

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 11TH NOVEMBER, 2025 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Claire Winchester (Chair), Jon Clayden (Vice-Chair), Sadie Billing, David Chalmers, Elizabeth Dennis, Ralph Muncer, Martin Prescott and Caroline McDonnell.*

In Attendance: *Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Sarah Kingsley (Director - Environment), James Lees (Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Jeanette Lowden (Shared Service Manager - Waste & Recycling), Jeevan Mann (Scrutiny Officer), Louise Randall (Leisure and Active Communities Manager) and Louise Symes (Strategic Planning and Projects Manager).*

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

Councillor Amy Allen, as Executive Member for Environment, Councillor Val Bryant as Executive Member for Customer Experience, Councillor Donna Wright as Executive Member for Place, Mark Leahy as Regional Contract Manager for Everyone Active, and Illana Shaw as Divisional Head of Municipal Operations for Veolia, were in attendance.

25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 37 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tina Bhartwas, Cathy Brownjoh, Dominic Griffiths, Paul Ward and Daniel Wright-Mason.

Having given due notice, Councillor Caroline McDonnell substituted for Councillor Ward.

26 MINUTES - 9 SEPTEMBER 2025

Audio Recording – 1 minute 53 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 9 September be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

27 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 35 seconds

There was no other business notified.

28 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 40 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 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.
- (5) The Chair advised of a change to the Agenda order and following Agenda Item 8, the remaining items would be considered in the following order: Agenda Item 11, Agenda Item 12, Agenda Item 10, Agenda Item 13 and Agenda Item 9.

29 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 19 seconds

There was no public participation at this meeting.

30 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 26 seconds

No urgent or general exception items were received.

31 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 28 seconds

There have been no called-in items.

32 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 34 seconds

No questions had been submitted by Members.

33 INFORMATION NOTE: MOBILISATION OF WASTE, RECYCLING AND STREET CLEANSING CONTRACT

Audio recording – 4 minutes 40 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen, as Executive Member for Environment presented the Information Note entitled 'Mobilisation of Waste, Recycling and Street Cleansing Contract' and advised that:

- The report provided a focused overview of the new waste collection services and highlighted issues encountered, resolutions implemented and next steps.

- The new service had a strategic aim to reduce waste and increase recycling which early indicators had confirmed so far.
- Apologies were given to residents who had experienced disruptions from the initial service rollout due to route optimisation delays, missed collections, bin configurations and service frequency.
- System refinements, training and strengthened public communications had been administered to address these issues which included the launch of a new waste app.
- Next steps would focus on the stabilisation of service delivery, enhancement of service performance and monitoring of resident engagement to support long-term behaviour changes.
- Lessons learned from the new contract would inform future improvements.
- The Waste Team, Customer and Digital Services Team, Communications Team and Veolia had all been instrumental in the success of the service change.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Caroline McDonnell
- Councillor Sadie Billing

In response to questions, the Shared Service Manager – Waste & Recycling advised that:

- After operational problems were experienced with the merger of the narrow rounds across East Herts and North Herts, the decision was taken to split the rounds back to their original routes and recruit additional experienced crew members which generated some initial improvements.
- Information was also gathered from residents and Members on specific collection points to add to the Veolia account management system.
- Customer complaints regarding missed collections were forwarded directly to Veolia who generated tickets for their crews to follow up on the following day.
- Waste and recycling data shown in the report was for both East Herts and North Herts but this could be separated by district and provided after the meeting.
- Data trends looked positive so far, however, they would need to go through more data cycles to confirm this.
- Since the rollout, both food and cardboard waste had increased in North Herts due to behavioural changes created by the new three-weekly collections.
- Seasonal changes in waste would be seen once the waste contract had been operational for at least a year.
- Comparisons could be made with garden waste and food waste last year as they were still collected bi-weekly and weekly respectively, however, it was acknowledged that weather variations between years would affect this data, particularly for garden waste.
- A further increase in food waste would be targeted through increased communications to residents before Christmas.
- Problems with street cleanliness in Barley would be addressed.
- Litter bin removals had been carried out across the district after an audit had taken place, however, a visit to Barley could be arranged to investigate litter bins.
- Missed litter bin collections in Letchworth could be due to personnel change or sickness but this issue would be investigated.
- Limited resources in the Waste Team had prevented them from updating communal bin labelling prior to the service change, however, additional staff members had been recruited to deliver revised communal leaflets and implement stickering.

- Veolia recently initiated a housing association forum in North and East Herts and there were plans to increase the uptake by holding the next meeting virtually.
- Veolia had a good relationship with Settle who distributed materials to residents on their behalf.
- Settle also held skip days for its residents which council officers endeavoured to attend.
- A Waste Communications Officer would progress communication with residents and housing associations once recruited.
- Collection problems from hybrid properties that consisted of both residential and commercial facilities had been resolved but if any further problems arose, Members should flag these to the Waste Team.
- Data mapping for the new bin deliveries was done in conjunction with Veolia and they were delivered to residents before the service change.
- All undelivered bins due to mismatched data had now been delivered but requests to replace damaged and lost bins were ongoing.
- Lessons learned from route nuances would be captured by the waste management system and help to advise any potential future service changes.
- Crews checked off whole roads when making collections except in the case of assisted collections and properties which were on the hotspot list and both required manual intervention.
- Unforeseen turnover of contract officers had overwhelmed the team slightly due to lost knowledge, however, remaining members of the Waste Team had been adaptable in their roles to support others when a refocus of priorities had been required.
- A new Contracts Manager would start in December and recruitment for a Service Performance and Projects Officer would begin imminently.
- The entire EV refuse vehicle fleet was anticipated to be operational by the end of December.
- Refuse vehicles using Hydrogenated Vegetable Oil were already in use.
- Call surges in March were due to the garden waste subscription renewal.
- The increased fraction of cardboard and food waste was being recycled.
- Shortages of bins and caddies had been experienced early into the service change, however, additional stock had since been purchased and distributed to residents.
- Once more data had been captured, it would be internally reviewed to measure the success of the service change.

In response to questions, the Divisional Head of Municipal Operations for Veolia advised that:

- Initially, support crews were drafted in to rectify missed collections but normal crews were switched onto this duty to build knowledge, create ownership and enforce accountability.
- Missed bins had not always been collected the next day at the start of the rollout, however, this had sometimes been due to issues beyond their control such as road closures.
- Residents should not be reluctant to make Veolia aware of issues as resolving them would help to deliver services that residents deserved.
- Where a change of this scale occurred, a lessons learned exercise would always be carried out.
- While there had been issues with the service change, there had been less than expected.
- They had not been able to utilise all staff from the previous waste services operator.
- Once the service change had stabilised, there would be more time to scrutinise data and implement changes where nuances had been picked up.
- False collection logging was a training issue and they actively addressed this through vehicle camera monitoring and retraining where applicable.

The Chair thanked Councillor Amy Allen and officers for their participation.

34 LEISURE AND ACTIVE COMMUNITIES CONTRACT YEAR ONE OVERVIEW

Audio recording – 1 hour 4 minutes 1 second

Councillor Amy Allen, as Executive Member for Environment, presented the report entitled 'Leisure and Active Communities Contract Year One Overview' and advised that:

- The first year of the Leisure and Active Communities contract with Everyone Active had been successfully delivered.
- Initial challenges during mobilisation around booking systems and operational policies had been resolved as users had adapted to new procedures.
- Year one had seen substantial capital investment by both Everyone Active and the Council which included pool safety upgrades, gym refurbishments and facility improvements to ensure modern, customer-focused environments.
- Performance monitoring from year one would service as a data baseline, as data recorded by the previous operator was not directly comparable.
- Year two data would also be incomparable due to temporary closures resulting from decarbonisation works.
- £460,632 had been delivered in social value which signified 13.31% of progress to date.
- The Active Communities programme to promote physical activity inclusion and health improvements had been launched successfully.
- The new agency agreement effective May 2025 was expected to improve the VAT position of the Council and deliver £270,000 of surplus with no visible impact on services for customers.

The Regional Contract Manager for Everyone Active provided Members with a visual presentation of the services delivered in year one of the contract, between April 2024 to March 2025.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Sadie Billing
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis

In response to questions, the Regional Contract Manager for Everyone Active advised that:

- Membership discounts based on geographical proximity to centres was not currently being considered.
- It would be impossible to offer free memberships to all those with disabilities, however, they would take comments on board about expanding their free membership scheme.
- 95% of their staff had worked for Stevenage Leisure Limited (SLL) previously, and anecdotal feedback from them indicated that facilities had been a lot busier than they had been under the previous contractor.
- Everyone Active were transparent on their decision making and data collection.
- Programmes were constantly reviewed to see what worked well.
- Marketing for their active communities programmes was significant, however, it was acknowledged that the best marketing came from word of mouth and referrals from friends.
- They were proactive when receiving customer complaints and engaged with the Council where necessary on these.

- Capacity of weekend sessions at North Herts Leisure Centre had been reduced due to limited access to changing facilities which had in turn helped to manage vehicle access while a portion of the car park had been closed for decarbonisation works.
- It was difficult to signpost residents to alternative swimming pools during closures, however, they managed several sports halls and diverted residents to those in Baldock, Stevenage and Central Bedfordshire where possible.
- Good communication had been maintained with regular hirers ahead of closures.
- Green travel plans were in place across all their sites.

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

- It would only be possible to compare individual metrics such as swim memberships with the data from SLL.
- The social value from the contract was monitored through the portal.
- The closure of changing facilities in the winter had not been ideal. However, the only alternative would have been to close pools completely which would have resulted in a significant loss of income and increased dissatisfaction from residents.
- It was accepted that some adults would not want to use pools during the changing room closure, however, it seemed that sessions for children had been largely unaffected.
- Once the changing facilities were reopened, they would push communications to encourage attendance at Family Fun sessions.

The Chair summarised discussions and outlined that the breadth of qualitative and quantitative data records should be retained by Everyone Active, and that concerns from residents should be listened to.

Councillor Jon Clayden proposed and Councillor Sadie Billing seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee noted and commented on the Leisure and Active Communities Contract performance for 2024/25.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to scrutinise year one of the Leisure and Active Communities contract.

35 NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DRAFT TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

Audio recording – 1 hour 58 minutes 12 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place presented the report entitled 'Draft Town Centres Strategy' and advised that:

- The adopted Local Plan 2011-2031 required the Council to prepare and maintain up-to-date town centre strategies to support their strategic policy approach and respond to any changes since the Local Plan evidence base was first prepared.
- Since the Local Plan adoption, online shopping had continued to increase, and pressures from the cost of living and COVID-19 pandemic had also impacted town centres.
- The Council wanted town centres in North Herts to be welcoming and vibrant for residents.
- An overarching Town Centres Strategy had been prepared with consultants from Lichfields as seen at Appendix A to the report.
- Moving to an overarching model instead of four distinct town centre strategies had saved officer resources and time which had helped the Council to manage speculative planning applications through the Local Plan review period.

- Cross-cutting planning-based thematic policies to guide development and key investment priorities tailored to the needs of each town centre had been identified within the strategy.
- The strategy would act as a bridge between the Local Plan and its future review and would also provide guidance for developers and planning officers when developing and determining planning applications.
- Key Priorities within the Council Plan would be supported through the strategy.
- Other Council strategies such as the Economic Development and Sustainability strategies as well as the Churchgate Shopping Centre Regeneration project would also be linked with the strategy.
- Proposals in the strategy would differ to those in the Local Plan which meant that it would be adopted as a material planning consideration for relevant planning applications rather than as a supplementary planning document.
- The strategy would also ensure that plans for town centres continued to be carried out through the Local Government Reorganisation process.
- The document had been divided into four sections with the third section focused on the strengths and weaknesses of each town centre and the fourth section on further actions that the Council could consider to effectively deliver the ambitions within the strategy.
- Formal consultation would also be carried out with key stakeholders and partners and feedback from this would shape a clear, action-focused delivery plan in the final version of the strategy which would be regularly reviewed and updated.
- Initial drafts of the strategy had been reviewed by the Strategic Planning Board and the Political Liaison Board had reviewed the final draft in October.
- Subject to Cabinet approval, the strategy would be issued for public consultation in late 2025 with the final version anticipated for presentation in early 2026.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis

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

- As part of the Town Centre Retail Study review, a residential telephone survey was undertaken which also included businesses.
- Workshops were also carried out with key businesses and Business Improvement District (BID) Managers to inform the strengths and weaknesses of each town centre in addition to the key priorities.
- Key stakeholders and businesses would be consulted again as part of the wider public consultation.
- The number of businesses engaged, and the location of these, in the Retail Study would be provided after the meeting.
- The strategy would guide developers on development in town centres and allow them to use the evidence base outlined in the first section as justification for developments going forward.
- Consultants from Lichfields engaged with Royston First BID and the Chief Officer from Royston Town Council and they would continue to work with them to raise the profile of the consultation in Royston to encourage more feedback.
- The strategy aimed to address active travel while recognising vehicle use, however, it was acknowledged that modal shift to active travel would take time.
- They would work to implement measures such as the Walking and Infrastructure Plan to improve links within town centres and improve links between rural villages and town centres using S106 contributions and working with Hertfordshire County Council.

- Protection of Public Realm was referenced in the strategy through measures such as the promotion of community facilities.

In response to questions, Councillor Donna Wright advised that:

- Placemaker would be used in the consultation phase to enable readers to interact with the sections of the strategy that were of interest to them.
- New information was contained within the strategy rather than it being a summary of the sources cited within, particularly in the third section.
- Community and culture within the Public Realm were referenced in the strategy, however, if stakeholders felt that they needed enhancing, they would be able to express their views on this through the consultation.
- Parking in town centres would be looked into as part of the Parking Strategy review, particularly in Hitchin where they would investigate underutilised car parks as part of the Churchgate project.
- The glossary within the strategy was currently a draft and would be expanded over time.

Councillor Jon Clayden suggested that signposting on page 44 of the Draft Town Centres Strategy should be expanded, particularly for residents who might be interested in reading the document.

Councillor Martin Prescott noted that public transport was limited in the villages surrounding Royston, therefore, sufficient parking in the town centre was vital to attract residents and help town centre businesses, who would otherwise be impacted by larger businesses on the outskirts of the town where car parking was more available.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis noted that lessons could be learned from Baldock Town Centre which encouraged active travel over vehicle use and was successful with this despite having surrounding villages. It was also noted that the community use of Public Realm spaces in Baldock should be protected within the strategy.

The Chair summarised discussions and outlined that two concerns raised by Members were that the community and value aspects of retaining public realms in town centres was important in the strategy and that consideration should be given to travel to town centres, as well as parking in the centres.

Councillor Martin Prescott proposed and Councillor David Chalmers seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That the draft Town Centres Strategy (attached as Appendix A to this report) and its associated Appendices be endorsed and approved for public consultation.
- (2) That delegated authority is granted to the Director – Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Place to make any minor non-material corrections, including but not limited to cosmetic additions or presentational alterations, to the draft Town Centres Strategy as considered necessary for the public consultation.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

- (1) To allow the draft Town Centres Strategy to be progressed to public consultation so that it may be developed and eventually adopted as a material planning consideration to support developers, landowners and relevant stakeholders when considering developing proposals and to provide policy advice to development management officers when determining planning applications until superseded by any new Local Plan.

- (2) To set key priorities which seek to maintain and enhance the unique character and vitality and viability of the district's four town centres through agreed partnership working.
- (3) To reinforce and deliver the Council's ambitions as set out in the Council Plan (2024 - 2028).

36 SOLAR FOR BUSINESS SCHEME

Audio recording – 2 hours 32 minutes 3 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen, as Executive Member for Environment, presented the report entitled 'Solar for Business Project Closure Report' and advised that:

- The report provided an overview of the project closure and lessons learned from the Solar for Business pilot project.
- Despite efforts, it had not been possible to put legal agreements in place with any businesses to deliver solar installations on commercial premises.
- As detailed in paragraph 7 of the report, the scheme was modelled on a successful scheme operated by West Suffolk Council.
- Paragraphs 7.7 and 7.9 outlined the targeted outreach to large businesses and commercial premises with high electricity use.
- Interest was attracted from 22 businesses and 7 were shortlisted, however, some were removed due to short leases or lack of financial return for the Council.
- 3 businesses proceeded to negotiate, however, they withdrew due to reasons surrounding savings versus installation costs, the proposed lease and practical issues.
- After their withdrawal, the decision was taken to discontinue the pilot project and prioritise other projects with key climate actions instead.
- Paragraph 8 outlined delivery constraints of the scheme and lessons learned.
- One lesson learned was that businesses were more willing to invest directly in solar technology due to the falling price of solar panels.
- Feedback from the project was used to inform the Sustainable Communities Grant which was open to businesses and community groups.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Sadie Billing

In response to questions, the Climate Change & Sustainability Project Manager advised that:

- Just over £8,000 of funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund had been spent on the project and the remaining funding had been reallocated to other projects since its closure.
- Officer time on the project had mainly been his, but officers from Legal, Policy & Strategy and Procurement had also spent time on the project.
- The scheme entailed the Council undertaking solar installations on the roofs of business premises in return for a reduced rate on electricity produced by the solar panels through a long-term power purchase agreement.
- Pricing and leases offered to businesses had been similar to those offered by West Suffolk Council and other authorities in the market.

- Template leases developed during the project had the potential to be used with in the future.
- Interest had not been expressed by any businesses that occupied council owned buildings, however, this could be revisited when tenancies were up for renewal.
- Economies of Scale might have been achieved through the bulk buying of solar panels if multiple businesses had signed up, however, they would have been achieved primarily through the installation on larger roofs, where the price per kilowatt installed would have been less.
- Great effort had been put into engagement with the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, Business Improvement Districts and business groups.
- A business target list had been built for the scheme using business rate lists and through communication with their Estates Team.
- Interest had been received from smaller businesses through the general release of the scheme, however, they were not deemed to be financially suitable for the scheme.
- Feedback from businesses who declined the scheme indicated that businesses were more interested in purchasing the solar panels directly, or through funding from grant schemes and other sources, which had been a contributing factor to the work undertaken on the Sustainable Communities Grant.
- Further work would undertaken to help businesses to reduce their emissions.

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

- The project closure was due to the inability to reach arrangements with suitable businesses that would generate sufficient financial return, as well as contribute towards their climate change goals.
- It was decided that officer time would be better spent on the delivery of other actions within the Sustainability Strategy, as they would have a greater impact.
- The Council had no regrets in piloting the scheme as they had gained valuable insights and limited their financial exposure before making any commitments.
- Business engagement would be looked at going forward to deliver wider sustainability goals across the district.
- The scheme had been managed in line with Council project management framework.
- Officer time spent on the scheme had been funded through existing budgets and had not been recorded as the Council did not record officer time in this way for any projects.

In response to questions, Councillor Amy Allen advised that lack of effort from officers had not been the reason behind the closure of the project.

Councillor Martin Prescott noted that business communication networks such as the Royston Chamber of Commerce existed and could have been utilised in the outreach phase to businesses. He also highlighted that 5-year asset leases for solar panels with reasonable payback terms existed and therefore businesses would have found the 25-year lease offered unattractive.

Councillor Jon Clayden proposed and Councillor Sadie Billing seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and noted the findings of the Solar for Business Project Closure Report (Appendix A).

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Committee to scrutinise the reasons for closure of the project.

37 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Audio recording – 3 hours 7 minutes 54 seconds

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

- Work Programme updates were now published monthly in MIS and included a link to a work programme suggestion form.
- The item on Crime and Disorder Matters at the next meeting would focus on crime against the LGBTQ+ community and cybercrime against elderly residents.
- All Work Programme details could be found in Appendix A to the report.
- A Task and Finish Group meeting took place on 30 September with Senior Planning Officers to address questions regarding scope and S106 obligations.
- The consultation on developer contributions had been extended to 20 November to allow parish councils more time to respond.
- Another Task and Finish Group meeting would take place later in the week to identify themes from the responses in the consultation and to form next steps.
- There had been one open referral on the decisions and monitoring log which had been accepted by Cabinet at the meeting on 23 September.

The Chair outlined that an email had been circulated to all Members of the Council to draw their attention to the work programme suggestion form, through which Members could suggest items for scrutiny input.

Councillor Ralph Muncer noted the High Court Case with the Chief Constable of Northumbria Police and Northern Pride and suggested that Members should consider this in relation to the Crime and Disorder Matters item at the next meeting.

Councillor Sadie Billing proposed and Councillor Jon Clayden seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee prioritises 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 10.13 pm

Chair