 1 second

- (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 reminded Members of the adopted North Herts Scrutiny Charter and the need to ensure that the meeting was conducted with independence, initiative and integrity. The full Charter was available to Members via the Scrutiny Intranet pages.

17 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 11 seconds

There was no public participation at this meeting.

18 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 16 seconds

No urgent or general exception items were received.

19 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 21 seconds

There have been no called-in items.

20 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 24 seconds

No questions had been submitted by Members.

21 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2025-26 (QUARTER 1 UPDATE)

Audio recording – 3 minutes 32 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Council Delivery Plan 2025-26 (Quarter 1 Update)' and advised that:

- In response to the Corporate Peer Challenge and the subsequent audit, the Council had been investigating how to extend Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to focus on achieving the outcomes set out in the Council Delivery Plan (CDP).
- These would be included in the Q2 report and smart measures would also be introduced without increasing pressure on workload.

The Director – Resources gave a verbal presentation and advised that:

- Digital Transformation and Leisure Centre Decarbonisation were the only projects with an amber status.
- The amber status classified projects that had missed one or more milestone dates without there being a significant impact to their delivery.
- In Appendix A, changes to milestones and new milestones that were subject to Cabinet approval were highlighted in blue and yellow respectively.
- Leisure Centre Decarbonisation, Churchgate, Decarbonisation of Council Buildings – Phase 2 and Local Plan Review all had a red risk level, as well as the overarching corporate risks.
- A red risk level was present where the project had scored highly on likelihood and impact which led to a higher level of monitoring and review.
- Three KPIs had a red status. Two of these related to Careline Installations and the other to Customer Service Centre (CSC) calls answered in 45 seconds.
- Explanations and planned actions were detailed in paragraph 8.4 of the report.
- The performance indicator for the Revenue Budget KPI was +2.4%.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Claire Winchester

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

- The red status on Careline Installations was due to resourcing issues, however, there were actions in place to address these to ensure that they would progress to a green status.
- KPIs on working days lost to short-term absence and staff turnover were worth measuring as they could present problems if they exceeded a certain level.
- Both KPIs had been measured over a long period and had targets despite them not being included in the table. This error would be rectified before the report was presented to Cabinet.
- No financial implications were expected from the Building Safety Act issues detailed within the report.
- The due date on the milestone to provide Salex with finalised project data had not changed as ancillary works would not have a direct climate impact and as such, data could be provided before they were complete.
- The Leisure Centre Decarbonisation Project Manager had left their post due to a change in personal circumstances, however, the project had now entered the construction phase and would not require the same level of support that had been given by them during the project setup phase.
- An illustrated grid for risk level scoring was included at page 22 of the report.
- The assessment of whether the impact would be low, medium or high not only accounted for the impact on residents, but considered legal impacts, financial impacts and other impacts to the Council as a whole.
- Each impact was assessed by the officer relevant to that area, but it was also down to Cabinet, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee and the Finance, Audit & Risk (FAR) Committee to provide feedback on these.
- The Medium Term Financial Strategy due date had been changed to enable FAR Committee, Cabinet and Council to consider it individually.
- Recent waste data had not been collected as priority had been given to oversee the waste contract and service change first. Once this had been completed, all the relevant

data would be collected and the period in which no data had been collected would not be lost.

In response to questions, Councillor Ian Albert advised that:

- There was no update on the implementation of a learner pool at Royston Leisure Centre but the importance of this was noted and they would aim to have information available at the upcoming Budget Workshop.
- Members were invited to attend the quarterly Resource and Performance Management Group meetings where risks were highlighted and discussed.

Councillor Jon Clayden proposed and Councillor Sadie Billing seconded the recommendations.

As part of the debate, Councillor Ralph Muncer suggested that Members should receive an update at the next meeting on the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme as milestones associated with this had slipped and costs had significantly increased since initial project estimations, therefore, they should monitor issues to be able to act at the earliest opportunity.

After consulting the Executive Member for Resources and Director – Resources, the Chair confirmed that Members would be able to ask additional questions.

The following Members asked additional questions:

- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Jon Clayden

In response to additional questions, Councillor Ian Albert advised that:

- There had not been a lack of transparency on the Churchgate project as regular Member briefings had been held and there would be more in the future.
- £296,000 had been spent on Churchgate to date, mostly on consultancy fees.
- An extensive public consultation process had yielded over 3,000 responses.
- A Parking Strategy Survey would be conducted to review existing parking usage which would inform how they could signpost users to alternative parking sites.
- Understanding the impact that the project would have on pedestrians and other modes of transport across Hitchin was critical.
- Hitchin Market Board had been consulted from the beginning of the project and the importance of working with market traders was recognised.
- The Council had been working with Market Curators to determine the best look and feel for the market in Hitchin after Churchgate had been redeveloped.
- A report at Full Council in December would take Members through the findings to date and plans in the lead up to a full procurement exercise.
- Depending on the procurement route taken, the building work would begin in 2027 or 2028 once the building process had been affirmed.
- A highly experienced Project Manager who had worked with several local authorities had been appointed and would start next week.
- Project Board workshops had been held and regular audits through the Internal Shared Audit Service had been carried out to hold the team accountable for each phase of the project to ensure that it had been effectively run.
- The latest audit made three recommendations, and these had been addressed within the agreed timescales.
- Engagement on the project masterplan was planned.

- Market traders, the Market Manager and Hitchin BID Manager were engaged with regularly and had been consulted on their concerns around the project.
- There was a challenge between balancing parking space and the redevelopment of Churchgate which the Parking Strategy Survey would help to inform.
- It was recognised that the Churchgate project would continue after Local Government Reorganisation had taken place and that they would need to consult shadow authorities once they had been formed.
- Inevitably, projects in their early stages or with a degree of uncertainty were likely to have a red risk level, but there were mitigations in place to manage risk.
- £30,000 of the initial £400,000 funding allocated for Charnwood House had been spent on essential roofing works, electrical works and clearance to maintain structural integrity and prevent further decay of the building.
- They were committed to the revitalisation of Charnwood House for the benefit of Hitchin and the wider district.
- External agents were appointed with the task of engaging suitable operators to run the building as a community hub, however, their marketing had not yielded a letting for various reasons.
- There would be a review of the work on the building to date, and future options for the building would be put to Executive Members.
- While it was not formally on the market, they had retained contact details of groups that were formerly interested in running it as a community hub.
- Ensuring that Charnwood House would be in the community for the long-term was important.
- A dedicated webpage with periodic updates on Charnwood House was available on the Council website.
- Regular reports on Charnwood House were given at Hitchin Community Forum.
- The remainder of the initial funding allocated to the project would hopefully help a future operator of the facility obtain funding from other sources for the project.

In response to additional questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that there was a page on the Council website entitled 'The Churchgate Conversation' which gave a detailed the timeline of the project and associated documentation.

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

- The status of the high priority audit finding would be checked and verified before the next FAR Committee meeting.
- The purpose of the report was to highlight risks and to track the completed actions against the planned actions that had been put in place to address those.
- More detail on each project including their risks and planned actions could be found on Ideagen.
- Charnwood House would not be on the Council Delivery Plan until a defined plan had been made for it.

In response to additional questions, the Chief Executive advised that:

- Ongoing reviews of strategy and policy documents would have to account for the changes that Local Government Reorganisation would bring, including Hertfordshire County Council assets that would come under the control of the future unitary authority and impact their current assets, especially if they were nearby or adjoining.
- Once assets for all eleven authorities across Hertfordshire had been mapped out, a division of these would be negotiated among the new unitary authorities.

Following additional questions from Members, there were no more points in the debate.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- (1) Provided comment on the Council Delivery Plan Quarter 1 monitoring report.
- (2) Determined any project they want to receive more detail on, as part of the next monitoring report.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Cabinet notes progress against Council projects and performance indicators, as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A), and approves new milestones and changes to milestones.

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

22 UPDATE ON PAY ON EXIT PARKING IN COUNCIL OPERATED CAR PARKS

Audio recording – 1 hour 0 minutes 45 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'Update on Pay on Exit Parking in Council Operated Car Parks' and advised that:

- The Council commissioned Flowbird UK to replace parking machines across all its car parks.
- New machines were touchscreen and ticketless with a check-in, check-out system that accepted contactless payments.
- Signage was provided in every car park to inform users how to pay.
- Except for Woodside Car Park in Hitchin, one machine in each car park accepted cash payments, and receipts were available in all car parks on request.
- By late March, new machines had been installed in all car parks except for Norton Common and Hitchin Swimming Centre due to Traffic Regulation Orders.
- A communication strategy had been in place through the rollout phase and comprised member briefings, press releases, website FAQs and social media engagement by the Communications Team to address concerns.
- Support had also been provided by Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) and the Customer Service Centre.
- Teething problems arising from the new machines included network connection issues which had caused delays to payments and penalty charge notices (PCNs) to be issued.
- Touchscreen visibility was also a problem in the sunlight.
- Planned fixes included the installation of industrial sim cards, modems, software resolutions, signage changes and the consideration of zoning adjacent car parks to provide alternative payment options.
- Touchscreens would also be regularly cleaned to ensure visibility.
- New signage would address user confusion from some pre-paid ticket holders who had attempted to check-out when they did not need to, and blue badge and season ticket holders who were not required to register for a parking session.
- PCNs had increased 61% from Q1 2024 to Q1 2025 partly due to users entering their Vehicle Registration Marks (VRMs) incorrectly under the new system, but also the recruitment of two more CEOs which had allowed for more coverage.
- Challenges to PCNs had increased from 32% to 44% and of these, 78% had been cancelled compared to 66% in Q1 the previous year as a more lenient approach to PCN challenges had been taken during the rollout phase.

- Despite initial problems, the new system had modernised their car parks and increased flexibility for users.
- A 26% reduction in PCNs from April to July showed that the public were adapting to the new machines.
- Most users had successfully continued to pay for parking since the rollout.
- Even with the recent increase in PCNs, they still counted for less than 1% of all successful parking transactions.
- Transaction volumes were up 6% overall, therefore, the new machines had not discouraged motorists from parking in Council owned car parks.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Tina Bhartwas
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Claire Winchester

In response to questions, Councillor Donna Wright advised that:

- Signage and information boards had been installed prior to the rollout phase and guidance including FAQs had been published on the Council website.
- CEOs had been present in car parks for the first two weeks after the rollout to increase the ease of use and accessibility of the new machines.
- An initial increase in PCNs had been anticipated, however, they had not anticipated the number of VRMs that had been incorrectly entered.
- Human error would always exist in the check-in, check-out system, which is why PCNs had been rescinded where VRMs had clearly been wrongly inputted.
- Pay by phone methods might allow some VRM cross checking with the DVLA, however, doing this would not be possible due to privacy and logistical issues.
- Some PCN challenges had not received a response due to time lag. They had either been responded to since the publication of the report or would be responded to in due course.
- The voucher system for the Free After 3 scheme in Royston car parks would require users to display a ticket on their windscreen.
- Still requiring check-in after 3pm had allowed them to build a robust data baseline that would inform third party subsidy discussions.
- Over 3,000 free parking sessions had been voluntarily registered in August, however, the number of unregistered sessions was unknown as they had not issued PCNs for failure to comply with this.
- A decision on the Free After 3 subsidy would be taken as part of the Parking Tariff Review 2026/27 report that would be discussed at Cabinet in early 2026.
- Discussions with Royston First BID and Royston Town Council would be held on the subsidy to inform the review.
- The Communication Strategy had concentrated on providing adequate signage and guidance on information boards and the machines themselves.
- The public were informed about the new machines through press releases and via their Outlook magazine, both prior to and after their installation.
- Guidance on how to use the new machines was posted on their website on 18 March.
- FAQs were not initially available after the rollout as a buildup of questions was required to inform which questions were most frequent.
- A slower rollout might have mitigated some of the issues experienced, however, the period of disruption would have been longer and economies of scale gained by the quick rollout would have been lost.

In response to questions, the Strategic Planning & Projects Manager advised that:

- Signal strength and connection tests were undertaken by Flowbird UK in each car park before installation and they had informed the Council that roaming SIM cards would allow the machines to connect to the best network available.
- Hitchin was well known for its weak network connectivity and consequently, most problems associated with this had been experienced there.
- Various solutions had been investigated including additional sim cards, antennae, and hiring an independent company to assess signal strength.
- After locking the machines onto the O2 and EE networks, network connectivity issues were alleviated in Hitchin car parks except for those on Portmill Lane where they would look to relocate the machines to address this problem.
- The project had been delivered within budget.
- The cost of relocating the machines would be negotiated with the contractor if necessary as they had been assured that the new machines would perform.
- Industrial strength SIM cards had already been introduced to all machines to improve their connectivity, however, this had not improved the connectivity at the Portmill Lane car parks. As such, a modem and router had been trialled but this had only caused more signal dropouts.
- In response, antennas had been installed onto the machines to test their signal and they would be advised of the outcome in due course.
- Further solutions would be prepared by the contractor if this was unsuccessful.
- Flowbird UK were a reputable contractor and had rolled out the check-in, check-out system across other local authority car parks.
- If a machine was out of order, it would display a message to use an alternative machine and CEOs could also display physical notices.
- Signage had been budgeted for within the project.
- Costs for solutions to the problems experienced had not been discussed with the contractor.
- New signage for blue badge holders had been displayed as near to disabled bays as possible and there was also information on the Council website on this.
- As long as a user could identify the car park they had used and provide proof of payment, this could be cross checked through the system and allow a PCN to be cancelled, even if a significant VRM error had been made.
- An Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) CCTV system had been investigated but due to the small size of their car parks, this system had been deemed to be too expensive.
- They would speak to the contractor about attaching covers over the touchscreens to help with visibility in sunlight.

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

- They were working with the Legal Team to resolve the agreement with Knebworth Parish Council on the subsidy for the 30-minute free parking tariff in St Martin's Road Car Park.
- Decisions on PCN challenges were made by officers in the back office rather than CEOs who merely enforced parking infractions.
- The PCN challenge process was managed by the Customer Directorate, but the increase in the number of challenges would be investigated.

There were no points made as part of the debate.

Councillor Jon Clayden proposed and Councillor David Chalmers seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee noted the Quarter 1 update of the Pay on Exit Parking Project.

REASON FOR DECISION: This report is following the request of the Committee for an update on the Pay on Exit Parking Project and to provide a comparison between 2025/26 Quarter 1 and 2024/25 Quarter 1 parking transaction figures and the number of Penalty Charge Notices issued per car park.

23 PRESENTATION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION

Audio recording – 1 hour 47 minutes 39 seconds

Councillor Laura Williams, as Executive Member for Local Government Reorganisation/Devolution, and the Chief Executive provided a presentation entitled 'Update on Local Government Reorganisation Progress' and advised that:

- Local authorities in Hertfordshire would merge into unitary authorities.
- The Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process was currently in stage two which would involve a submission to central government on how the current authorities would like LGR to take place in Hertfordshire. This stage would conclude in late November.
- Principles on working together had been agreed by the Leaders and Chief Executives of all twelve authorities including the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Commissioner.
- An interim submission document detailing the outline proposals on behalf of Hertfordshire was submitted on 21 March to allow the Government to check-in on their progress relating to LGR.
- Two sets of parallel work were undertaken by district, borough and county councils as well as districts and borough councils on their own, but the decision had been made that it would be better for a single set of work to be carried out.
- The Governance structure adopted in March would operate until the November submission date, after which, there would be an opportunity to change this again.
- Hertfordshire Leaders Group meetings took place fortnightly, and the Chief Executive Co-ordinating Group met weekly.
- There was a Programme Management Office with Project Managers to ensure workstreams stayed on track and that information was fed back to Leaders via Chief Executives.
- North Herts were represented on every workstream by a Director or Senior Manager within the Council.
- The Service Design work stream had five co-leading Chief Executives and North Herts represented one of these.
- The Director – Customers was leading the Technology work stream.
- The Programme Board had three Chief Executives who represented Labour, Liberal Democrat and Conservative led authorities.
- Three work streams (Horizon 1, 2 and 3) with different deadlines had been created.
- Horizon 1 was for the November submission document where the initial effort would be focused, but this would reduce in early October once the document had been finalised.
- Horizon 2 involved transition planning and setting up the unitary authorities before launch day on 1 April 2028. Work on this was already underway but would increase after work on Horizon 1 had dropped off and would peak before the unitary authorities went live.
- Horizon 3 was focused on ambition and vision which would be detailed within the submission document, however, it would be up to the unitary authorities and strategic authority to adopt their own council plans and strategies once they were formed, therefore, the effort on this workstream would be low until then.

- The submission document would be drafted in October using the stakeholder engagement data gathered in September.
- Workstreams on Services and Finance were key for the submission document.
- A Member briefing on LGR had been delivered.
- Stakeholder engagement in September would take place through staff conference sessions and Community Forum meetings where Hertfordshire County Councillors would also be present.
- Stakeholders were also being directed to online assets relating to LGR including a feedback form.
- After seeking advice, King's Counsel indicated that discretion sat with the Executive to decide on the model preference, however, it was recognised that all Members should have the opportunity to debate on the issue, therefore, an Extraordinary Council meeting had been scheduled before Cabinet made the final decision on the matter on 19 November.
- Having a consistent submission from all eleven councils with the same recommendations would be desirable.
- The Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) had informed them that each authority could only choose one option as their preference, however, it was also possible to express no preference at all.
- Options for two, three or four unitary authorities would either be attached as appendices to the submission document or be embedded within.
- The Secretary of State (SOS) would decide the outcome of LGR, not the local authorities.
- They had asked MHCLG Civil Servants for more specific dates than what had already been provided by the SOS on 24 July.
- After submission, the Government would decide which options would be put forward to statutory consultation.
- Statutory consultation could be launched after the New Year and close after local elections in May 2026.
- It was speculated that the Government would announce which proposal it would implement before summer recess in 2026.
- Deadlines were tight, therefore, they would start the transition work before the Government had made their decision.
- Secondary legislation that would set out the ward boundaries, number of councillors, electoral cycles and the predecessor authorities could go to Parliament for decision after summer recess in 2026.
- Elections to the shadow unitary authorities would happen on 6 May 2027.
- Power for the shadow unitary authorities to make decisions needed to be in place so that a constitution, financial regulations and budgets could be adopted before the unitary authorities went live.
- New authorities needed to be safe and legal as a minimum to go live.
- There would be engagement with Leaders on how much transformation and ambition could be delivered upfront and as part of the transition programme.
- There could be benefits with better services and savings being found sooner, however, they would have to balance risks with opportunities as they would not want to harm already vulnerable residents.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Sadie Billing

- Councillor Claire Winchester

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant, as the Deputy Leader, advised that she could not comment on how Cabinet would decide on the LGR submission document in November.

In response to questions, the Chief Executive advised that:

- There was a pressure to balance the delivery of day-to-day Council services as usual, work towards the submission document, and the desire of the administration to achieve what they could before North Herts ceased to exist.
- Some officers would see LGR as an opportunity to retire early, however, lots of officers would still want to work and they would be reviewing their Workforce Strategy to support them through uncertainty and put them in the best possible position to retain their roles after LGR.
- Consultants had supported the consultation process and would analyse the data to provide results for Hertfordshire as a whole and individual areas to allow comparisons. It had not been determined how this would be shared but this would be discussed with other authorities to ensure a consistent approach.
- There was no template for the submission document, however authorities in Hertfordshire wanted to raise a single submission which would have a spine document detailing the common proposals with mini proposals for each option underneath.
- Within the executive summary of the submission, they would detail which authorities supported each option.
- Communication professionals and graphic designers would help to make the submission document persuasive, visually attractive and reflective of Hertfordshire.
- The presentation slides would be made available to Members on The GrowZone as well as the slides that were presented at the Member briefing.
- An Extraordinary Council meeting had been organised to discuss the submission document because LGR was of great interest to Members.
- The submission document would be made public as soon as it was published.
- Models for how LGR would look would not be made available to the public prior to this due to the pace at which they were working.
- The Government would have the final decision on the unitary authority structure, however, it would be possible for them to challenge the decision via Judicial Review.
- The Government could go against the preferences set out by the majority of local authorities in the submission document if they could justify their decision.
- Consultation would be based on principles rather than detail due to proposals that would have to be made on assumptions.
- It was speculated that the Government Executive would decide on the legislation for LGR that would also be voted on in Parliament.
- There had been no suggestions that the elections in 2026 would be postponed as per conversation with MHCLG.
- The scheduled district and borough council elections in 2027 would be cancelled and replaced by elections to the shadow authorities.
- No clarity had been provided by the Government on the timeline for creation of a strategic authority and as such, they were discussing the potential to include a proposal for this to be created on the same timeline as the unitary authorities within the submission document.
- They had not decided how the submission document would address electoral boundaries and constituency changes.
- Elections for shadow unitary authorities would be determined by the Government in terms of the structural changes order that would include the number of councillors and ward boundaries and more.

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that there were many uncertainties relating to finances and LGR, therefore, the finance model was constantly changing but would be finalised for the submission document in October.

The Chair thanked Councillor Laura Williams and the Chief Executive for their presentation.

N.B. Following the conclusion of this item, there was a break in proceedings and the meeting reconvened at 22.15. During the break Councillor Martin Prescott left the Chamber and did not return.

24 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Audio recording – 2 hours 45 minutes 44 seconds

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report entitled 'Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2025-26' and advised that:

- Members should contact the Scrutiny Officer, Chair or Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee if they wished to raise an item for the Work Programme and a form to aid this process was in development.
- Detailed explanations on deferrals to the Museum Storage Update and North Herts Town Centres Strategy items could be found in the published supplement.
- The S106 Task and Finish Group met on 16 July to draft consultation questions. These had since been compiled into questionnaires and would be circulated to stakeholders.
- A further meeting would be held with Strategic Planning Officers on Tuesday 30 September to address questions on scope and S106 obligations.
- The Local Government Association Peer Review had been removed from the report as all actions on this had been completed.
- The Decisions and Monitoring Tracker had not been included in the report as there were no decisions to monitor at this meeting.

Councillor Ralph Muncer noted that due to advice to delay stakeholder consultation, it would be more appropriate for the S106 Task and Finish Group to present their report to the Committee meeting in February rather than January.

The Chair highlighted the following:

- The update from the Director on Health Equalities could be deferred to the meeting on 6 January 2026 as it was not a time critical item.
- It would be feasible to postpone the item on Environmental Health to the Committee meeting in January.
- Given the volume of business, 2-3 items scheduled for the Committee meeting on 11 November would need to be postponed or deferred.

In response to points raised by the Chair, the Director – Resources advised that:

- The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) item could be deferred as consultation needed to take place on this before changes were made.
- As part of Local Government Reorganisation, future CTRS timelines would be changed to align with other authorities once it was known which authorities would be grouped together to form the new unitary authorities.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Ralph Muncer

In response to questions, the Chair advised that:

- The North Herts Town Centres Strategy would be presented at the meeting in November.
- The Museum Storage Update did not have a deadline for decision, therefore, it could be postponed to a future meeting.

In response to questions, Councillor Jon Clayden advised that they did not have the data related to the waste contract change yet, therefore, it would be better to delay discussion on this until the relevant data was available.

In response to questions, the Scrutiny Officer advised that they would contact the Director – Environment to investigate the availability of data from the waste contractor.

In response to questions, Councillor Paul Ward advised that the waste contractor might be operating under a normal regime once the six-monthly review was due in February.

In response to advice, Councillor Ralph Muncer highlighted that bin collections impacted all residents, therefore they should be reviewing this sooner to bring positive change to the service.

Councillor David Chalmers highlighted the following:

- Hertfordshire Constabulary had decided to withdraw all visible support for LGBT Pride events in Hertfordshire which was of real concern at a time when trust amongst the LGBT community with the police was not at its strongest, therefore, questions should be put to the Police on hate crime when the Crime and Disorder Matters item was considered at the Committee.
- The Committee should request an update on recent crime against the LGBT community in Hitchin.
- They should also request how their decision to withdraw support had correlated with the community as they were one of the first police forces in the country to come to this decision.

In response to points raised by Councillor David Chalmers, Councillor Ralph Muncer noted that:

- They needed to consider the appropriateness to discuss this issue at the Committee as this policy would have been taken at headquarters rather than a local level, therefore, it would be more appropriate for this to be asked at a Police and Crime Panel meeting where the Police and Crime Commissioner and Chief Constable could be held to account.
- However, local issues should be discussed and they could look at the existing community work by the Constabulary and how they could build relationships with the Council, its councillors and officers.

In response to points raised by Councillor Ralph Muncer, Councillor Jon Clayden detailed that the decision affected residents everywhere but perhaps the scope could be broadened to look at all hate crimes.

In response to points raised by Councillor Ralph Muncer, Councillor David Chalmers advised that the decision taken would impact the community and they should ask questions on their behalf.

In response to points raised, Councillor Claire Winchester advised that they had until January to submit questions to the Police on this.

Councillor Paul Ward highlighted that burglaries in the form of organised crime had taken place in the district, therefore, it would be useful for the Police to speak about organised gang crimes relating to burglaries and other crimes.

Councillor Sadie Billing highlighted that they should look at crime trends and how those compared with the previous year.

Councillor David Chalmers highlighted that cybercrime against elderly residents should be discussed.

Councillor Ralph Muncer advised that they should decide on a few topics to ensure that depth on each topic was not sacrificed.

Councillor David Chalmers put forward crime against the LGBT community district as the main topic to discuss with the Police.

Councillor Tina Bhartwas suggested for antisocial behaviour in the context of vulnerable residents in social housing to be discussed.

Councillor Sadie Billing suggested to have LGBT related issues as the main topic of discussion but to request written responses on other topics that had been raised.

Councillor Tina Bhartwas proposed and Councillor David Chalmers 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, suggests a list of items to be considered at its meetings in the coming civic year.

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 10.46 pm

Chair