

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



26 January 2026

Our Ref Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3
February 2026
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To: Members of the Committee: Councillors Claire Winchester (Chair), Jon Clayden (Vice-Chair), Tina Bhartwas, Sadie Billing, Cathy Brownjohn, David Chalmers, Elizabeth Dennis, Dominic Griffiths, Ralph Muncer, Martin Prescott, Paul Ward and Daniel Wright-Mason

Substitutes: Councillors Matt Barnes, Sam Collins, Sarah Lucas, Caroline McDonnell, Vijaiya Poopalasingham and Claire Strong

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

to be held in the

**COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERON
ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF**

On

TUESDAY, 3RD FEBRUARY, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

Yours sincerely,

Isabelle Alajooz
Director – Governance

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Agenda **Part I**

Item		Page
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	Members are required to notify any substitutions by midday on the day of the meeting. Late substitutions will not be accepted and Members attending as a substitute without having given the due notice will not be able to take part in the meeting.	
2. MINUTES - 6 JANUARY 2026	To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 6 January 2026.	(Pages 5 - 18)
3. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS	Members should notify the Chair of other business which they wish to be discussed at the end of either Part I or Part II business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency. The Chair will decide whether any item(s) raised will be considered.	
4. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS	Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.	
5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION	To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public.	
6. URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS	The Chair to report on any urgent or general exception items which required their agreement. At the time of printing the agenda, the Chair had not agreed any urgent or general exception items.	

7. CALLED-IN ITEMS

To consider any matters referred to the Committee for a decision in relation to a call-in of decision. At the time of printing the agenda, no items of business had been called-in.

8. MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

To receive and respond to any questions from Members either set out in the agenda or tabled at the meeting.

**9. LGA CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE FOLLOW UP
REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

(Pages
19 - 52)

The Council undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) between 4 and 7 November 2024, where we were visited by a peer team supported by the Local Government Association. The peer team produced a feedback report, which was reported to Cabinet on 14 January 2025. Subsequently an Action Plan was developed to respond to the recommendations and was approved by Cabinet on 23 March 2025, with an update on progress reported to Cabinet on 23 September 2025. The peer team undertook a one day follow up visit on 15 December 2025 and have issued a follow up report, which is attached at Appendix A.

**10. ENTERPRISE PORTFOLIO UPDATE
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – ENTERPRISE**

(Pages
53 - 72)

To provide the committee with an update on the progress of the Enterprise Directorate.

**11. LOCAL PLAN REVIEW
REPORT OF THE INTERIM STRATEGIC PLANNING MANAGER**

(Pages
73 - 78)

This report provides an overview of the new plan-making system. A Cabinet report on 20 January 2026 sought delegated powers for the submission of a formal notice of the intention of the Council to start preparing a new Local Plan under the new system as well as publish a revised Local Plan timetable.

**12. OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME
REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER**

(Pages
79 - 94)

This report highlights items scheduled in the work programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2025-26 civic year. It also includes items that have not yet been assigned to a specific meeting of the Committee.

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Public Document Pack Agenda Item 2

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, 6TH JANUARY, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

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

In Attendance: *Anne Banner (Benefits Manager), Faith Churchill (Democratic Services Apprentice), Steve Cobb (Licensing and Community Safety Manager), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Jeevan Mann (Scrutiny Officer) and Robert Orchard (Culture and Facilities Services Manager).*

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

Councillor Ian Albert as Executive Member for Resources, Councillor Mick Debenham as Executive Member for Regulatory, and Councillor Tamsin Thomas as Executive member for Enterprise were in attendance.

Chief Inspector Sarah Gilbertson, Police Sergeant Taranvir Gill and Police Constable Lewis Thompson from Hertfordshire Constabulary were also in attendance.

38 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 29 seconds

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

Having given due notice, Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham substituted for Councillor Wright-Mason.

39 MINUTES - 11 NOVEMBER 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 11 November be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

40 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 30 seconds

There was no other business notified.

41 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 34 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.

42 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 42 seconds

There was no public participation at this meeting.

43 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 46 seconds

No urgent or general exception items were received.

44 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 50 seconds

There had been no called-in items.

45 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 54 seconds

No questions had been submitted by Members.

46 CRIME AND DISORDER MATTERS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 2 seconds

CI Sarah Gilbertson, PS Taranvir Gill and PC Lewis Thompson from Hertfordshire Constabulary gave a presentation on crime against the LGBTQ+ Community in North Herts and advised that:

- North Herts Police comprised the Response Team which dealt primarily with 999 calls and the Neighbourhood Team which worked with the public and external partners like the Council to set long-term neighbourhood priorities and needs.
- There were four Police Sergeants in the Neighbourhood Team assigned to Royston, Letchworth, Hitchin and the Community Safety Unit, which addressed hate crime.
- A High Court ruling in 2025 deemed participation of Northumbria Police at the Newcastle Pride Parade to be unlawful as it breached the Police duty of impartiality. Because of

this, Hertfordshire Constabulary had undertaken an assessment of how they supported the community at events.

- Tackling inequality and discrimination remained priorities for them, however, they would not be able to actively participate in events going forward.
- They had attended North Herts Pride Day to give advice on safeguarding, reporting hate crime and to have general engagement with the public.
- They met regularly with the LGBTQ+ Society at North Herts College to gain an understanding of issues among the younger generation. The meetings were also used to provide students and teachers with more information on reporting hate crimes and how their investigations were carried out.
- Presentations had also been given to schools to address specific issues when reported.
- There had been a 12.9% increase in hate crime reported across North Herts in 2025 compared to the previous year. It was speculated that this was partly due to their increased engagement with the community on reporting hate crimes.
- A spike in hate crime reports during the summer months was thought to be due to more outdoor social activities and events taking place at that time of year.
- There had also been an increase in non-crime hate incident reports in 2025 on the previous year. However, 11.5% less hate crime incidents had been solved compared to the previous year.

The following Members asked questions:

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

In response to questions, Hertfordshire Constabulary representatives advised that:

- Non-crime hate incidents would continue to be recorded until they received further guidance that stated otherwise.
- Public trust and confidence were key to support the LGBTQ+ Community, hence why they had an officer that was focused on hate crime within their team.
- Increases in hate crime reporting and reporting of violence against women and girls were seen as positive as there had been a lack of public trust to report these in the past.
- They were following the guidance set after the High Court ruling, however, officers from Hertfordshire Constabulary would still be visible at pride events wearing pride lanyards.
- The LGBTQ+ Community were one of the most engaged communities in North Herts according to Herts Connected, and the High Court ruling had not impacted this.
- They had processes to decrease tensions before events took place such as undertaking a Community Tension Impact Assessment.
- Police Officers remained interested in local matters as members of their communities, including the LGBTQ+ Community.
- Hertfordshire Constabulary had a good relationship with schools and colleges in North Herts and openly discussed local issues with them to increase awareness.
- Trends had been seen with online abuse through social media, as well as hateful speech in schools, which they had worked to address.
- Work had been conducted with Muslim and Jewish communities to ensure that they were safeguarded against abuse arising from international events.
- Legality and conduct of stop searches were scrutinised by independent panels with public involvement.
- Victims of crime regardless of prosecution were eligible to access victim services provided by Hertfordshire Constabulary through Beacon Victim Care, and more vulnerable victims were eligible for enhanced support.

- Children that required additional support received it through safeguarding referrals to the Child and Young Persons Team.
- Teachers could act as appropriate adults to report crimes on behalf of children when confidentiality from family members was desired.
- Virtual meetings instead of face to face could take place if preferential to the victim.
- Victim feedback on Hertfordshire Constabulary was gathered through text messages that were sent to victims following the closure of an investigation.
- Mechanisms were in place to ensure that negative victim feedback was taken seriously and that failings could be learned from to inform future actions.
- Public trust could be gained through positive results for victims, which could lead to more hate crime reporting.
- Herts Connected used data from the National Census and other sources to inform them of the engagement levels with each demographic.
- Strategic reviews with officers of all levels were held to discuss engagement levels and hold them to account by setting targets.
- Engagement with the public was often face to face, however, they also utilised social media and their Corporate Communications Team to reach out and share success.
- The Sikh Community had been identified as an under-engaged demographic, however, one of their officers was from the Sikh Community which they would use as an opportunity to engage with them and promote representation in their workplace.
- Support from charities both online and based in North Herts was utilised where possible to support hate crime victims.
- A person could be a victim of multiple hate crimes and charges for separate offences would be sought in this situation.
- The best outcome was always sought for victims, and they had out of court powers at their disposal where victims did not desire to give evidence in court such as through conditional cautions or community resolutions.
- Community resolutions allowed victims to have conversations with offenders and in some cases, they would receive financial reparation or a written apology.
- Even when a victim did not want to progress a hate crime case, Police officers would always try to provide closure, and the details of the suspect were kept on record.
- There were several different ways to report hate crime such as through Herts Against Hate, online anonymously or to a trusted adult.
- Education and supporting partner organisations like Crucial Crew to visit schools were some of the strongest methods they could use to change the perceptions and realities about committing hate crimes against the LGBTQ+ Community.

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that Members should direct questions regarding the interpretation of the High Court ruling towards her as the Council representative on the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Panel.

Hertfordshire Constabulary representatives continued their presentation on cybercrime against the elderly and advised that:

- £1.3 billion had been lost to fraud in 2023, with a significant proportion of that linked to cyber-enabled crime.
- The older adult demographic had been identified as the highest risk group of cyber-enabled crime
- Phishing and investment scams were the most common cybercrimes reported by the elderly, with an average of £21,000 lost per victim.
- Romance scams targeting older adults had increased by 30% in 2023.
- Tech support scams where criminals pretended to be from a secure or trusted source were getting more common, and identity theft remained prevalent.
- They had a dedicated Fraud and Cyber Policy that was refreshed annually and contained four procedural aims to respond effectively to fraud and cybercrime.

- Action Fraud were the national lead police unit for fraud and cybercrime in the UK. They investigated cybercrime trends, and referred cybercrime cases to local forces such as Hertfordshire Constabulary, who had a Fraud Triage Manager responsible for reviewing these.
- An eastern region special operation unit dealt with higher value cybercrime.
- Calls from cybercrime victims were recorded and sent to the Fraud Triage Manager for review and were allocated depending on whether the crime was about to take place or had already happened and more lines of enquiry were needed.
- Banking Protocol was an agreement with several banks and building societies nationally where police officers would attend scenes of suspected fraud to have conversations with suspected victims before any funds were withdrawn.
- Reports from the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau sat within the London City Police and were issued to local forces if trends were spotted.
- Vulnerability to Fraud Notifications were sent to banks and buildings societies to identify residents that would be vulnerable to fraud to help the prevention of cybercrime.
- 742 engagements had taken place with members of the older adult demographic in Hertfordshire with the majority of those being on cyber awareness.
- Cybercrime education had been provided to the elderly by officers in libraries and care homes as they recognised that it was the key to prevention.
- Older adults were the second most engaged demographic according to Herts Connected. However, further engagement was still needed and more advice surgeries were planned for 2026.
- Beacon Victim Care, Trading Standards and Hertfordshire County Council Shared Anti-Fraud Service would also attend these surgeries.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Sadie Billing
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Paul Ward

In response to questions, Hertfordshire Constabulary representatives advised that:

- Members were encouraged to advise residents to call 101 if they were unsure of a situation and suspected the involvement of cybercrime.
- They would do everything in their power to prevent repeat cybercrime.
- The young person demographic was more engaged than the older adult demographic as detailed by Herts Connected.
- There was no indication that youths were more susceptible to cyber dependant crime in general, however, it was noted that they may be more susceptible to false purchasing.
- Significant law changes would be coming to the policing of social media platforms.
- Repeat cybercrime victims showed that something had gone wrong in the prevention process. The Vulnerability to Fraud Notification was designed to avoid this to put prevention measures in place like two-step authentication.
- Repeat victims of rogue traders were often seen where details of victims had been shared into a wider criminal network and other criminals had used these later on.
- Significant markers were placed onto addresses where cybercrime susceptible residents had been identified. This helped them to respond to 101 calls from neighbours urgently.
- Some funding had been given to them to install smart doorbells at addresses where cybercrime susceptible residents were identified.
- The biggest increase in romance cybercrime nationally took place during the COVID-19 pandemic with the most affected demographic being older adults.
- Members were encouraged to attend the scheduled library sessions in 2026.

- If Members knew of any cybercrime hotspots, they should contact them.
- All Police Officers were aware of Herts Connected and they ran social media campaigns to highlight its importance to the public. Registering for it was easy and they could track who had joined to allow them to promote it to those who had not.
- Communications sent through Herts Connected could be targeted towards relevant households.

Following the conclusion of this item, there was a break in proceedings and the meeting reconvened at 21.22. During the break, Councillor Martin Prescott left the Council Chamber and did not return.

47 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2025-26 (QUARTER 2 UPDATE)

Audio recording – 1 hour 52 minutes 6 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources presented the report entitled 'Council Delivery Plan 2025-26 (Quarter 2 Update)' and advised that:

- The report outlined the most recent update for the Council Delivery Plan (CDP) including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and the associated risks.
- Members could access more detail on the CDP through Ideagen as detailed in paragraph 8.10 of the report.
- Two projects had been completed which were the King George V Skate Park in Hitchin and the implementation of the Waste and Street Cleansing Contract.
- Data on the KPI relating to missed bin collections per 100,000 lifts had been explained in paragraph 8.5.
- The five projects with an amber status were outlined in paragraph 8.2.
- Actions to address the KPIs with a red status had been set out in paragraph 8.4, although, the KPI relating to Careline Installations had seen a recent improvement.
- Proposed KPIs that would link more closely to the Council Plan in response to the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge report were detailed in paragraph 8.7.
- There was an error in Appendix A to the report as there had not yet been a further report on Churchgate to Full Council, which had been scheduled to happen on 4 December 2025.
- A full-time Project Manager had been appointed to the Churchgate project and several meetings had taken place before Christmas to explore development options.
- Work would continue to look at the project for housing options and the market, and the Churchgate Project Board had expressed desire to improve parking signage in Hitchin.
- A Member Briefing on Churchgate would take place in late January or early February to ensure transparency and to allow questions to be asked.
- Decisions on the future of Charnwood House would be made in due course once the documents from the Estates Team on an Expression of Interest exercise had been reviewed.

The following Members asked questions:

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

In response to questions, Councillor Ian Albert advised that:

- It was expected that the Churchgate update report, delayed from Full Council in December, would be presented to Full Council on 26 February 2026.

- A Churchgate Project Board meeting would take place on 20 January to finalise the position of the project before the Member Briefing and Full Council meeting.
- Investigation would take place into how Members received information about events in their area, specifically larger events that were supported by the Safety Advisory Group.
- Cabinet were responsible for the risks and mitigations within the Council Delivery Plan, and ultimately, its delivery.

In response to questions, Councillor Tamsin Thomas advised that extra time had been spent on Churchgate to ensure that a robust update would be provided at the Member Briefing and Full Council meeting.

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

- The CDP was not used to performance manage the Senior Leadership Team as some of the KPIs and project deadlines were set to be ambitious rather than easy to achieve. Instead, focus was given to why they were not met and the actions to address these.
- Missed bin collection data was recorded and verified by Veolia, however, this would be checked with the Waste Team to obtain further updates.
- CO₂ figures were produced annually and there was lots of data processing involved to produce these, however, this would be checked with the Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager when the next set of data was due.
- The Customer Service Centre (CSC) provided a good training ground for new starters, particularly apprentices who were promoted to other internal roles which contributed to staff retention issues, but was positive for the Council.
- Results from the implementation of AI to phone lines to handle basic CSC enquiries had been positive and reduced the need for human intervention.
- An update on staff retention issues and the use of AI for phone lines would be obtained from the Customer and Digital Services Manager in due course.

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

RESOLVED: That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

- (1) Provided comment on the Council Delivery Plan Quarter 2 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.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide the 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.

48 INFORMATION NOTE: MUSEUM COLLECTION FACILITY UPDATE

Audio recording – 2 hours 17 minutes 57 seconds

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise presented the Information Note entitled 'Museum Collection Facility Update' and advised that:

- There had been a need to address the long-term future of the museum collection facility.

- Members who had not already visited the existing facility were invited to do so.
- Failure to provide an adequate facility for the Museum collection would affect the accreditation of North Herts Museum and its ability to operate.
- The majority of the Museum collection was not currently on public display.
- Pressure on the existing facility would only increase as the Museum was the designated receiver for any finds in the district resulting from excavation, which would increase due to the surge in development arising from the Local Plan.
- The project had been delayed repeatedly at some cost. However, the acquisition of the new facility had been secured for significantly less than the £4M capital budget.
- A Project Board had been formed to oversee the project, which would be managed in line with the standard project management methodology.
- The facility would safeguard the accreditation of the Museum as well as the collection itself once complete.
- The purchase of the new facility took place in July 2025, and the lease to the current tenants had been extended to ensure the Council would receive an income stream while plans for the new facility were made.
- A summer exhibition had been held by the Museum to showcase artifacts in storage at the existing collection facility. Additionally, a monthly series had been launched in December to highlight more items in storage.
- A positive response had been received to an expression of interest on grant funding that would assist outreach efforts.
- Advanced negotiations were ongoing with a contractor that would provide Professional Technical Services to carry out the design work for the new facility.
- Project progress had been shown in the Gantt Chart displayed in Appendix 1 to the Information Note.
- Investigations into the moving process of the Museum collection were already underway, including an ascension strategy that would cover the addition and removal of collection artifacts as the collection was moved.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Jon Clayden

In response to questions, Councillor Tamsin Thomas advised that:

- Unlike the project at Harkness Court, this capital project had a Project Board with the Culture and Facilities Service Manager as the Project Manager and the Director – Enterprise as the Accountable Officer.
- Grant funding available was linked to public engagement projects which would present an opportunity for them to maximise public engagement through increasing awareness of the Museum, strengthening outreach to schools, and building their volunteer network.
- There were no concerns that Local Government Reorganisation would affect the project if its delivery remained on schedule. However, if enough progress had not been made, there would be concerns over the facility being redeployed to address other storage needs, subject to the decisions of the subsequent unitary authority.

In response to questions, the Culture and Facilities Service Manager advised that:

- The estimated cost of a long-leasehold at £2.5M – £2.7M had been correct.
- The capital budget for the project had been reduced to £3M and unforeseen costs in the design stage might cause the project to exceed this, but equally, savings might also be made to keep it within budget or take it below.
- The Design Team would be responsible for producing the technical specifications for the new facility which would inform the construction and renovation phase of the project.

The timeline on this was unconfirmed but if any progress on this was made before the next Committee meeting, it could be presented with the Enterprise Portfolio Update.

- Baseline project funding would guarantee the safeguarding of the collection from the existing facility to the new one, and any grant funding would help them to maximise the community and outreach benefits of the project.

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that there were intentions to place the project onto the Council Delivery Plan, therefore, Members would receive quarterly updates on the project and further update requests could be made by the Committee if necessary.

Councillor David Chalmers noted that it was encouraging to see plans for the new facility to be used as an asset to engage the community.

The Chair thanked Councillor Tamsin Thomas and the Culture and Facilities Service Manager for their verbal presentation.

49 EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME AND PROPOSALS FOR 2026/27

Audio recording – 2 hours 37 minutes 32 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources presented the report entitled 'The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Effectiveness and Proposals for 2026/27)' and advised that:

- The history of Council Tax support offered to working age residents, including the introduction of a banded scheme in April 2023, was detailed in section 7.
- Regulations for Council Tax support relating to pension age residents were set by the Government rather than the Council.
- More detail on the current scheme, including an assessment of its effectiveness and affordability, had been provided at the beginning of section 8.
- An ideal Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) would provide support to those that needed it most, however, the report highlighted the difficulties in measuring its effectiveness.
- Disregards incorporated into the scheme were set out in paragraph in 8.2.
- The campaign by Marie Curie to prevent residents from dying in poverty and the actions that local authorities could take to address this through Council Tax reductions were described in paragraph 8.14.
- The differences between North Herts Council CTRS and the scheme offered by Manchester City Council as the exemplar authority for the campaign were described in paragraph 8.16.
- Marie Curie acknowledged that changes to the CTRS policy would take time to achieve due to the consultation required, however, they were yet to provide a response to the Council on their CTRS which provided up to a 100% Council Tax reduction for residents.
- Each threshold band would be uplifted by inflation as detailed in paragraph 8.19.
- The Council should be proud of their CTRS and the work of Officers.

The following Members asked questions:

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

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

- It was hoped that all residents who needed support were captured by the CTRS and that the proposed changes to the discretionary scheme would provide further stop gaps to ensure this.
- It was anticipated that changes to the discretionary scheme would have a negligible cost to the Council.
- Those that were in poverty due to income would qualify for the main scheme, and the discretionary scheme would provide support to those that were facing additional costs outside of their income.
- It was difficult to predict the financial impact to the Council of uplifting the bands versus keeping them the same, however, it was estimated that approximately the same number of residents would be eligible after the bands were uplifted without accounting for wider economic conditions.
- Keeping the Council Tax bands the same could mean that residents would receive less support with their Council Tax, however, this may also cause difficulties with collecting payments and result in more bad debts.
- The banded CTRS created less of an admin burden than the previous scheme as a change in circumstances was less likely to trigger a review.

In response to questions, the Benefits Manager advised that:

- Increased publicity of CTRS would be done through their website and engaging with customers to encourage promotion through word of mouth.
- The reduction in pension age residents using the CTRS when compared to working age residents was likely due to an increase in pensioner wealth in the district.
- Universal Credit payment data was received to calculate the claims of working age residents which made the process less onerous than before.

In response to questions, Councillor Ian Albert advised that:

- The Council worked with Age UK and other external organisations to publicise several initiatives including CTRS.
- Conversations would be held with officers to ensure that residents who contacted them about the CTRS were sufficiently signposted to all support provided by the Council and external organisations.
- Residents that were in low paying jobs were supported by the CTRS scheme.
- Recording the number of calls where residents reported that they could not afford their Council Tax would be investigated, in addition to the average level of CTRS discount from movement between bands.

Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham proposed and Councillor Sadie Billing seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- (1) Commented on the report and consider any further mechanisms that would provide data on the effectiveness of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- (2) Provided comments on the recommendations to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) To agree to amend the Council Tax discretionary policy to include the support provided to residents with a terminal illness, with the wording detailed in paragraph 8.7, and
- (2) To approve changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme bands to reflect the impact of the inflation.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: To respond to the request from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and to consider changes for next year.

50 INFORMATION NOTE: COMMUNITY SAFETY OVERVIEW

Audio recording – 3 hours 2 minutes 39 seconds

Councillor Mick Debenham, as Executive Member for Regulatory presented the Information Note entitled 'Community Safety Overview' and advised that:

- The Community Safety Team were the first point of contact for sharing information with the Police and they represented the Council on the Joint Executive CCTV Partnership.
- Their duties covered a wide portfolio such as dealing with dog fouling, hate crime, unauthorised encampments and abandoned vehicles.
- Increased budget and resources had been given to their team which they had used to increase patrols in fly tipping hotspots, serve a record amount of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs), conduct three successful prosecutions, and issue a closure order to a vape shop in Royston.
- Roll out of the Safety Charter for Women and Girls had taken place in pubs and extra safeguarding training had been provided to taxi drivers.
- Safety talks had been held in schools and they had worked with children to create videos for social media on the dangers of a variety of issues from drugs to cyber bullying.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham

In response to questions, the Licensing and Community Safety Manager advised that:

- They had been able to restructure within the team to allow two officers to focus primarily on fly tipping due to the extra funding, with another officer able to cover when necessary.
- The previous Police Sergeant for the Community Safety Unit in North Herts had been recruited to their team.
- School visits were key to capture the younger demographic and target prevention.
- Cross border fly tipping would be resolved through a targeted approach with local authorities in Bedfordshire.
- They were not as reliant on public reporting of fly tipping due to the additional resources they had to station Officers in hotspots, however, Members should reassure residents that fly tipping would be addressed if reports were made.
- When fly tipping was reported but not suspected by an officer after an assessment, a message would be sent to Veolia via the Admin Team for them to clear it. This took longer on private land as they did not have a duty to clear waste there.

- Fines that were given to fly tipping offenders in court were often less than the FPNs that would have been charged by the Council, therefore, there was a delicate balance in publicising these prosecutions.
- Hate crime had not been covered in their school visits as the Police already worked on this, but as one of their partners, they would include them on any future talks on hate crime that they planned to hold with schools.
- The Safety Charter had initially focused on towns, but this would be rolled out to pubs, restaurants and off licenses in rural communities.

In response to questions, Councillor Mick Debenham advised that:

- Fly tipping numbers for the previous year had already been exceeded just six months into the current year due to their targeted approach.
- They could investigate increasing communications relating to positive outcomes from fly tipping to encourage more reporting.
- The rollout of the Safety Charter for Women and Girls would be expanded from Hitchin to more towns and villages across North Herts.

In response to a question to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the Information Note, The Chair expressed a preference for an Information Note on Community Safety to be presented annually to the Committee.

The Chair thanked Councillor Mick Debenham and the Licensing and Community Safety Manager for their verbal presentation.

51 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Audio recording – 3 hours 26 minutes 48 seconds

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

- Items on Digital Transformation, the Local Plan Review and an Enterprise Portfolio Update were scheduled for the next Committee meeting on 3 February.
- An item had been submitted through the Work Programme submission form on the inability to challenge the 1874 Road Naming Statute.
- The consultation on S106 contributions had finished and the next meeting of the S106 Task and Finish Group was scheduled for 29 January 2026 to finalise findings and recommendations. The final report would be presented at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 24 March.
- One referral on the Decisions and Monitoring Tracker had been presented to Cabinet on 19 November 2025 and been marked as completed.

Councillor Jon Clayden proposed and Councillor Ralph Muncer 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 11.00 pm

Chair

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

3 FEBRUARY 2026

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE FOLLOW UP

REPORT OF: CHIEF EXECUTIVE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 The Council undertook a Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) between 4 and 7 November 2024, where we were visited by a peer team supported by the Local Government Association. The peer team produced a feedback report, which was reported to Cabinet on 14 January 2025. Subsequently an Action Plan was developed to respond to the recommendations and was approved by Cabinet on 23 March 2025, with an update on progress reported to Cabinet on 23 September 2025. The peer team undertook a one day follow up visit on 15 December 2025 and have issued a follow up report, which is attached at Appendix A.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the findings of the CPC follow up report be noted.
- 2.2. That the progress against the CPC action plan be noted.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure that the Council responds to the matters identified within the CPC follow up report, ensuring that the benefits of the CPC process are realised.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. The 'do nothing' option of not following up on the agreed action plan has been discounted, as the Council committed to undertake the CPC and should therefore seek to gain benefit from that process.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 A number of staff and councillors met with the peer team during the follow up visit on 15 December 2025. All those who took part were invited to attend the feedback session on the day. The Leader and the Leadership Team received the feedback report and had the opportunity to raise any questions or clarifications.

- 5.2 This report will be considered by Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 February 2026, prior to the Cabinet's consideration.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. The process for the CPC in November 2024 was set out in previous Cabinet reports and the LGA's CPC final report can be found on our website at [Corporate Peer Challenge | North Herts Council](#). Progress Reviews are a core component of all CPCs and every council that has a CPC is required to have a Progress Review and publish the findings from this within 12 months of the CPC. The progress review at North Herts took place just outside of these timescales to avoid pressure in the run up to submission of LGR proposals in November 2025. The LGA will also publish the Progress Review report on their website.
- 7.2. The Progress Review provides space for a council's senior leadership to share with peers the progress made against the CPC recommendations, discuss early impact or learning and receive peer feedback on the implementation of the council's CPC RAG rated Action Plan. The peer challenge manager produces a short report following the Progress Review, including the peer team's key observations against each recommendation, and as outlined above, the council are required to publish this. In advance of the Progress Review, the council are required to provide a RAG rated CPC Action Plan (Appendix C) and short position statement (Appendix B) which clearly set out the progress made in relation to each of the CPC's recommendations. During the progress view, peers reviewed the Action Plan, and the progress made against each recommendation.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. It should be noted that the original CPC took place prior to the publication of the Devolution White Paper in December 2024, which significantly redrew the future landscape for local government including North Herts Council. The CPC follow up visit took place on 15 December 2025 during the short period of time that the Council had an Acting Leader, between the Full Council meetings of 4 December 2025 and 13 January 2026. This is referenced within the report.
- 8.2. Members will be aware that for the majority of 2025 a significant amount of senior leadership time was spent working on the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) proposals. Despite these demands the position statement at Appendix B shows a wide range of achievements during this period across all of the Council's priorities. The Action Plan at Appendix C (updated since Cabinet last reviewed it in September 2025) also shows the progress made in responding to nine of the ten recommendations in the original report, with an explanation as to why recommendation three was not being pursued.
- 8.3. The CPC follow up visit on 15 December involved a number of meetings with staff and councillors, with sessions covering the themes in the original CPC report of strategic

alignment and delivery, driving organisational growth and performance-led modernisation. Additionally there was a session discussing LGR and devolution, covering both the Hertfordshire experience and experiences of the peers in their areas. The peer team have provided a follow up report, attached at Appendix A, which recognises the good progress made since November 2024 and where work is still ongoing.

- 8.4. The follow up report is the end of the formal LGA led CPC process, but the Council will continue to progress the actions on the Action Plan whilst they remain relevant. Assuming LGR takes place on the timelines anticipated this will almost certainly be the last CPC that North Herts Council undertakes as they typically take place every five years or so. Any new Unitary Authority that replaces the Council will undertake CPCs (or its future equivalent) in due course.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Cabinet's terms of reference include at paragraph 5.7.13 "To consider the reports of external review bodies on key aspects of overall service delivery".
- 9.2 The CPC is a voluntary process and therefore there is no legal obligation to either host a CPC or act upon the recommendations. However, it is best practice to undertake a CPC every five years and having done so, to act upon the issues identified. By doing so, this process is recognised by the LGA as a way to assist councils in meeting their Best Value Duty. The Best Value Duty is a statutory requirement contained within Part 1 of the Local Government Act 1999 for local authorities to "*make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness.*"

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. The original CPC report identified a need to better align the financial strategy with organisational priorities, ensuring that there was a real balance between income and expenditure and that there was no longer a reliance on the use of reserves to produce a balanced budget. The CPC follow up report identified there had clearly been progress in aligning service plans with the corporate plan, budget and transformation objectives.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2. The CPC process helps to reduce risk by providing a different perspective on the Council. All the five themes of the CPC process can support specific and strategic risk management.
- 11.3. The CPC report identified areas where we can utilise our performance management framework more effectively, which could help with risk mitigation. The follow up report recognised the progress made, but that there was more to do.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. Where relevant the Council has (and will) consider the equalities implications of actions set out in the Action Plan.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1. There were staffing resource implications within some of the recommendations in the original CPC feedback report, particularly organisational development and ways of working, which were considered in the development of the action plan. The CPC follow up report identified the good progress made in this respect and the ongoing work, including the emerging new workforce strategy.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1. Appendix A – Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Report January 2026
- 16.2. Appendix B – Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review Statement December 2025
- 16.3. Appendix C – Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan December 2025 update

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 NHDC Peer Review Position Statement

18.2 LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Feedback Report

18.3 Cabinet reports 14 January 2025, 23 March 2025, 23 September 2025

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LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

North Herts Council

15th December 2025

Feedback

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1. Introduction

The council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) during November 2024 and promptly published the full report with an action plan.

The Progress Review is an integral part of the Corporate Peer Challenge process. Taking place approximately ten months after the CPC, it is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Receive feedback from peers on the early progress made by the council against the CPC recommendations and the council's RAG rated CPC Action Plan.
- Consider peers' reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs.
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date.

The LGA would like to thank North Herts Council for their commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress Review was the next step in an ongoing, open and close relationship that the council has with LGA sector support.

2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review at North Herts Council took place (onsite) on 15th December 2025.

The Progress Review focussed on each of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge, under the following theme headings:

Strategic alignment and delivery

Recommendation 1 – Develop the golden thread: Engage all staff and partners in developing an annual delivery plan with clear priorities, outcomes and measurable KPIs – golden thread:

- Align the financial strategy with organisational priorities, ensuring that there is a real balance between income and expenditure and that there is no longer a reliance on the use of reserves to produce a balanced budget.

- Align the digital transformation and capital projects with organisational priorities.
- Align service plans and staff objectives with the council plan.

Recommendation 2 – Prioritise: Collectively the political and officer leadership needs to be clear about what it wants to do and how the “one team” is going to do it. There may be things that have to take longer, be paused or stopped to free up resources to deliver the priorities.

Recommendation 3 – Place narrative: Promote the place narrative for North Herts that encapsulates its character and attributes. This narrative will serve to define and promote North Herts, giving a voice to its rural roots, and fostering a distinct identity for the area.

Recommendation 4 – Partnerships: Maximise collaborative opportunities to get the best outcomes for North Herts. There are willing partners ready to support delivery of shared ambitions.

Driving organisational growth

Recommendation 5 – Leadership: Build energetic and visible officer leadership, with more strategic impact. Create opportunities for more in-person communications and support senior officers with the skills and time to look “up and out” to develop strategic partnerships and strategy. Develop new ideas to get people excited about working for North Herts Council.

Recommendation 6 – Organisational Development: Create an organisational development plan that horizon scans for future challenges and sets out clear processes for learning and development, appraisals, succession planning, recruitment and retention.

Recommendation 7 – Ways of working: Reset expectations of behaviour regarding internal council relationships, ways of working and responsibility for presenting committee reports. This includes the behaviour and roles and responsibilities of councillors to councillors, councillors to officers, officers to councillors and officers to officers.

Performance-led modernisation

Recommendation 8 – Performance management: Improve the rigour and transparency of performance management. Be clearer in explanations regarding corrective and preventive actions, set challenging targets and use the data to drive improvement.

Recommendation 9 – Modernisation: Capitalise on digitalisation skills and capacity to deliver a modernisation programme across the council.

Recommendation 10 – Project management: Strengthen project and programme management. Be clear on the skills and resources required and ensure the delivery framework which includes lessons learnt and benefits realisation is applied consistently across all projects.

For this Progress Review, the following members of the original CPC team were involved:

- Cllr James Dawson, Labour Leader of Erewash Borough Council (replaced Cllr Hugo Pound who was unable to rejoin the team)
- Cllr Sarah Bütikofer, LGA Liberal Democrat Regional Peer - North Norfolk District Council
- David Blake, Managing Director - Worcester City Council
- Kirsty Human - Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

3. Progress Review - Feedback

Out of the CPC's ten recommendations, the council's RAG rated action plan reports that 90 per cent are either completed or being progressed and 10 per cent have not yet been progressed.

Peers returned to North Herts Council (NHC) following an intense year of work which not only saw the council deliver some big projects and achievements but also co-produce and submit a proposal for local government reorganisation (LGR) in Hertfordshire to the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) on 28th November 2025.

Following the LGR proposal submission, on 4th December 2025 a motion of no confidence was tabled against the leader over disagreements centred around which LGR option to submit. The motion passed, and on our visit, peers found NHC to be in political stalemate, with the deputy leader acting as leader until an extraordinary meeting, which is scheduled for 13th January 2026 to elect a new leader.

Despite the political challenges, peers discovered the council in a very optimistic position, having just drawn breath from the LGR proposal submission and in a state of reflection. There was no underestimating the collaborative work that has been delivered over the past year. Peers took time to congratulate all those who had contributed to this significant effort including the chief executive, leader and senior officers.

3.1. Strategic alignment and delivery

There has clearly been progress in aligning service plans with the corporate plan, budget and transformation objectives. Peers heard how the budget has aligned resources to key priority areas including those projected due to LGR, for example training and development and additional staffing. A draft budget has been prepared, and cross-party workshops have been held to develop this. The scenario planning suggests that depending on the outcome of the financial settlement, general fund reserves may be needed to plug a financial gap this year, but the budget will still be balanced, with the worst of the impact coming in 2027/28.

The council has delivered a substantial amount of work over the past year, this includes significant changes to the shared waste collection service, commencement of the £16.4m leisure centre decarbonisation and modernisation programme, second community governance review, acquisition of a building in Letchworth to house precious artefacts from North Herts Museum and increased and enhanced the approach to public consultation and engagement on issues such as the Women and Girls Safety Charter, Tenants Charter and Community Forums. All this has been achieved against the backdrop of LGR which has drawn heavily on the resources of the chief executive, leader and senior management team.

There is a recognition amongst officers that this pace of delivery cannot be maintained without sacrifice. Peers felt there was a need to revisit the prioritisation

exercise completed earlier in the year to again rationalise the number of projects and at the very least rank them in order of political priority. We recognise that some councillors want to leave a legacy, however there is a limit to what can be achieved alongside the planning and implementation of LGR without adverse impact to staff. Political expectations need to be reevaluated against the resources available. If a compromise can't be found, then serious consideration needs to be given to finding and allocating additional budget and resources.

The recommendation around place narrative has not been progressed due to LGR. Peers understood the reasoning for this and were pleased to hear that despite this, North Herts, its towns and villages continue to be promoted through the new Economic Development Plan, Local Plan and Town Centre Strategies. It was acknowledged that continuing to elevate the importance of North Herts and its "places" is vital to ensuring continued investment and growth as new boundaries are drawn, political agendas change and funding from central government is directed to future mayoral combined authorities. The residents in this part of Hertfordshire must not lose out.

The chief executive and leader along with some directors and senior managers have been heavily involved in developing the LGR proposals and workstreams. Officers are providing key skills and knowledge to the programme in areas including information technology (IT), artificial intelligence (AI) and digital transformation. This has further strengthened partnership working across the county and positioned the council well for the future.

Opportunities for collaboration are also being explored with councils that may be within the same unitary. For example, discussions are ongoing with Stevenage Borough Council to draw on their ability to build council housing with the need in North Herts for more affordable housing. A shared venture of this nature has the potential to bring benefits to both councils and pave the way for further successful LGR outcomes.

3.2. Driving organisational growth

A senior leadership team restructure was agreed and implemented earlier in the year with the permanent appointment of the seventh service director, who had been on a

fixed term contract. Following the retirement of two service directors a robust external recruitment process resulted in the appointment of two internal candidates to these roles. Peers commented on the positive example of this outcome, demonstrating to staff who want to progress and how NHC is actively growing its own talent.

The senior leadership team is now fully resourced and able to work together to deliver the council priorities alongside the LGR workstreams. Peers reflected on the positive change this has created. There is an improved distribution of work, increased capacity for reflection and strategic thinking and evidence of directors now looking up and taking an external perspective, out of the organisation. The reassignment of executive portfolios to match the directorates and more evenly distribute responsibilities has supported senior management capacity. Regular meetings, away days and a new learning and development programme can only serve to strengthen this new approach.

The council is producing a new workforce plan considering LGR timescales. Workstreams are looking at relaunching the organisational values, recruitment and retention, including what is needed now up to 2028, what is needed to put staff in the best position for what happens next along with a staff wellbeing theme to ensure staff are well supported through the next few years.

Recruitment and retention is currently in a good position but the council is not taking this for granted. There is recognition that uncertainty over future arrangements will for some cause anxiety and for others be seen as an exciting opportunity. Meeting the needs of all views is a challenge but NHC is already exploring opportunities for increased learning and development, future apprenticeships and maximising the potential of current/future graduates.

Every meeting discussed the increased and improved communications and engagement with staff. A new series of staff conferences were held in September led by the chief executive and leader, and staff are helping to shape future versions. The chief executive is providing regular updates on LGR, even if there is nothing much to say. The senior leadership team (SLT) are also taking turns in providing regular communications to all staff, along with virtual and in person staff briefings. This increase has been noted by staff who welcome it, but for some, there is still more to

do. Peers were really pleased to see the progress on this recommendation and encourage the officer and political leadership to continue. Consider how SLT members could be even more visible at other council sites such as the depot and look for opportunities to drop into team meetings to introduce yourself.

Peers heard of progress being made on political accountability, with portfolio holders now presenting reports to committee supported by officers to answer technical questions. This is a recent change with work to do to ensure consistent implementation of the process.

There were mixed views on whether councillor and officer relationships have improved. Some officers reported still feeling “caught out” by councillors and others reported receiving advance notice of questions to be tabled, which meant they could prepare ahead of meetings. Some staff also reported feeling upset by the recent council meeting involving a vote of no confidence in the leader. They felt the behaviour displayed was not in line with NHC’s values and opened the council up to reputational risk.

Peers were keen to emphasise their role was not to comment on the meeting or how it was conducted but they did stress the need for stability. Staff are understandably worried about the political leadership and the impact this has on their work, priorities and LGR process.

The council meetings in January 2026 provide the opportunity to steady the ship and elect a leader who can steer NHC through the next period of work which will include setting and approving a balanced budget, continuing to progress the legacy projects and navigating the next phase of LGR including public consultation on the proposals ahead of the minded to decision from MHCLG.

3.3. Performance-led modernisation

Gradual progress is being made around performance with a clearer council delivery plan providing more explanation as to the direction of travel. The use of benchmarking data from LGInform is being used to support the development of more stretching targets and to allow councillors to compare the performance of NHC with others. And Overview and Scrutiny Committee are providing review and oversight of

the data to drive improvement.

There is however more work to do, to fully embed a strong performance driven culture. Consistency in how performance indicators are selected, set and challenged needs to be prioritised. Along with ensuring they are aligned to the corporate plan, delivery plan, service plan and budget – the golden thread. Further benchmarking will also ensure the council is driven to be best in class. Officers felt there was more political direction needed to support progress in this area.

Churchgate remains the largest and potentially riskiest project on the council's agenda. Peers heard that resources were allocated to secure the appointment of a skilled project manager to oversee the project alongside the technical consultants. Councillors have recently discussed their plans for the site which include residential (private & affordable), market (indoor & outdoor space), car parking, community and leisure space, retail (inclusive of independent) and the possibility of a food store. Project Board are currently investigating the viability of these items and choosing the best option for developing the site. Councillors will receive an options appraisal report in early 2026 for decision on how to proceed. There is forward momentum on the project and NHC are committed to delivering the project, even if that means delivering an oven ready proposal to the new unitary, the residents of North Herts will still see the benefits.

Digital transformation continues to be a key component of the corporate plan, and it is helping the council to modernise. In view of LGR the council has been self-aware enough to stop some projects where LGR makes them less viable. However, where appropriate IT and AI are transforming services with positive results. Peers heard how the use of AI and bots within customer services is revolutionary, supporting effective and efficient delivery. Up to 50 percent of all calls relating to revenues and benefits are now being answered by AI, allowing staff in this area to work on other priorities.

In addition, the knowledge, skills and expertise within the teams at NHC are positively contributing to LGR across Hertfordshire with NH leading the Technology workstream. This is a key area of work which can make a huge impact on the transformation, savings and success of the new authority.

4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA would like to thank North Herts Council for undertaking an LGA CPC Progress Review.

We appreciate that senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an on-going offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on several of the areas identified for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this.

Rachel Litherland (Principal Adviser) is the main point of contact between the authority and the Local Government Association (LGA) and their e-mail address is Rachel.Litherland@local.gov.uk

Further information, support, and resources on LGR/Devolution, can be found on the [LGA's devolution and LGR Hub website](#).

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1.0 Welcome back to North Herts

We're pleased to welcome the Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge team back to North Herts, one year on from your last visit in November 2024.

This past year has been one of significant progress and purposeful change. Building on the recommendations from your visit, we've worked hard to embed learning, strengthen our leadership capacity, and deliver meaningful improvements for our communities – all while navigating the challenges of financial constraint and preparing for Local Government Reorganisation.

From launching our Women and Girls Safety Charter to starting our ambitious £16.4 million project to decarbonise and modernise our leisure centres and changing our Waste and Recycling service, we've focused on delivering tangible outcomes that make a difference to our residents. We've also taken steps to improve how we engage with our communities – through in-person forums, design workshops, and our first-ever budget consultation – ensuring local voices shape local decisions.

This Corporate Peer Challenge Progress Review statement provides a snapshot of our achievements since your last visit aligned with our key Council Priorities: **Thriving Communities, Accessible Services, Responsible Growth, and Sustainability**; and our action plan updates on the ten recommendations you gave us last year have been emailed over.

We hope this review statement demonstrates our commitment to continuous improvement, transparency, and delivering for the people of North Herts. Thank you again for your support and challenge – we look forward to updating you on our progress.



Cllr. Daniel Allen,
Leader of the Council



Anthony Roche,
North Herts Council
Chief Executive

2.0 One year on



Thriving communities

Women and Girls Safety Charter launched

In response to growing concerns around safety in public spaces, we launched the Women and Girls Safety Charter in January 2025 – a district-wide initiative encouraging venues and organisations to take a stand against harassment and violence.

Developed in partnership with local stakeholders, the Charter sets out clear commitments around staff training, reporting procedures and safe spaces. Over 20 pubs from across the district have already signed up and we plan to promote the charter to other premises in the future.

The Charter has been promoted through our digital communications channels and featured in Outlook magazine, helping to raise awareness and drive engagement. It's a key part of our work to make North Herts safer and more inclusive for everyone.

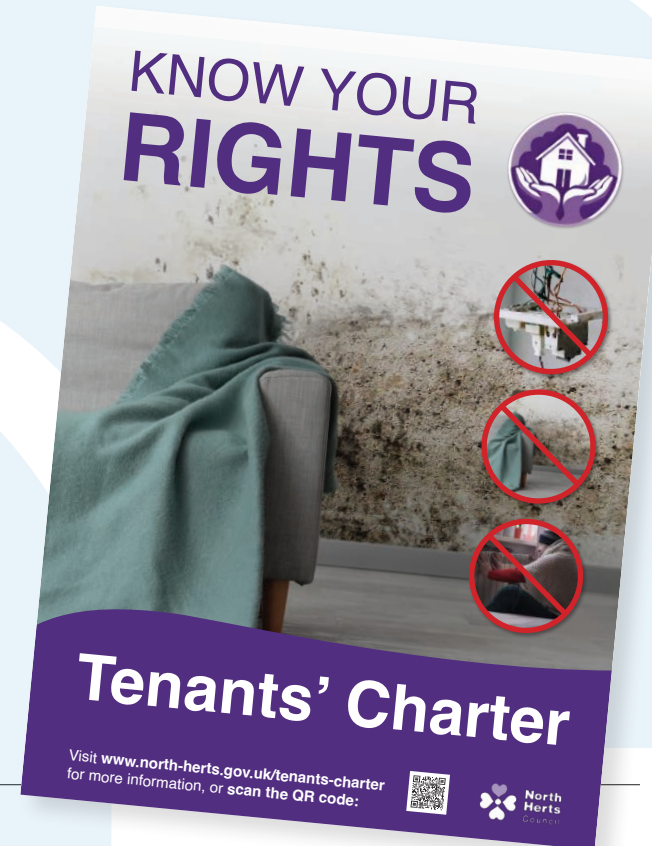
Tenants' Charter launched

We published a Tenants' Charter in February to provide guidance and support to both tenants and landlords in North Herts. This is a first for North Herts and sets out the rights and responsibilities for tenants, landlords and the council, to ensure rented homes in the district are safe, warm, and well maintained.

We felt it was important to not only create one comprehensive source of information, where tenants and landlords can find answers to any questions they have, but to also work together to create a community where everyone enjoys a comfortable and secure living environment.

Advice for tenants includes checking that the letting or managing agent is registered, that the agreement provided is a proper tenancy agreement, and how to stop mould becoming a problem. Advice for landlords includes checking that tenants have the right to rent your property, ensuring the property is free from hazards, and that gas and electrical inspections are carried out by qualified professionals.

1000 people have visited our Tenants' Charter webpages for advice and support, and we are currently in the process of taking flyers and posters to letting and managing agents, community centres, GP surgeries, and libraries to spread the word further about our Tenants' Charter.



Thriving communities

White Ribbon accreditation achieved

In December 2024, we were proud to achieve White Ribbon Accreditation – a national recognition of our commitment to ending male violence against women. The accreditation followed months of work across the council, including staff training, awareness campaigns, and policy reviews.

We marked the achievement with a public pledge event and have continued to promote the campaign through our channels, including Outlook magazine. White Ribbon aligns with our wider efforts around community safety and equality, and we're now working with partners to embed its principles across the district, starting with a Men's Panel on White Ribbon Day's 2025 theme of "We speak up" in November.

The accreditation is not just a badge – it's a statement of intent, and we're determined to keep the momentum going.

In-person resident liaison

Following on from the Churchgate regeneration in-person hubs in September 2024, we have started a programme of increased in-person resident engagement events, starting with a resident's design forum in June.

A diverse group of 22 North Herts residents were invited to explore and develop a vision for new development in the district and set the direction of travel for the emerging District Design Code. Residents were encouraged to reflect on their own experiences of living in North Herts and to identify what makes neighbourhoods successful, inclusive and distinctive.

In September, residents were invited to join our Community Forums in-person to hear more about Local Government Reorganisation from our Leader and have their opportunity to ask questions. In total 73 residents joined us across our five Community Forums in Great Ashby, Baldock, Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston. Their feedback has helped shape our response to Government. A second resident's design forum is planned for November.





Thriving communities

Community Governance Review

We undertook our second community governance review (CGR) consultation from the 14 March to the 9 May 2025, asking for feedback on proposed changes to parish arrangements such as changes to ward boundaries, that parish election dates be aligned to the district election cycle and the number of parish councillors, based on the feedback received in our first CGR consultation in 2024.

Householders in areas where a substantial change was proposed were sent targeted flyers detailing the specific changes. The consultation was shared directly with all district and North Hertfordshire County councillors, parish councils, MPs, PCC and to anyone who expressed an interest to hear more following the first consultation. It was also communicated on the homepage of our website, dedicated consultation webpage and through our E: Newsletter and social media channels. The consultation was also promoted via general flyers circulated for display in various community establishments, at Councillor Surgeries and announcements made at the various meetings such as at the Community Forums. Anyone who was unable to respond via the online consultation was assisted in any way that they needed, such as the

provision of paper forms, accepting comments via email to ensure everyone could have their say.

We had a significant response of 2,253 completed surveys which were weighed against statutory criteria and used to form the recommendations which can be found at: www.north-herts.gov.uk/community-governance-review and will be implemented ahead of our 2026 local elections.



£4.5M Government funding secured for supported housing scheme

Following a successful funding bid to the Ministry of Housing and Local Government under its Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP), we were awarded £4.5m to deliver an accommodation-based service for homeless 18–24-year-olds, with support needs. The partners to the bid were One YMCA and Hertfordshire County Council, and the service – which is also run by One YMCA – launched in April 2025 and is based at their site in Hitchin.

The building has 24 self-contained rooms for the SHAP, and the aim of the service is to eventually resettle young people into their own independent accommodation. In addition to support from the Council and One YMCA, residents can also be referred to specialist partner agencies such as health services, social care, CGL (Change, Grow Live) and MIND.



Accessible services

Waste and recycling service change

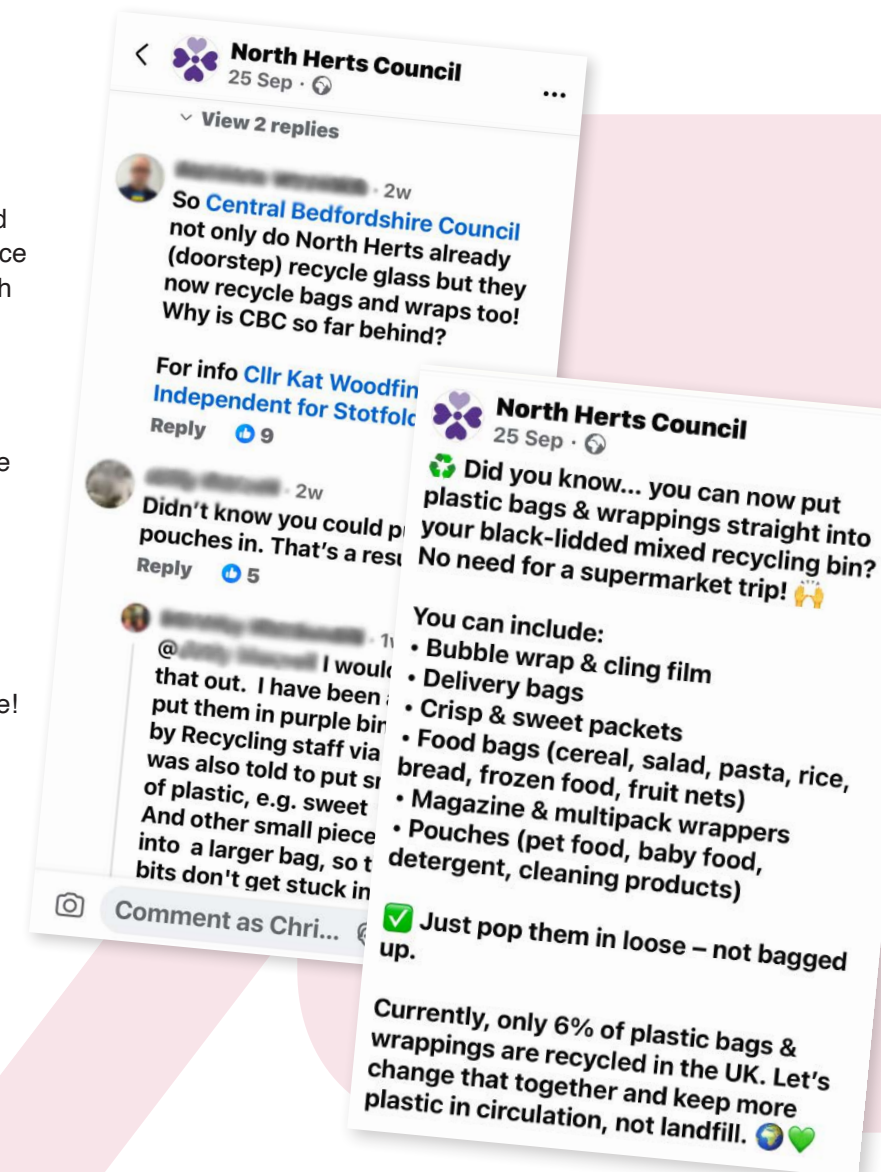
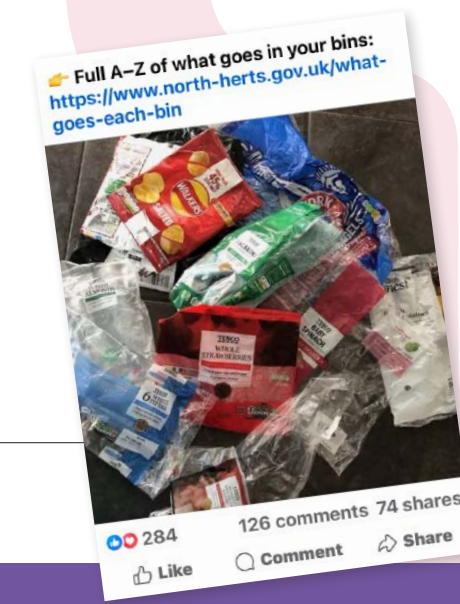
Following a public consultation in 2022 and a highly competitive and robust procurement process, our shared waste, recycling, and street cleansing service (with East Herts Council) was awarded to Veolia in May. This was followed by changes to our waste and recycling service in August, designed to make recycling easier and more efficient for residents, support our wider environmental goals of reducing carbon emissions and align with the Government's 'Simpler Recycling' environmental requirements.

The key changes were:

- An increase to the range of materials that residents can recycle at home, including increased capacity for cardboard and paper, and the addition of plastic bags and wrapping recycling.
- Collection frequency changes -, with non-recyclable waste, mixed recycling and cardboard & paper bins moving to a new alternating three-week collection cycle.
- New collection days for some residents - to improve route efficiency.

Food waste continues to be collected weekly and garden waste continues to be collected fortnightly for subscribers. We have also launched a new council app that notifies residents in advance of each collection, letting them know exactly which bins to put out when. As of the 20 November, the app had been downloaded 7,224 times and been very positively received.

The contractor and service change were of course not without challenges, but we have already seen a 34% decrease in general waste tonnage in August (Vs July) and have received an overwhelming positive response to the fact that residents can now recycling plastic bags and wrapping at home, including residents of neighbouring councils asking them to do the same!





Accessible services

Progress on the Digital strategy

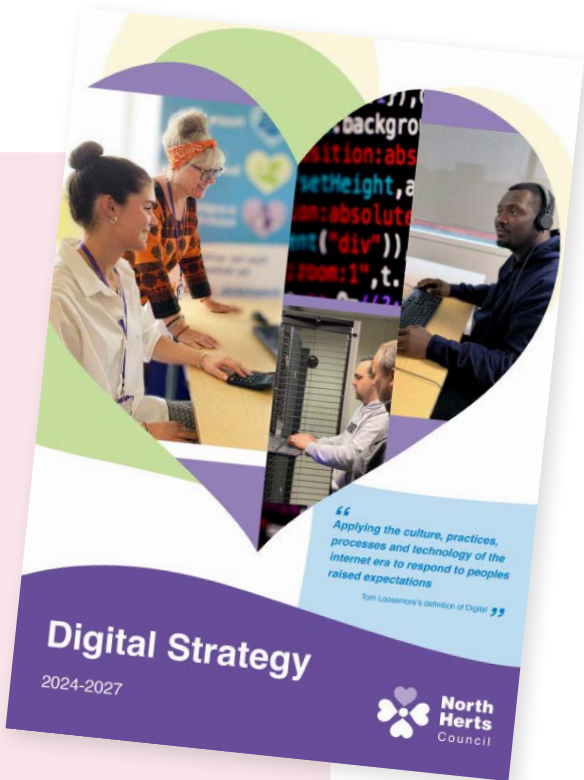
Over the past year, we have made substantial progress in delivering our Digital Strategy. Key achievements include using our digital platform 'Connect' to deliver a host of fully integrated online Waste services that includes a garden waste platform, reporting a missed bin, and booking a bulky waste collection. The team have also been busy developing an online bookings application, a Grants application and more. Views of our Customer Service webpages have increased by 46.58% YOY and views of our 'Report a problem' webpage have increased by 27.71%.

An intelligent chatbot service has been launched on the website to improve customer engagement and an AI telephony system is now in place on the Customer Service telephone line to handle the most common enquiries. Staff are also being upskilled in AI & Data through the apprenticeship programme. Work is ongoing to redesign processes, rationalise applications, and enhance efficiency across the Council.

Advancing Digital Inclusion

Prioritisation has been given to digital inclusion through the expansion of the 'Staying Connected' programme following a successful grant application, which will be delivered in partnership with North Herts CVS. This initiative aims to improve digital skills and access for residents most affected by digital exclusion, including older adults, those living in poverty, and people with disabilities. Plans include recruiting Digital Champions and upskilling Council staff, distributing secure devices to households in need, and running cybercrime awareness workshops with Hertfordshire Constabulary. The programme is expected to support over 300 residents by March 2026.

Looking ahead, our digital inclusion plans will be embedded within the mid-term review of the Digital Strategy, rather than developed as a standalone strategy. The Council will continue to signpost, connecting residents with external organisations such as Hertfordshire Steps to Skills and Barclays Digital Eagles. The Customer Service team will maintain their role in assisting residents with online tasks, ensuring that digital transformation remains inclusive and accessible to all.



Accessible services

People Advancements

Over the past year, we've made significant strides in strengthening our leadership team by ensuring appropriate resources and therefore enabling more time for strategic decision making. This includes an additional Director role, reorganisation of teams and reassignment of executive portfolios to match the directorates and more evenly distribute responsibilities.

We've also invested in staff engagement and development, including hosting three successful in-person staff conference events that fostered connection, celebrated achievements (see staff conference film shared on email), and supported our values. Feedback from the events showed that they were valued by staff and we have committed to making this an annual event. In addition, we are beginning a review of our Regular Performance Review process, and have started work on a refreshed People Strategy, which will consider our values and guide our approach to recruitment, retention, and development as we head towards Local Government Reorganisation.

Museum Collection Facility

We are proud to own North Herts Museum, the leading accredited museum in the district which houses a collection of great regional, academic, and scientific importance. Items in our collection include the world's oldest football collection, records of our rare chalk stream habitats and Roman bones.

In March 2025, Cabinet agreed to acquire a new building in Letchworth to safeguard and preserve the estimated 1 million plus items in our museum collection by keeping them at a stable temperature and in a suitable environment all year round, something our current facility is unable to provide. As well as protecting the area's history, art and heritage collection for years to come, the new building will also be able to accommodate visitors, including school children.

This project will also ensure that our North Herts Museum service retains accreditation which enables us to apply for grants and host national and international exhibitions such as The Snowman, Paddington, and Rembrandt. The redevelopment of the new premises is estimated to take two years to complete at a cost of around £3M.





Responsible growth



Local Plan review



Our Local Plan review has begun, focused on setting the stage for a refreshed vision for our district. We've commenced gathering studies and data about things like housing need, flood risk, the Green Belt and more, to make sure any updates to our Local Plan are based on robust data.

We're identifying land that could meet the district's future needs as part of our review – from housing and jobs to green spaces. We are in the process of assessing a range of sites and are gathering more detail on those with potential, such as transport and landscape information.

We have procured a new digital platform: Place Maker to ensure North Herts residents can sign up to have their say and receive regular updates on the progress of our Local Plan review, be the first to know about upcoming Planning Policy consultations and comment directly on planning policy documents.

Planning applications for East of Luton and Baldock (the single largest planning application we have received) have been received and validated and

are currently being consulted on. During November 2025, the Planning Officers' Society completed a focused review of the planning service. This is to help us continue delivering our current Local Plan while also responding to changes in national planning policy.

Churchgate regeneration approach approved

At Full Council in July 2025 approval was given for us to move forward with developing a regeneration encompassing Portmill East/West, Biggin Lane car parks, the Market and the shopping centre. This approval has enabled us to work on the financial viability of the scheme on a much more detailed level, which has included: car parking surveys/analysis to determine if Hitchin can 'afford' to lose spacing/income, a market feasibility study that focuses on the ideal size/mix/location of the site, a public realm study that demonstrates how the river could be opened up etc and a community space feasibility study that reviews the need for this type of space in Hitchin. These work streams will provide us with that extra level of detail required to move forward in our programme and report back to the appropriate committee, in preparation for taking forward the process for bringing on board external development expertise in Spring 2026.

Economic development strategy

Our new Economic Development Strategy for the district was adopted in July 2025. The strategy is aligned with the Council's economic aspirations, priorities and economic vision. Our Council Plan (2024-2028) sets out the importance of 'Responsible Growth' with a clear commitment to support economic growth across the district, and to work closely with businesses and other partners to deliver on our key objectives. The strategy is supported by a comprehensive evidence base, that includes stakeholder engagement with a variety of local businesses and an in-depth analysis of economic data in North Herts (in relation to jobs, trending growth areas, industries, connectivity etc). The evidence base enabled the team to identify five action areas to focus on: 1) business and enterprise; 2) people and skills; 3) innovation and economic change; 4) site and premises and 5) investment, position and promotion. The strategy also celebrates our position geographically and maps out areas within the district (looking in) and outside (looking out) with both themes identifying opportunities available to the Council to achieve substantial economic growth. The strategy focuses on economic portraits of each town in North Herts, mapping out key opportunities in each of them.



Responsible growth



Town Centres strategy in progress

Our Town Centres strategy is in progress and will support development both in and surrounding our four town centres: Hitchin, Letchworth Garden City, Royston and Baldock.

The strategy incorporates advice on a range of changes in national policy and guidance and takes account of the updated evidence in the Town Centres and Retail Study (2024), setting out our vision and planning priorities for our town centres across the following themes: 1) land use and retail; 2) built environment; 3) transport, access and movement and 4) community. It will provide additional guidance to Local Plan Policies pending the approved review of the Local Plan which is due to progress during 2026 once new Government regulations and guidance are released.

The draft Town Centres strategy was presented at the 19 November Cabinet meeting: Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday, 19th November, 2025, 7.30 pm I North Herts Council with public consultation planned for December 25 and January 26, including in-person engagement at our December Area Forums. Following consultation and adoption our Town Centres strategy will play

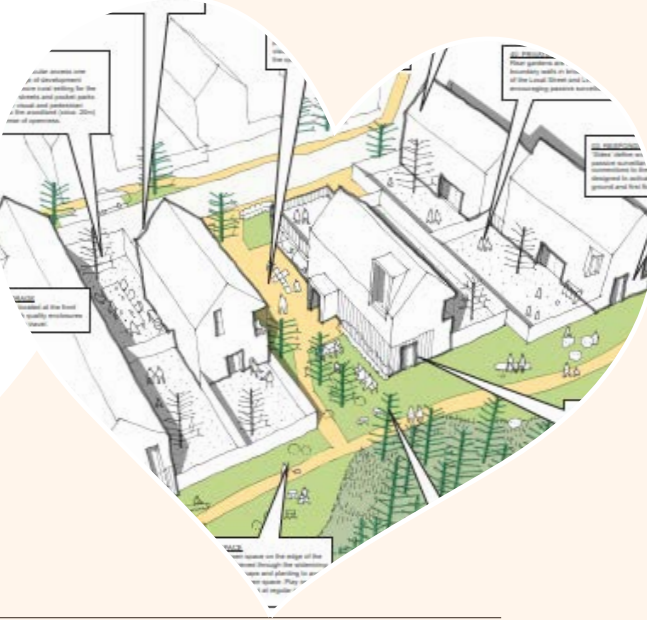
a key part in the assessment and determination of planning applications in and surrounding our four town centres.

District Design Code in progress

Work has begun on our District Design Code, a multi-phased design policy document that aims to improve design quality of new development in North Herts, provide consistency to pre-application feedback and upskill planners.

One of only a handful of councils producing their own code in-house, the seven key place-making objectives within our code have been created using feedback from members, officers and the residents design forum mentioned earlier in this document and supported and reviewed by North Herts Council, County and industry expert working groups.

The first phase of our District Design Code will focus on new developments on settlement edges, covering topics such as open space, streets, built form and tenure neutrality, with public consultation planned for Spring 2026.



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Sustainability

Decarbonising our Leisure Centres

Our ambitious £16.4 million project to decarbonise and modernise our leisure centres, making them more energy-efficient, environmentally friendly, and enjoyable for residents began in June.

The scheme, which is part-funded by £7.74 million from the government’s Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme is bringing significant upgrades to Royston Leisure Centre, Hitchin Swimming and Fitness Centre, and North Herts Leisure Centre (Letchworth). The improvements will cut carbon emissions and enhance the experience for our leisure centre users.

As part of the project, all three centres are benefitting from decarbonisation measures including replacing gas boilers with air source heat pumps, installing solar panels, upgrade of insulation, glazing and air handling systems and introducing energy-efficient technologies across all buildings. Royston Leisure Centre is also benefitting from a large gym extension with state-of-the-art equipment and refurbished changing rooms. North Herts Leisure Centre is getting a brand-new pool flume and swimming pool changing rooms and Hitchin Swimming & Fitness



Centre will enjoy refurbished changing rooms and a new health suite.

This major investment marks an important step towards a greener, more sustainable future for North Herts and will be accompanied by energy efficiency improvements to other council-owned buildings in 2026-27 as we have also been further awarded over £1.17 million in government funding from Salix Finance. These future upgrades are expected to save around 100 tonnes of carbon emissions every year.

Our continuing commitment to sustainability

In August 2025, we launched our Sustainability Strategy, setting out our aims for how we’ll work with communities to tackle climate change and protect our local environment. Developed with input from residents, councillors and officers, the strategy focuses on practical actions across energy, transport, biodiversity, waste and adapting to the changing climate.



To support grassroots efforts across North Herts, we also introduced the Sustainable Communities Grant – a pot of nearly £80,000 to help local community groups and businesses deliver sustainability projects. From renewable energy projects to increasing biodiversity and community engagement on sustainability education, the grant is supporting a range of initiatives that make a real difference.

Alongside this, we published our Sustainability Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) in September 2024, which provides detailed guidance to developers on how to embed sustainability into new developments. The SPD covers areas including energy efficiency, water conservation, and green infrastructure, ensuring our planning decisions support our climate goals.

Together, these actions, alongside our ambitious project to decarbonise our leisure centres, show how we are demonstrating leadership through actions to reduce our own environmental footprint and reflect our commitment to empowering communities and embedding sustainability in everything we do.



Sustainability

Budget consultation held

Over June and July, we asked residents to help us shape our future budget decision-making by sharing their thoughts on the services they value and their future priorities via our first-ever budget consultation.

The aim of the consultation was to gauge residents’ views and use the findings to aid our decision-making rather than make any concrete decisions on future services. The consultation focused on those services which are paid for through our general funding rather than those that are fully covered by fees and charges.

559 residents responded who told us their top five services in terms of importance to them were:

- 1) Waste collection & recycling;
- 2) Parks & greenspaces;
- 3) Street cleaning;
- 4) Community safety & environmental crime; and
- 5) Environment health.

In terms of their thoughts on balancing our future budgets, they told us that they would rather we find ways new ways to fund our existing services rather than reduce the frequency or quality of the services we provide. These findings will be used to help us set our 2026-27 budget, which will be agreed at our February 2026 Council meeting.

Royston Bee Corridor

Following a request from a Royston resident who wanted to introduce ‘wild areas’ within Royston, we expanded our award-winning Letchworth bee corridor initiative to Royston in March 2025 – creating a new pollinator-friendly route that connects green spaces across the town.

The project, involving the council but led by John O’Conner, our grounds maintenance contractor, includes wildflower planting, bee hotels and educational signage, designed to support biodiversity and raise awareness of the importance of pollinators. Local schools and community groups have been involved in planting days, which has helped create a sense of ownership and pride.

The project builds on our wider commitment to enhancing natural habitats and making our towns greener and more resilient. It’s also a great example of how small-scale environmental interventions can have a big impact – both ecologically and socially.



3.0 Local Government Reorganisation

Following the formal invitation from central government in February to develop proposals for a single tier of local government in Hertfordshire, we have been working collaboratively with our 10 Hertfordshire council colleagues and the Police and Crime Commissioner to draft a single submission, with three options contained within it.

We have embraced the challenge and taken a leading role in the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme team, being on the Programme Management Board, leading the Technology & Systems workstream and co-leading the Service Design workstream, whilst being represented on all the other workstreams.

Throughout our approach has been to embrace and explore the opportunities reorganisation could bring in terms of how services are delivered in Hertfordshire in the future.

Key district partner organisations, including Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, our Business Improvement Districts and Veolia were involved in our first stage stakeholder engagement to ensure their voices were heard at an early stage. This was followed by a full month of both in-person and online stakeholder engagement in September with wider stakeholders, staff and

councillors. Staff have been kept informed since February through regular staff briefings, updates on The Hub and Global update emails. LGR was also the focus of one of the main sessions at our in-person Staff Conferences. Councillors have been kept informed through regular Political Liaison Board, party leader and executive member briefings, updates on The Hub and Global update emails. A councillor briefing and separate Overview and Scrutiny Committee presentation took place during the September engagement.

After listening to resident feedback both in-person and through September’s survey and following discussion and debate with North Herts Council Councillors at the Extraordinary Council meeting on the 13 November, the four unitary model was confirmed as our preferred model for the future of Local Government Reorganisation in Hertfordshire at a meeting of the North Herts Council Cabinet on Wednesday 19 November. This included a caveat that we would like the proposed placement of Arbury Ward to be reconsidered by central government.

Embracing the challenge that has come with developing the LGR submission has come with a significant impact on staff workload, particularly our

most senior officers. Aside from the additional workload that participating in each LGR workstream has naturally created, LGR commitments have also resulted in a review and reprioritisation of the digital transformation programme plans discussed during your last visit and the difficult decision not to actively pursue our increased Place Narrative promotional plans.

It is recognised that the future work to support the transition to the new authorities, whilst also ensuring our community sees no difference in business as usual and we deliver any legacy projects the Council wishes to prioritise, will place significant strain on staff workloads. It may be necessary to employ additional staff between now and 2028 to deliver all this work, including the need to backfill for any officers who are delivering the transition programme.

It is also recognised that the uncertainty caused by reorganisation will have an impact personally on staff, at different times. Training and support are already in place to assist with this, and a programme will be delivered until April 2028. The Chief Executive has committed to keeping staff updated on the timelines for when the issues of greatest interest to staff will be addressed.

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North Herts Council Corporate Peer Challenge – November 2024
Action Plan adopted by Cabinet 18 March 2025

No.	Recommendation	Action	Led By	Timescale	Update (early September 2025)	
1	Develop the golden thread	<p>We will use the Council Delivery Plan to continue to reflect the major projects that will support the delivery of our Council Plan. We will review our corporate KPIs (supported by an Internal Audit) to assess how they can be improved to reflect our priorities and also provide challenging targets that help to drive improvement</p> <p>Alongside the Council Delivery Plan, we will continue to use internal Service Plans to reflect the other key tasks in each Directorate. These will have a focus on supporting the Council Plan, but will also incorporate other statutory requirements. Where appropriate, we will use Service KPIs to support Service Managers and Directors to assess performance.</p> <p>Leadership Team will review all the projects on the Council Delivery Plan and Service Plans on a quarterly basis. This will help manage the delivery of projects and also ensure that they continue to align with the Council Plan and priorities. Executive Members will also be kept informed of progress against Service Plans. Cabinet (through quarterly updates on the Council Delivery Plan) will have regular opportunities to determine any projects that should be included at that level, as well as assess delivery of existing projects, KPIs and risks.</p>	<p>Exec Member & Director – Resources</p> <p>Executive Members and Directors</p> <p>Executive Members and Directors</p>	<p>Report to 24th June Cabinet/ 17th June O&S as part of the annual update of the Council Delivery Plan.</p> <p>From start of new civic year</p> <p>From start of new civic year</p>	<p>Report to PLB (July and August) on areas of Council Plan that could link to KPIs. Agreed that would look to add measures that link to Council Plan outcomes for the Q2 report (January)</p> <p>Service plans have been adopted using these principles</p> <p>To be circulated to Leadership Team when prepared for Risk and Performance Management Group. Took place for the Q1 report in August.</p> <p>Service Plans to capture projects that are not on the Council Delivery Plan.</p>	

		We will carry out a budget consultation exercise during summer 2025 to help inform our budget setting process for 2026/27 onwards. We will use this alongside the 3-year settlement for 2026-29 to assess our funding priorities. This will inform the areas where we will make savings to achieve a balanced budget.	Exec Member & Director – Resources	Summer 2025	Budget consultation took place throughout June and July. Feedback has been captured and is being analysed.	
		The Digital Transformation oversight group will review what software and processes should be a transformation priority to maximise the organisational benefits. These could be direct financial benefits or through reducing effort that frees up Officer time.	Director – Customers	April 2025	The review is now considering the impact of Local Government Reorganisation and whether we need to speed up, slow down, or stop different elements of the programme (see rec 9).	
		We have carried out a review of the capital programme to assess the likely timing of delivery and any projects no longer needed. The budget setting process for 2025/26 has also provided an opportunity to assess new and existing proposals. We will add new capital projects (e.g. Churchgate) when we have a defined plan and a reliable estimate of timing and costs.	Exec Member & Director – Resources	Ongoing review	Council report July 2025 flags the capital implications of the Churchgate project, although it is still too early to attach figures to the project.	
		As staff regular performance reviews are carried out, the priorities within them will be linked to the priorities in the Council Plan, Council Delivery Plan and Service Plans.	All managers	Ongoing	Leadership Team will monitor completion of RPRs, as part of regular HR update	
2	Prioritise	We will use the Council Delivery Plan to track progress against our key corporate projects. As well as the formal discussion of this at Cabinet, we will also start to discuss it on a regular basis at Political	PLB	Ongoing	Initial prioritisation discussion at June PLB, followed by Executive Members and Directors reviewing priorities for their areas and feeding back to the Leader,	

		Liaison Board. We will agree which are the most important priorities for North Hertfordshire. This will allow earlier discussion of how the projects are helping to deliver our priorities and any blockages to delivery. Where blockages are caused by staffing resources we can assess where there may be opportunities to prioritise projects, based on the staff required (as usually requires specialist knowledge and skills) and relative importance of projects.			Deputy Leader and Chief Executive. Prioritisation considerations also need to include the resource requirements needed to support the LGR programme. This will be further considered during the upcoming budget cycle.	
3	Place Narrative	<p>Subject to securing suitable funding, we will seek additional capacity to identify the opportunities available to promote our North Herts Place Narrative across the district.</p> <p>The most effective opportunities will then be included in a Marketing & Communications plan that the consultancy will be responsible for creating, executing, and measuring, with support from the North Herts Council communications and Economic Development teams.</p>	Exec Members & Director - Customers, Director – Enterprise	Summer 2025	Due to local government reorganisation in Hertfordshire, it has been agreed not to actively pursue this work. We will continue to use the North Herts Place Narrative assets but will not commit resource to actively promoting it.	
4	Partnerships	<p>We will continue to look for opportunities with partners, wherever interests can be aligned.</p> <p>We will continue to work closely with Herts Growth Board, HCCSP and others, taking leading roles where appropriate.</p>	<p>Cabinet and Leadership Team</p> <p>Cabinet and Leadership Team</p>	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>We are discussing with neighbouring councils potential opportunities through LGR eg housing, planning.</p> <p>CEx is on the LGR programme board, overseeing whole programme. CEx and Director Customers are strategic leads for two of the workstreams, with all other Directors (and some senior managers) also involved in</p>	

		The new leadership team structure includes a strategic health lead, which seeks to work more closely with the NHS through the work of the ICB.	Director Regulatory	From 1 April 2025	<p>working groups. The Leader is taking an active role at Herts Leaders Group and is the new Chair of the Hertfordshire Infrastructure and Planning Partnership.</p> <p>We continue to try to engage with health to explore opportunities for greater co-operation, however the ICB is currently focussed on their own restructure.</p>	
5	Leadership	<p>A leadership team restructure has been agreed and will be in place from 1 April 2025. There will also be further changes in the leadership team during the course of 2025, with two retirements. We will put in place a learning and development programme to integrate new members to the Leadership Team, build relationships and explore ways to re-energise the organisation, with visible officer leadership and more strategic impact.</p> <p>We will look to create opportunities for more in-person communications, for example an annual staff conference, attending different team meetings and visiting front line service areas.</p>	<p>Chief Executive and Directors</p> <p>Leadership Team</p>	<p>From 1 April 2025</p> <p>From 1 April 2025</p>	<p>The new structure has been implemented and two new directors appointed. The Cabinet portfolios have been aligned to the director responsibilities, to streamline and simplify arrangements. The learning and development programme for LT is being designed, to take place in the autumn.</p> <p>The first staff conference was delivered, with three sessions taking place during September.</p>	
6	Organisational Development	We will create a new HR strategy that reflects our priorities and how we develop existing staff and recruit new staff to deliver them. As we know that there will be some changes in the Leadership Team over the summer, we will do the majority of this work over the Autumn to ensure that it can capture the views of the new Directors.	Exec Member & Director - Resources	Autumn 2025	Still planned for Autumn, but now also considering impact of LGR. Shortens the timeframe for the strategy and therefore may be a different focus.	

		<p>We will be clear on the importance of learning and development, even when there is a need to reduce our spend. We will use our new Learning Management System to help with accessing training.</p> <p>We will review how we carry out our Regular Performance Reviews (appraisal) to make it simple, effective and aligned to the golden thread.</p> <p>We will use workforce data to inform how we address succession planning, recruitment and retention, with appropriate plans in place.</p>		In place and ongoing	<p>Consider as part of HR strategy</p> <p>We will consider benefit of change as part of HR Strategy</p> <p>To include in HR Strategy work</p>	
7 Page 49	Ways of Working	<p>We will relaunch our values with Officers and Councillors. This includes listening to and considering the views of each other, and work together and support each other to be the best organisation we can be.</p> <p>Executive members will present committee reports at meetings</p> <p>We will look at light touch staff surveys to check in with staff, which can also be used to reinforce expectations of behaviour.</p> <p>We will review our approach to whistleblowing training, in order to raise awareness across the organisation.</p> <p>We will consider adoption of any new model Code of conduct for Councillors</p>	<p>Member training champions and Leadership Team</p> <p>Cabinet</p> <p>Director - Resources</p> <p>Director - Governance</p> <p>Standards committee/</p>	<p>Summer 2025</p> <p>Ongoing</p> <p>Summer 2025 and ongoing</p> <p>Start of new civic year</p> <p>When available</p>	<p>Considering ways to make our values more memorable as part of the HR strategy.</p> <p>This is the practice adopted</p> <p>We included wellbeing questions as part of a recent survey (during August) on LGR.</p> <p>Whistleblowing training has been delivered to Directors and representatives from each directorate.</p> <p>New code awaited. In the meantime, Council adopted the</p>	

			Director - Governance		Code of Good Practice for Statutory Officers.	
8	Performance Management	<p>We have updated the Council Delivery Plan to be clearer on any indicators that do not meet the green performance threshold. The report highlights the actions that will be taken to seek to improve performance, and we will continue to work on the explanations that Cabinet and O&S need.</p> <p>Internal Audit will benchmark our performance indicators to see how the measures and the target values compare to others. We will use that audit report to reflect on how we use the indicators to drive improvement</p> <p>We will also have an annual review of indicators that consistently achieve a green rating to assess how realistic it would be to set a more stretching target, and the benefits to residents that it would provide.</p>	Exec Member & Director – Resources	<p>Completed</p> <p>Report to 24th June Cabinet/ 17th June O&S as part of the annual update of the Council Delivery Plan.</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>To consider KPIs that link to the Council Plan as part of Q2 report (January).</p> <p>Cabinet reviewed the KPI targets in the June report.</p>	
9	Modernisation	The digital transformation initiative is a key component of our corporate plan, guided by an Oversight group that provides strategic direction and prioritisation. This programme encompasses the upskilling of staff across the Council and the provision of appropriate tools to support their roles. Several workstreams are currently underway, including a partnership with an apprenticeship provider to develop skills in business transformation, AI, and data insights.	Exec Member & Director - Customers	Ongoing	The programme is ongoing and has helped support the launch of the new waste contract. The programme is being reviewed and reprioritised in light of LGR, however appropriate transformation work continues. We have recently piloted an internal app using a Microsoft workspace and have introduced an AI telephony solution. This gives additional capability and aligns with the digital strategy	

		<p>A significant aspect of the digital programme involves the review and redesign of Council processes to enhance efficiency. We have recruited a dedicated Digital Business Analyst (BA) for this purpose, and through this work, we anticipate the transfer and upskilling of BA skills. Ongoing engagement with staff and Councillors is planned, alongside the development of our rolling communications plan.</p> <p>Additionally, a controlled pilot of using AI (Microsoft Copilot) is underway to identify use cases and assess the potential efficiency impact across various areas within the Council.</p>		<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Currently considering the next potential cohort to undertake courses with the apprenticeship provider, this is likely to be in early 2026 once the current cohort have completed and can share the benefits / successes of the programme.</p> <p>We are also supporting digital inclusion and upskilling across the district by partnering with North Herts & Stevenage CVS to deliver a range of digital inclusion initiatives</p> <p>This work was temporarily paused as the lead on this changed role. Since October 25 there has been a new Lead for this project and so this work has re-started, initially exploring how Copilot can be used across the organisation alongside other tools such as Robotic Process Automation, or a digital solution built in Netcall or on MS Workspace</p>	
10	Project Management	<p>See response to recommendation 2, which covers resourcing of ongoing projects. For larger capital projects we will move towards incorporating project management into the capital cost, to reflect the required capacity and ensuring the total cost is considered as part of the overall project appraisal.</p> <p>We have a process for collecting lessons learnt from projects. By improving the</p>	Exec Member & Director - Resources	<p>Ongoing</p> <p>Ongoing</p>	<p>Churchgate report to July Council sought budget for the appointment of an experienced project manager, to help support the delivery of the project. This was approved and an individual recruited.</p> <p>Reports will come to LT when completed, or on an exception</p>	

		project reporting to Leadership Team (included in the response to recommendation 1) we will have better understanding on when smaller projects have completed, so can work with those project managers to ensure that we collate lessons learnt. Having more lessons learnt, which may also be more relevant to a wider audience, will allow us to produce regular updates to share across the Council.			basis as required. Lessons learned exercise to be completed for the wasted contract procurement and service change roll out.	
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3 February 2026

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: ENTERPRISE PORTFOLIO UPDATE

REPORT OF: STEVE CROWLEY, DIRECTOR – ENTERPRISE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR TAMSIN THOMAS, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ENTERPRISE

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To provide the committee with an update on the progress of the Enterprise Directorate.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

For the Committee to note the report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. The report is following the request of the committee for an update on the progress of the Enterprise Directorate and is for information only.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. None

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. The Executive Member for Enterprise has been kept regularly updated on the Service Plan for the Enterprise Directorate and has been fully briefed and supports the contents of this report.
- 5.2. Key projects are run via the Council's Project Management Framework, which ensure relevant Executives are members of the Project Board.
- 5.3. The Director and Service Managers hold quarterly meetings with the Shadow Executives and keep them up to date on key projects and operational items.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. The Executive Member for Enterprise and the Director – Enterprise have been asked to provide an update to this committee.

8. ENTERPRISE UPDATE

- 8.1 The Committee have specifically requested this report should cover:
- Churchgate Regeneration Project – options and on-going developments
 - Members are interested in Progress across the portfolio – current status, next steps, risk/ concerns.

8.2 Directorate overview

- 8.2.1 As part of the Senior Management restructure that took place 2024/25, the Enterprise team now includes Property Services (as of April 2025), this department is responsible for facilities management, reactive repairs/maintenance, statutory and non-statutory building compliance and project management of capital works, across a diverse property portfolio of approximately 76 premises/locations. In addition to managing the specialist out-sourced Health and Safety advice provided by Hertfordshire County Council the Property team manage a range of corporate health and safety functions, including eye-care vouchers, referrals from Display Screen Equipment (DSE) assessments, the asbestos register and premises fire risk assessments.

- 8.2.2 Therefore, the Enterprise Director is now responsible for Enterprise, Estates, Cultural Service, Property Service and is also a director of three council companies, these are Broste Rivers Group, Herts CCTV and Broadwater Hundred. This report does not cover the company work as reporting of this is undertaken by the appropriate Shareholder Representatives to the Cabinet Sub Committee (Local Authority Trading Companies' Shareholder). The Director is also the lead officer for the Baldock Industrial Estate Fire recovery and has been working with representatives from the Industrial Estate since the fire took place and liaising with them with regards the future of this site.

- 8.3 The following section provides an overview of the department focussing on Budget and headcount.

- 8.3.1 The table below shows this year's (2025/26) projected outturn compared to the full financial year of 2024/25.

	Enterprise		Estates		Cultural Services		Property Service		Total	
	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000	2024/25 £000	2025/26 £000
	Actual	Projected Outturn	Actual	Projected Outturn	Actual	Projected Outturn	Actual	Projected Outturn	Actual	Projected Outturn
Expenditure	391	609	537	529	1,231	1,269	882	819	3,041	3,226
Income	81	16	1,505	1,764	393	382	14	4	1,993	2,166
Total	310	593	-968	-1,235	838	887	868	815	1,048	1,060

- 8.3.2 The above demonstrates the total net position of the directorate has slightly increased (£12k) since last year and the following sets out the key reasons for this.
- 8.3.3 The Enterprise expenditure increase reflects the expenditure allocated to the ongoing Churchgate Regeneration project for consultancy costs, which have included our regeneration expert advisors (Lambert Smith Hampton), public realm (Leonard Design), communications (PLMR) Car parking consultants (Markides Associates), Market advisors (Market Curators). This expenditure is met through a dedicated Churchgate consultants budget, which has been allocated by the Council since acquiring the property and remains within budget expectations. The variance also reflects higher staffing costs – due to the team hiring an agency staff member to support the initial phase of the Churchgate project.
- 8.3.4 The income in 2024/5 was higher due to the Enterprise team receiving a grant from the Herts Economic Partnership – to support development and regeneration within the area. The grant was put towards the cost of consultants associated with the Churchgate project. The Council did not receive this fund this year. The income reflected in 2025/6 is mainly from the Community Lottery.
- 8.3.5 Estates projected expenditure for 2025/26 is expected to be broadly in line with 2024/25. Income projections for this year are expected to improve against last year, primarily following settlement of outstanding rent reviews and increased net income from Churchgate Shopping Centre.
- 8.3.6 Culture Services has a £50k overspend projected for the 2025/26 financial year. £25k of this is relating to dilapidations for Brotherhood Hall whilst other elements link to a range of more minor overspends across a range of areas.
- 8.3.7 Income within the service continues to grow, with Hitchin Town Hall related income trebling since 2021/22 and a further 59% up on 2022/23 based on the figures achieved in 2024/25. The 2025/26 appears to be on a par with the previous year's record income.
- 8.3.8 Property Services expenditure is £63k better than 2024/25, this is due to rent for the District Council Offices (DCO) being higher in 2024/25 due to back dated rent and also the repair and maintenance costs for the DCO being £27k higher last year.
- 8.3.9 The table below sets out the capital receipts that this directorate has generated over the last 5 years. All figures are shown using £000.

2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Total
£2,644	£4,199	£619	£0	£0	£7,462

- 8.3.10 The conditional sale of land at The Snipe, Weston is no longer proceeding. The future development and proposed sale of the site is under review.
- 8.3.11 The proposed development of land at Radburn Way is no longer proceeding following Cabinet's decision to retain the land and improve it as a habitat area with some public access.
- 8.3.12 Other potential development sites are under review with a prospect of future capital receipts. This will be reported on in the future once progressed to a point where a disposal can be forecast in the capital plan with greater certainty.

- 8.3.13 Estates have undertaken a strategic review of the Council's property portfolio and identified assets which may be suitable for disposal. These may be underperforming or isolated properties for example or suitable for sale to a special purchaser willing to pay above market value. Further work is ongoing and there are good prospects for delivering capital receipts for some of these in the next 12 months.
- 8.3.14 Whilst no receipts have been received last financial year and in the year to date, sales should be looked at and averaged over a period of time due to the availability and timing of property sales.
- 8.3.15 The current headcount is as follows:

Enterprise (3 FTE):

1 Full Time Enterprise Manager, 1 Part Time Economic Development Officer on a Shared Service agreement with East Herts Council, 1 Full Time Enterprise Business Partner and 1 Part Time Enterprise Business Partner.

Estates (3 FTE):

1 Full Time Principal Estates Surveyor, 1 Full Time Graduate Estates Surveyor, 1 Part Time (Admin Support Officer) and 1 Part Time (4-day week) agency Surveyor.

Museum and Hitchin Town Hall (18 FTE): 28 people, which works out as 18 Full Time equivalents, plus casual staff for events.

Museum

Cultural Services Manager, Curator & Education Officer, Digital Audience Development Officer, Education Apprentice, Curator & Heritage Access Officer, Assistant Curator, Museum Technician, Visitor Services Supervisor, Visitor Services Assistant (x3) and Digital Marketing Apprentice.

Hitchin Town Hall

Culture & Facilities Service Manager (oversees entire facility), Operations & Events Manager, Events Team Leader, Duty Manager, Events Assistants, Support Officers (x3)(works across entire facility) and Cleaners (x2) (works across entire facility)

Cafe Team

Catering Manager (currently vacant), Catering Supervisor, Catering Assistants (x2), Seasonal Kiosk Attendant and Catering Casual Bank

Property Service (7.5 FTE): 1 Full Time (Buildings & Facilities Manager), 1 Part Time Compliance Contract & Project Manager, 1 Full Time Building Surveyor, 1 Full Time Building & Facilities Manager, 1 Full Time Facilities Team Leader, 1 Full Time Compliance & Facilities Coordinator, 1 Full Time Maintenance Caretaker, 1 Full Time Health & Safety Officer (currently vacant and covered by SLA with Herts County Council)

8.4 What challenges, barriers, and/or risks most affect this portfolio?

- 8.4.1 The following sections focuses on the key challenges, barriers and risks for the department.
- 8.4.2 Churchgate Regeneration Project

As previously reported the Council purchased the Churchgate Shopping Centre Leasehold on 1 August 2022. Following that a Project Board was established and

adopted the 'NHC Project Management Framework' which is based on 'PRINCE 2' (an industry recognised Project Management tool). This framework ensures that the Council follows a clear process when setting up, managing, delivering and completing a large project. The Council has undertaken two rounds of public consultation, the findings from the consultation helped form the five development principles which are set out below.

The team have been continuing their work on various models to financially appraise the options to take this scheme forward. In July 2025, the team presented a report to Full Council which set out the key recommendations as a result of the ongoing due diligence including market testing, a series of Project Board workshops and financial appraisal studies with consultants Lambert Smith Hampton (LSH). The report set out four initial options, and made a recommendation to Council that we progress to develop a proposal based upon 'Option 3', which includes by default, Options 1 (mixed-use development of the Churchgate Shopping Centre, Hitchin Market and Biggin lane car park) and 2 (the same as Option 1, but includes development of Portmill Lane West car park). For context, Option 3 is mixed-use development on Plots 1 (Churchgate Shopping Centre and Hitchin Market), 2 (Biggin Lane car park), 3 (Portmill East), and 5 (Portmill West). Option 3 demonstrates the most likely scheme to be financially viable; exact costs and plans are yet to be defined, and this will not be known until the site has been fully designed and the Council has agreed how it will be developed.

The scheme remains committed to the five development principles that were set out last year, as a result of the public consultations and stakeholder engagement. As a reminder, please see these principles below:

- Heritage-led regeneration – retaining and enhancing historic character within the town, alongside introducing complementary development
- Multi-use developments - integrating residential, retail, and leisure together to support a diverse local economy
- Market and riverfront revitalisation - transforming Hitchin Market and the River Hiz corridor into a dynamic, community-centred hub
- Integrating green infrastructure, low-carbon technologies and smart mobility
- Unlocking new development potential in underutilised sites without overdeveloping heritage areas.

When conducting the feasibility work, several factors were identified in relation to financial viability:

- The presence of a food store will improve the financial viability of all options shown.
- The modelling then assumes that Biggin Lane would be a car park dedicated to food store customers (not a Council owned car park). If the development does not include a food store, this area is assumed to be used for other uses, such as retail and residential.
- The aim is to provide 40% affordable housing within the scheme. However, it is proving challenging to meet these requirements alongside delivering the other variables.
- Public realm/community space is important to the community. However, the cost of providing high quality public realm is expensive (based on other Council-led case studies and intelligence). The Council and Project Board members will need to consider this as part of the master planning process in the future.

The team have been working with specialist consultants to understand what could be feasible on the various sites. For example, the team commissioned Market Curators to

review and recommend varying, scalable options to transform Hitchin Market into a market hall style venue – providing both indoor and outdoor space for street food vendors, market traders, dining & event space and community space. This type of due diligence allows the team to financially appraise the project more precisely in preparation for going to the open market when conducting any procurement activity. The Enterprise Manager continues to work closely with Hitchin Market to ensure that the operation is successful in the interim period leading up to the regeneration. The market consultants (Market Curators) have also been working with the Market Board to create a joint action plan to ensure that traders are engaged and supported whilst the Council determines the next steps.

The team have also been surveying and analysing the current car parking provisions within the town centre. Markides Associates (car parking specialist, often used by the Council for various parking projects) carried out a detailed survey of all car parks within the town centre proximity, including all Council-owned car parks, supermarket car parks and privately owned car parks over the course of two weeks. The survey measured usage on selected weekdays and on Saturdays using both on-street surveyors and cameras. The analysis reviewed the current usage vs what the utilisation and parking provision would look like if Portmill East, Portmill West and Biggin Lane car parks were removed. Top level findings suggest that there is sufficient car parking in the town throughout the week and on weekends – except for Saturdays between the hours of 11am-2pm (peak shopping times). The consultants have suggested various measures that the Council could put in place to mitigate the parking provision becoming an issue in the future as Churchgate plans progress, such as installing digital signage to incorporate space numbers and highlighting different car park around the town. The report demonstrated that The Lairage car park is significantly underutilised, due to a number of issues that are being addressed as part of this project (such as shoppers being unaware of it, resulting in better signage required). Whilst the team continues to explore mitigation measures, the parking situation remains a concern for the Project Board members.

The role of a regeneration specialist Project Manager with significant experience in delivering similar projects was a role that the Council agreed would be required to deliver this project. It was also agreed that this role was not required until the Council was at the feasibility stage. Therefore, the Project Board presented and gained approval for this at the July 2025 Full Council meeting as this was the right time to introduce this role to the Project Team. Following this, the team explored the market and successfully appointed a Project Manager in September 2025 for an initial period of one year. A growth item has been submitted to continue the Project Managers employment for 2026/7.

The team are now beginning to explore the different procurement routes that the project may take, according to the feasibility work and taking into consideration the prospects of Local Government Reorganisation.

As mentioned above the Project Team and Project Board are continuing to work on various models to financially appraise the options so a viable scheme can be taken forward taking onboard the items that have been raised above, once this work is complete Project Board will approve a scheme, which will then be presented to Cabinet for approval. The aim is to report to Cabinet within the next two months.

8.4.3 Change in legislation

One of the biggest barriers took place in December 2021 through changes to The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (Prudential Code) with regards commercial investments. This change means Councils can only invest in their own area. Also, the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) have changed their rules, meaning that Councils can only borrow for investment where the primary reason is not to provide a financial surplus. In recent years, local councils have made increasing use of cheaper borrowing from the PWLB to invest in commercial property with a view to generating revenue. The rules governing the purposes for which local councils may borrow for commercial investment are set out in CIPFA's prudential code.

MEES (Minimum Energy Efficiency Standards) regulations in the UK require landlords to ensure rented properties (domestic and commercial) have an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of E or above, making F/G ratings unlawful to let, with plans to raise the bar to C or B by 2030. Landlords must meet these standards or register a valid exemption. There is a risk of getting investment properties up to compliance with potentially increasing standards.

8.4.4 It is a challenge to continue to retain and attract tenants at Churchgate Shopping Centre and justify acceptable repair and maintenance as we progress towards vacant possession for the redevelopment, with corresponding impact on delivering adequate financial returns.

8.4.5 Economic Development Strategy

The strategy is now complete and in operation. The team are looking forward to a restructure taking place in March 2026 which will support the workload associated with the new strategy, and the opportunities it will open. The strategy has enabled the Council to increase its economic development 'footprint' by partnering with businesses (of all scales), addressing the skills growth/gap in the community, and celebrating the ideal positioning and linkages in NH in relation to Cambridge, Luton (airport expansion), Stevenage (life sciences) and London. The Council is committed to increasing economic activity and creating opportunity for businesses. We realise that the action plan will dramatically increase the workload of the team, therefore more expertise is required to ensure the strategy is delivered to the best of its ability. Using the existing Enterprise staffing budget, the team have proposed a new structure that will enable a stronger economic development presence at North Herts. The team will look to appoint 1x full time Economic Development Lead Officer and 1x full time Economic Development Officer in the coming months to write and deliver the action plan associated with the strategy. The team will continue to manage the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and associated projects.

8.4.6 Repair and maintenance to Council Properties

Ensuring planned and reactive repair and maintenance of properties is undertaken, especially the older stock properties where the Council has repair responsibilities and where the asset may be delivering a limited financial return.

8.4.7 Local Government Reorganisation

The uncertainty of Local Government Review brings with it fresh challenges in terms of long-term planning, particularly around large capital expenditure on building fabric and mechanical and electrical plants.

8.4.8 Recruitment and retention

Recruiting and retaining general practice property surveyors is a challenge, this is an issue that many councils are facing. At present we are using an agency member of staff within this post.

8.4.9 Museum and Town Hall Events

Our Museum and Town Hall Team hold many events with the aim of making a surplus from these events. In recent years we have delivered many events inhouse, by doing this we can generate greater profits, however, this means we must ensure they are run professionally and efficiently, otherwise there is the risk of losing money.

8.5 What opportunities do you see in the future within this portfolio?

8.5.1 The Churchgate Regeneration Project

As mentioned above, this project has the potential to bring a wealth of opportunity to the district and further. Not only will this enhance the town, but it will also look to bring more jobs, housing and create a destination space. It is likely to attract more visitors from outside the district and will encourage business growth, Council income and social value. Now that the Council owns both the freehold and leasehold of the shopping centre, the Council are in the best possible position to unlock the potential on this site.

8.5.2 North Hertfordshire Economic Development Strategy 2025-30

This strategy focuses on the potential of North Herts, business growth and engagement. Research shows that North Herts is perfectly placed for business, and we are fortunate enough to have a range of SME's and large businesses willing to work alongside us to provide more jobs, better upskilling programmes and generally putting 'back into the community'. Now that the strategy is in place, the Council will build a stronger relationship with businesses in order to promote the growth and engagement within the District. [North Hertfordshire Economic Strategy](#)

8.5.3 Growing Broadwater Hundred (a Local Authority Trading Company "LATCo")

There is an opportunity to grow the existing property company to include more properties within its portfolio. The company currently manages the four properties at Harkness Court, Hitchin however depending on the success of this it could broaden its portfolio.

8.5.4 Opportunities for income generation for property held for operational purposes

Opportunities for income generation from improving the commercial property portfolio, identifying and executing opportunities through reviews, reinvestment, redevelopment and re-gearing of leases. Further investment in commercial property through either capital being made available or reinvestment of disposal proceeds to improve the asset or portfolio should be considered. Opportunities for income generation for property held for operational purposes should also be considered, such as the successful letting of the 2nd and part 3rd floor of the DCO.

8.5.5 Asset Management

Opportunities via Asset Management and Development - Within both the property portfolio assets should be identified for refurbishment and redevelopment where they are

failing to achieve their potential. They will be assessed in detail, possibly in conjunction with outside experts, to provide an assessment of the existing asset and identify and appraise viable options.

8.5.6 Charnwood

The details of this project are set out below in 8.9. Charnwood House, Paynes Park, Hitchin was gifted to the Urban District Council of Hitchin in 1937, subject to the Council holding the property in perpetuity for public community use. It is Grade II Listed. The property has been largely vacant since 2013. There was previous interest in the building from Charnwood Community Management Association, a registered charity, with the aim of taking a lease and maintaining the building for community use, providing a community hub for Hitchin residents with an emphasis on supporting those groups with an educational focus. This did not come to fruition for various reasons. The Council subsequently openly marketed the property but received limited viable interest due to the condition of the property and limited permitted use. In December 2025 Estates have reported back to Exec Members with options to bring the property back into community use. A decision has been taken in principle to progress with a refreshed marketing, setting out a detailed vision and proposed term for a long lease to a suitable organisation and use.

8.5.7 Thomas Bellamy

Thomas Bellamy House, Bedford Road, Hitchin is Grade II Listed and constructed in circa 1850. According to local history, the building was previously used as a hospital and subsequently split into individual offices suites which had been sub-let on a room or floor basis. The property has been vacant for a number of years. Last year the Council obtained a report on the building's condition, and costings to undertake internal upgrade and refurbishment together with a marketing report for potential sale or letting as office, residential or other potential acceptable uses. The Council has undertaken external works to correct structural issues, and repair and redecorate the external fabric. Decisions have not been made on the recommended next steps and the property has not been formally marketed. There is current interest from a local organisation to occupy the property under a new lease, subject to terms. Estates will be reporting back on this shortly to enable a decision on whether to proceed with marketing for sale or let, subject to discounting any other potential alternative options. An Options Paper is planned to be prepared before 31 March 2026.

8.5.8 Hitchin Town Hall

The primary opportunities for Hitchin Town Hall rests in ensuring the potential bookings calendar is as saturated as possible and that the team are working towards maximum coverage of the available hireable periods. To this end, there have been a number of steps taken to support further growth in use of the venue, with a new website and new booking system now in place. Other opportunities rest in the monetisation of the events taking place and whilst the intention is for the venue to remain a broad church, providing a diverse range of community and commercial events, maximising bar, catering and other supporting revenue streams help support the overall financial position of the facility. As mentioned in 8.3.7 of this report, revenue across the various income streams has increased over recent years, with bar income surpassing £100k in the last full financial year for the first time. The team continue to work on new events, collaborations,

partnerships and marketing opportunities to further the fortunes and wider use of the venue.

8.5.9 North Herts Museum

The museum is not generally judged on its commercial success, but does have its own income targets from services such as the gift shop and education service to meet along with costs which need to be managed. Instead, its success lies in enhancing the cultural offering for the community of North Herts by continuing to offer a wide range of exhibitions, events and outreach initiatives. The ability to reach and attract new audiences, support education at all stages of life and contribute to local pride, sense of place and community cohesion are all ways in which the museum service seeks to serve and benefit North Herts. In the future, the continued surveillance of grant funding opportunities to enhance the museum's offering will be key given that funding pressures limit the council's ability to solely fund additional outreach ventures and cultural projects. The museum exhibits a lot of our artefacts, however, we also hold a significant amount in our storage facility in Bury Mead. Recently the Council purchased the leasehold for an industrial unit in Letchworth which will become our Museum collection facility, the details of this project are covered below.

8.6 Key Projects (Churchgate is covered in 8.4.2, therefore, is not covered in this section). Appendix 1 provides the Action Plan for Enterprise which includes other projects

8.7 Museum Collection Facility

- a. What is the goal of the project?
To solve the current pressures on capacity and strive for improved environmental stability to secure the long-term future and preservation of the museum collection of North Hertfordshire. A modern and upgraded store would also facilitate greater community outreach and engagement opportunities along with enhancing our ability to rotate lesser seen items from our collection so that these may be placed on temporary display.
- b. When is the project expected to complete?
Current estimate would be 2027/2028.
- c. What has been achieved to date?
Officers initially explored development of the existing site through a variety of approaches, including supplementing the site with commercial ventures such as self storage services and leisure facilities built alongside the museum collection facility. Due to the size of the site and the financial projections for the various approaches suggesting these would not be viable, attention turned to other options and approaches.

In November 2024, a paper detailing several approaches to resolving the current situation was taken to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and to Cabinet. Cabinet, in agreement with the recommendations of Overview and Scrutiny discounted some of the options whilst a nominal budget was allocated to pursue further investigations on some of the leading options.

One such option was to explore the acquisition of a suitable long leasehold facility in the area and to convert this into a long term home for the museum collection facility. In March 2025 a paper on the merits of this specific facility recommending its acquisition was presented to both Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet. Cabinet, again with the support of Overview and Scrutiny Committee authorised the acquisition of the facility, which was then taken into Council ownership in July 2025. A project to deliver the newly renovated facility was established with the initial project board taking place in September 2026.

The project is utilising all of the Councils established project management methodology and standard documentation and a number of developments have already occurred. The existing tenants lease has been extended until July 2026, allowing time for the designs for the new facility to be completed whilst securing an additional income for the Council and avoiding a void period. A project comms plan has been drafted and adopted, officers have been invited to develop a full submission for grant funding, based on a successful expression of interest to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the project team are also at an advanced stage of negotiations with a potential provider of professional technical services, with a view to the provision of the expertise necessary to spearhead the design work and develop the technical specification for the renovation.

d. What is the current status of the project?

The project team is at an advanced stage of negotiations with a view to the appointment of a team of professionals to deliver the professional technical services necessary to complete the design work on the facility over the next few months. Based on this work, the intention is to appoint a renovation contractor to start work on the renovations in the summer. In the meantime, a full grant funding application will be submitted and work on appointing to the community engagement and collection relocation related roles (both paid and voluntary) will begin to take place over the coming months with a view to this strand starting towards the end of 2026.

e. What are the next steps?

The next steps will be to appoint the professional technical services and complete the design work, whilst progressing with the comms plan and efforts to secure grant funding support.

f. What are the key risks and issues affecting this project?

Financial pressure, escalating costs, staffing capacity, possible damage to the collection, possible loss of accreditation (though the risk of loss of accreditation has lessened in the short term, as a result of the Council embarking on this project and addressing the issues faced).

8.8 Enterprise Strategy

a. What is the goal of the project?

To refresh the current Commercial strategy to ensure it is more in line with how the team are operating today under the recent changes in legislation and to include more recent projects such as Churchgate Regeneration. The Economic Development Strategy has been rewritten to include business engagement and growth within North Herts. The strategies are both updates to reflect how the team are acting commercially

and developing the economic agenda of North Herts Council. The strategy will reflect the Council's position in terms of income generation up to Local Government Reorganisation.

- b. When is the project expected to complete?
The delivery of this strategy is behind the original timescale; this is mainly due to capacity in the team. However, now that the team has additional support (mainly in the Churchgate capacity), the Enterprise Manager can focus attention on the strategy. The aim is to complete the first draft by latest March 2026 (followed by approvals).
- c. What has been achieved to date?
Due diligence on other Councils Commercial/Enterprise strategies to find out where and how the North Herts version needs adaptation.
- d. What is the current status of the project?
A working draft is underway, and an initial meeting with the Executive Member has taken place to understand expectations.
- e. What are the next steps?
To continue writing and refreshing the Commercial strategy to achieve the latest deadline.
- f. What are the key risks and issues affecting this project?
The Council will need to put the relevant resources in place to execute the strategy post March 2026 (recruitment process pending). There is also a risk that the strategy is not approved or adopted, and therefore the timescale risks being delayed.

8.9 Charnwood House

- a. What is the goal of the project?
To bring the property back into good repair and condition, and community use.
- b. When is the project expected to complete?
End 2026, subject to a successful long-term letting on acceptable terms and conditions.
- c. What has been achieved to date?
Options appraisal and capital budget secured. Main external roof and structural works completed so the building is wind and watertight. Asbestos removed. The former museum items removed along with other items and cabling, redundant cabinets and lighting etc. Initial marketing exercise undertaken but limited demand due to restricted use and investment required.
- d. What is the current status of the project?
Revised draft options paper prepared and in discussion with Exec Cllrs to agree next steps.
- e. What are the next steps?
Subject to approval, this is likely to be a new refreshed marketing, setting out a detailed vision and proposed term for a long lease to a suitable organisation and use.
- f. What are the key risks and issues affecting this project?
Covenant restriction on use.

Statutory restriction on use.
Viability of Listed Building consent conditions.
Demand for community hub.
Achieving mutually acceptable and viable terms for the letting.
Delays due to Asset of Community Value (ACV) listing.

8.10 Riverside Walk

- a. What is the goal of the project?
This project is within the Responsible Growth priority of the Council Plan with the aim of opening up the walkway between Bridge Street and Biggin Lane and installing a bridge to connect both sides, this will increase footfall in this part of the town centre and implement placemaking art as part of the project.
- b. When is the project expected to complete?
The target is to begin and complete the project during summer/autumn 2026.
- c. What has been achieved to date?
A capital and revenue budget is secured for the project. An outline proposal has been prepared by consultant engineers. The river banks have been cleared, trial holes undertaken to identify utilities and for the bridge crossing point, and uneven sections of paving repaired.
- d. What is the current status of the project?
Consultation is underway with the Environment Agency to enable the design of the proposed bridge to be finalised and with Herts County Council Highways for linking with existing footpaths with a view to submitting a planning application in early 2026.
- e. What are the next steps?
There are a number of stages to delivery of this project including outline and detailed design, consultation with key stakeholders, planning consent, Highway and Environment Agency consents, tender for the works and delivery.
- f. What are the key risks and issues affecting this project?
Securing the necessary statutory consents and in a timely manner to enable completion in 2026.
Sufficient budget for delivery of the works. This will be subject to final design and tenders.

8.11 Council Office and Museum and Town Hall Decarbonisation

- a. What is the goal of the project?
The aim is to replace gas fired heating boilers with cleaner, more efficient electric heating to reduce the carbon footprint of both sites. Other measures such as secondary glazing, replacement of air handling units and installation of solar panels are also planned at Hitchin Town Hall and North Herts Museum. The overall project is partially funded by Salix through the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme.
- b. When is the project expected to complete?

Work programs yet to be fully developed and agreed. Completion at Hitchin Town Hall and North Herts Museum is planned to be by March 2028, in line with Salix funding requirements.

- c. What has been achieved to date?
Cabinet and Council approved the budget for decarb phase 2. Both sites are currently being project managed by the Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager. Initial feasibility, proposals and cost estimates were provided by Willmott Dixon as part of a successful funding application to the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme. Property Services have suggested an alternative solution for decarbonising the District Council Offices (DCO) that is significantly more cost effective than the original proposal. If the proposals are agreed by Project Board, it is envisaged that Property Services will project manage the works to the DCO. For Hitchin Town Hall and North Herts Museum a further feasibility study has been undertaken and services are being procured, including a mechanical and electrical consultant, architect and quantity surveyor, so that designs can be produced prior to submission of a planning application.
- d. What is the current status of the project?
Both projects are at feasibility and cost estimate stage.
- e. What are the next steps?
Surveys are to be undertaken and designs developed for Hitchin Town Hall and North Herts Museum ahead of submission of a planning application. Freeholder agreement will be required for the DCO and a program of works will be developed.
- f. What are the key risks and issues affecting this project?
As Hitchin Town Hall is a listed building, the top risk to the project relates to obtaining planning permission for siting of the air source heat pump and solar panels. Other risks include: impacts of any project delays on the ability to spend grant funding within each financial year; and the identification of concealed defects, issues not identified, or material costs leading to increased project costs.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. There are no legal implications following from this report which is for noting, however it is worth noting that members of a local authority who are not part of the executive can hold the executive to account for the decisions that affect their communities. This report seeks to update the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the Enterprise Directorate and how the Council's Enterprise projects are progressing.
- 9.2. There are various legislative provisions that give local authorities the power to trade commercially, in order to improve the range of services they can offer, such as S1 of the Local Authority (Goods and Services) Act 1970 (which allows local authorities to provide goods and services to other local authorities); S95 of the Local Government Act 2003 (which allows local authorities to engage in entrepreneurial commercial trading with private bodies and persons); S1 of the Localism Act 2011 ('the general power of competence', which allows local authorities to do anything individuals can do unless prohibited by law and subject to public law principles) and S19 of the Local Government

(Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 (which allows local authorities to provide facilities associated with recreational facilities).

- 9.3. As part of the assessment of any proposed trading activity pursuant to the Enterprise Team the Council will need to ascertain the most appropriate power and comply with any associated requirements and consider the limitations imposed by the legislation.
- 9.4. Section 4(2) of the Localism Act 2011 provides that where, in exercise of the general power of competence, a local authority does things for a commercial purpose a local authority must do them through a company. This is particularly pertinent to the use of Broadway Hundred Ltd by using a LATCo the Council can take advantage of the wider market place in terms of the services being provided.
- 9.5. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 allows local authorities to provide and maintain museums and art galleries. The act, however, does not place a statutory duty on local authorities to do so. Therefore, the Council's commitment to the North Herts Museum arises more from a concern for the Museum and its collection than obligation.
- 9.6. Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 (LGA 1972) requires principal councils in the UK to obtain the best consideration that can reasonably be obtained when disposing of land (other than a short tenancy of less than seven years). This is the statutory expression of "best value" in the context of selling or leasing council property.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. Financial implications are covered in the body to the report

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Good risk management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.
- 11.2. There are no direct risk implications relating to this report, as it is solely providing an update on the progress of activities and projects within the Enterprise directorate. Key risks are assessed and managed for each individual project and where appropriate, these are recorded on a Risk Log and/or the Risk Register. Section 8 of the report highlights key risks relating to specific projects and the directorate in general.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. The strategy states that all proposed ideas will be of an ethical nature and will be considered to have a positive impact on the community as a basis for consideration. In line with the Council's commitment to demonstrate due regard the Equality Duty, it will conduct equality impact assessments where required (i.e. any key decisions, major budget implications and any revisions to major service provisions).

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply directly to this report. The Council will conduct environmental impact assessments where required (i.e any key decisions, major budget implications and any revisions to major service provisions).

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 There are no human resources implications for this report.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix 1 – Action Plan - Enterprise

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 Council Plan
18.2 Council's Delivery Plan

Appendix 1 Enterprise Action Plan									
Enterprise									
Action	Corporate Objective	Target/Aim/Outcome	Planned Start Date	Due Date	Assigned to	Status	Other services required (only list those service inputs which would not be considered 'business as usual')	If the action involves a procurement, has this been added to the procurement pipeline?	Will this be managed as a project (as per the Council's Project Management guidance)? If yes- Is it a small/ medium or large project?
2025/26									
Enterprise									
Baldock Industrial Estate Recovery	Thriving Communities	To liaise with Baldock Industrial Estate companies and assist them in the recovery of the Industrial Estate.	13/07/23	Ongoing	Steve Crowley	Baldock Fire representaitives have gain planning permission to demolish the site and they are aiming to comence work on site in the next few months. Once the actual start date is known all ward Members/MP will be informed.	Environmental Health, Planning	N/A	N/A
Museum and Town Hall									
Museum Collection Facility	Accessible Services	To have established the project to deliver the new museum collection facility, acquiring the intended facility, assembling the project board, progressing the designs and developing the project to the stage of launching the procurement for the renovation contractor.	01/09/25	31/3/2026	Rob Orchard & Ros Allwood	Intended facility acquired. Project Board formed. Project documentation drafted and adopted. Comms plan drafted and adopted. Current tenancy extended (to July 2026) Project team are at an advanced stage of negotiations with regards to the procurement of professional technical services (architect, structural engineer etc.) to support the development of designs and technical specifications.	Legal, Planning, Building Control, Property Services, I.T., Comms	Yes	Yes - Large Project
Grow Hitchin Town Hall service use and associated income.	Sustainability	To grow the Hitchin Town Hall business, hosting more events and attracting more hire enquiries. Securing a more financially beneficial outturn position from the following income channels: Hire income, events ticket sales, bar income, fitness classes, catering and marketing services.	01/04/25	01/04/26	Katie Hasler	Income continues to grow, with revenue across these income streams for the 2024/25 financial year almost trebling since 2021/22 and a 59% increase on 2022/23. 2025/26 is on track to match 2024/25.	Comms		
Grow museum audience and associated income.	Sustainability	To grow the museum audience, both in terms of overall visitor numbers and in the context of the areas demographic, ensuring the museum is hosting and attracting a diverse range of thought provoking, engaging exhibitions and installations, appealing to all cross sections of the community with a particular focus on minority groups. To ensure the talks, cafe and gift shop income is trending favourably alongside visitor numbers, with a diverse range of offerings and good quality products & services.	01/04/25	01/04/26	Ros Allwood	Visitor numbers are on track to match 2024/25.	Comms		
Town Hall Redecoration	Sustainability	To have planned, scheduled, procured and begun to deliver the redecoration of various events spaces at Hitchin Town Hall.	01/04/25	31/03/27	Rob Orchard & Katie Hasler	Procurement specifications have been developed with sensitivity to the historic buildings and existing bookings.	Procurement, Property Services, Planning (Conservation Officer)		
Chiller Replacement	Sustainability	To have replaced the roof chiller, which is an essential component of maintaining a stable environment within our museum galleries but which, following multiple attempts to repair it, is now in need of wholesale replacement. NOTE - This task has been delayed to coincide with the decarbonisation works earmarked for 2026/2027. Property Services have liaised with museum colleagues to discuss ways of limiting the impact of this delay in the interim.	01/08/25	30/12/27	Rob Orchard & Ros Allwood	This has been passed to the decarbonisation project.	Property Services, Procurement		
Estates									
Churchgate Shopping Centre.	Responsible Growth	Agree with the newly appointed managing agent (Praxis) a schedule and programme repairs to Churchgate Shopping Centre and commission the agent to undertake the repairs, Estates overseeing the entire process.	Ongoing	Ongoing	Philip Doggett	Prepared and under review to agree appropriate works	Legal Services.	TBC	TBC
Progress preferred options for potential development land at : Yeomanry Drive (Baldock); Land rear of Baldock Road/Radburn Way (Letchworth); Orchard Way, Breachwood Green	Responsible Growth	Finalise preferred options for potential disposal or other recommended actions - disposal to generate a capital receipt and/or retention of housing stock for revenue as appropriate on a site by site basis.	Ongoing	31/06/2026	Philip Doggett/Estates Team	Individual reports on others in hand. Radburn Way - Approved to turn into a habitat site at June 2025 Cabinet. Orchard Way - brieing report in preparation. Biodiversity report completed. Yeomanry Drive briefing submitted to Exec Cllrs and follow on work underway to make a decision on next steps.	Legal Services. Planning.	N/A	N/A
Investigation of options for repurposing of Royston Town Hall Annexe.	Responsible Growth	Remove maintenance obligations, improve building energy efficiency & environmental performance, generate new long-dated rental income stream and partially provide new community space.	Ongoing	31/03/26	Philip Doggett/Steve Hensby	Discussions underway with Herts County as adjoining landowner.	Legal Services. Planning.	Yes for external advisors	TBC
Riverside Walk, Hitchin.	Sustainability	Deliver planned riverside walkway from Jill Grey Place to Bridge Street.	Ongoing	31/09/26	Philip Doggett/Julie Gray	Underway. Project plan being drafted	Legal Services. Planning.	Yes	Yes - Small

Property acquisitions & developments. - See below Asset Management Plan action.	Responsible Growth	Explore opportunities for property acquisitions and developments across the Council's property portfolio with a view to maximising income and capital appreciation.	Ongoing	Ongoing	Philip Doggett	Ongoing restricted by CIPFA rules regarding investments purely for investment returns.	Legal Services.	N/A	N/A
Investigate & pursue options for future use of Charnwood House, Hitchin.	Sustainability	To accommodate planned community hub use with aim of bringing a town centre asset into beneficial occupation for the wider community & reduce holding costs.	Ongoing	31/12/2026	Philip Doggett	Options paper submitted and approved.	Legal Services. Finance. Planning. Property Services.	TBC	TBC
Prepare an overarching Asset Management Plan to incorporate the previous the Property Acquisition and Development Strategy.	Responsible Growth	Overall Asset Management Plan to incorporate:Property Reviews And Performance Measures Portfolio Objectives Commercial Property Portfolio - Investment And Management Acquisitions (In particular in light of revised financial regulations) Asset Management and Development Disposals.	Ongoing	31/12/25	Philip Doggett/Estates Team	Overall vision, priorities and KPIs prepared.	Legal Services. Finance.	N/A	N/A
Negotiations and appropriation of land needed at Great Ashby for the access to site GA2 allocated in NHDC Local Plan for around 600 homes	Responsible Growth	Generate a capital receipt from grant of access.	Ongoing	30/04/2026	Philip Doggett/Steve Hensby	Terms for Option Agreement approved at Cabinet September 2025 . Drafting with external lawyers.	Legal Services. Planning.	N/A	N/A
Review options for property management system record keeping (including updating existing and new systems).	Sustainability	Efficient management of the Council's investment property portfolio and timely completion of lease renewals and rent reviews to ensure maximum rental income. Improved performance management and reporting, including centralised storage of key information including capital valuations.	Ongoing	Ongoing	Philip Doggett/Estates Team	In dialogue with MSU and digital team. Decision to continue with formatted spreadsheets pending outcome of LGR and merging of property systems.	Finance. Procurement	Not yet. Depending upon outcome of review and decision.	TBC
Agree future plans for the former Depot, Icknield Way, Letchworth.	Responsible Growth	In consultation with Waste Services, make a decision on whether to hold this asset or progress potential re-development, in partnership with LGCHF	Ongoing	31/12/26	Philip Doggett/Estates Team	Discussion ongoing internally with Waste Team.	Legal Services. Planning. Waste	TBC	TBC
Letchworth former museum (and library - subject to HCC)	Responsible Growth	Investigate and bring forward potential re letting or disposal, in conjunction with HCC library site where possible. Note freehold of library owned by NHC (HCC occupation rights).	Ongoing	31/12/2026	Philip Doggett/Estates Team	Discussions underway with Herts County as adjoining landowner.	Legal Services. Finance. Planning. Property Services.	TBC	TBC
Review estate in line with North Herts Council's Climate Change Strategy and developments in MEES Regulations (or equivalent)	Responsible Growth	Review estate for compliance with NHDC's Climate Change Strategy and explore solutions for non-compliance.	Ongoing	31/06/2026	Philip Doggett/Estates Team	Ongoing	Property Services, Legal & Policy and Strategy/Sustainability and Climate Change	N/A	N/A
Former bus office & toilets, Royston	Sustainability	Review opportunities to bring back into use and lease out.	Ongoing	31/06/2026	Philip Doggett/Estates Team	Started.	Legal Services. Finance. Planning. Property Services.	TBC	TBC
Thomas Bellamy House, Hitchin.	Responsible Growth	Undertake an options appraisal for potential letting or disposal, including short term interim uses pending longer term proposals.	Ongoing	31/03/26	Philip Doggett/Estates Team	Options paper in preparation	Legal Services. Finance. Planning. Property Services.	TBC	TBC
Enterprise									
Manage the Property Letting Company	Sustainability	Aim to ensure the company is fully functional and in line with the Property and Development Strategy. Ensure that the letting of Harkness Court is run smoothly, and is generating an agreed income back into the Council.	Underway	BAU	Chloe Gray	Two Directors in place - awaiting paperwork from final Director. In operation for two years, all four flats are let with the first lease up in June 2026. Some unforeseen initial maintenance issues incurred, however all has been resolved and business remains as usual.	Company Directors, Legal	N/A	N/A
Manage the Hitchin Market contract with Hitchin Markets Limited	Sustainability	Continue to monitor and manage the contract. Attend Board meetings and plan for the future of the market in conjunction with the Churchgate Regeneration project. Conduct a yearly financial review to assess the position of HML and investigate new ways of generating income/savings.	Ongoing	BAU	Chloe Gray	Current contract is due for review and renewal in April 2026. Regular check ins are conducted with the HML Chairman and Market Manager. Traders/Board being kept up to date on Churchgate position - via email, face to face meetings and workshops. Team are working closely with a consultant (part of the wider Churchgate regen project), to create and implement an action plan to support Hitchin Market in the interim period between now and the regen. It is recognised that Hitchin Market face operational challenges in the coming months.	Legal	N/A	N/A
Lead the Council on the Churchgate Regeneration Zone project.	Responsible Growth	Manage the project alongside internal teams, Lambert Smith Hampton and David Leonard Designs regarding the future regeneration of the property and its surroundings. Complete the second public consultation, analyse the feedback and publish the findings. Conduct a financial viability assessment to work out what options are viable to the Council, in preparation for kicking off the Procurement process to appoint a development partner. This work is likely to take up until December 2025, with a view to begin masterplanning early 2026.	Ongoing	01/04/26	Chloe Gray with Steve Crowley	The team attended Full Council in July 2025 to recommend the most viable option to move forward with (Option 3). Since then, Churchgate PB workshops have continued on this basis, with the latest focusing on the financial viability of a range of options available to the Council. Workstreams such as a car parking survey & analysis, and a market review/ proposal have also been completed as part of the necessary due diligence to support the business plan going forward. The business plan will recommend a packaged, viable scheme, based on the technical work and consultation outcomes so far. This plan will be used to launch a Procurement process in 2026.	Legal, Procurement, Estates, Planning, Communications, Consultants	Not yet. Awaiting Full Council decision.	Yes - Large Project

New Economic Development Strategy	Thriving Communities	Rewrite the NH Economic Development Strategy alongside SOW Limited (consultant). This will be a complete refresh, and be aligned to the aspirations/ priorities set by the current administration. The strategy will focus on better business engagement, putting NH on the map as an attractive place to work, utilising opportunities within the District associated with employment and tourism etc. It will focus on 'looking in' at NH and celebrated the vast opportunity to grow etc, as well as 'looking out' that focuses on the geographical position of NH and how we can make the most of this going forward.	Ongoing	BAU	Chloe Gray with Andrew Figgis	Strategy is complete and was adopted by Cabinet in September 2025. The team are working on an accompanying Action Plan document that sets out how NH will achieve the aspirations of the strategy across the next 5 years, and correspond with the new Economic Development team restructure. The strategy focuses on better business engagement, growth and partnerships - utilising the position of North Herts in conjunction with Cambridge, Luton, Stevenage and London.	Comms, Finance, Community Partnerships, Consultants	N/A	N/A
Refresh the current Commercial Strategy	Responsible Growth	Refresh the current Commercial Strategy to reflect the change in focus from Commercial to Enterprise and the reasons behind this. Set out objectives in line with the current financial position of the Council, taking into consideration the financial climate today. Include a section on regeneration - in relation to the Churchgate project and ensure that all objectives are aligned to both financial and social value.	01/06/24	31/03/26	Chloe Gray	Initial changes have been made in line with the Council's current financial position/climate. A first draft of this strategy is due in March 2026.	Finance	N/A	N/A
North Herts Community Lottery	Thriving Communities	Continue to manage Gatherwell and the lottery process. Aim to increase ticket sales and good cause sign ups as much as possible in a bid to exceed existing forecasts.	Ongoing	BAU	Chloe Gray	Ticket sales and good cause sign ups continue to increase - with ticket sales reaching over 1,000 per week. The income generated is automatically being added to the Community Grants pot to spend on projects within NH (community groups are required to apply for the funding). Comms plan still in place and underway to continue to promote the project.	Comms, Finance, Community Partnerships	N/A	N/A
UK Shared Prosperity Fund	Sustainability	Set out the 2025 work programme for the UK SPF allocation according to the criteria set. Once agreed, deliver and monitor the projects alongside community stakeholders and Cllrs.	Ongoing	01/09/26	Chloe Gray with Andrew Figgis	Funds have been allocated - with Cabinet approval. In the process of monitoring existing and new projects to ensure value for money/monitor success, taking into consideration the latest deadline issued by central gvt from March to September 2026.	Comms, Community Partnerships, Cllrs	N/A	N/A
Building Services									
Review and agree a way forward with the recruitment of the vacant post that has been difficult to recruit to.	Sustainability	Due to difficulty recruiting to the Buildings and Facilities Surveyor a number of alternative options will be explored.	01/04/25	30/09/25	Michael Clark	Completed new post-holder in post	HR	N/A	No
Baldock Community Centre re-roof flat roof above office and reception.	Sustainability	Re-roof works completed	01/06/25	31/08/25	Nafees Parkar	Works completed December 2025	N/A	N/A	No
Re-roof flat roof area near plant room of DCO.	Sustainability	Re-roof works completed	01/07/25	31/09/2025	Nafees Parkar	Quotations received. Works postponed until spring.	N/A	N/A	No
Structural survey of both multi storey car parks	Sustainability	Survey report received and circulated to colleagues	01/09/25	30/11/25	Nafees Parkar	Reports received.	N/A	N/A	No
Upgrade/ renewal of St. Mary's churchyard lighting and feeder pillar.	Sustainability	New flood lights and alterations to distribution boards completed	01/07/25	31/07/25	Michael Clark	Completed	N/A	N/A	No
Arrange electrical and structural test of amenity lighting.	Sustainability	Surveys completed and report received	01/10/25	28/02/26	Michael Clark	PO raised and awaiting dates from supplier to undertake surveys, but likely to be in February 2026	N/A	N/A	No
Retender the Air conditioning service contract which expires mid Feb 2026	Sustainability	New contract in place for February 2026	01/10/25	31/01/26	Michael Clark	In progress - initial meeting with Procurement Officer & Legal Services	Procurement, Legal		No
Retender the Lift maintenance contract which expires 31st October 2025	Sustainability	New contract in place for November 2025	01/07/25	30/10/25	Michael Clark	Completed	Procurement, Legal	Yes	No
Fire door remedial works at North Herts Museum / Town Hall and DCO	Sustainability	All remedials works completed and 100% compliance reports received. Updated asset lists and building plans updated.	01/04/25	31/08/25	Michael Clark	Town Hall & Museum completed. DCO nearly completed. Allowed contractor to spread works out to minimise disruption to staff and building users.	N/A	N/A	No
Hitchin Town Hall clock tower repairs	Sustainability	Repairs to base of clock tower completed and leak resolved	01/07/25	31/07/25	Nafees Parkar	Completed	N/A	N/A	No
Review H&S post in view of possible retirement of post holder.	Sustainability	Review the role and consider alternative delivery models and present to Director of Enterprise	01/01/26	28/02/26	Michael Clark	Completed	HR	N/A	No
Retender the cleaning contract (current contract expires March 2026)	Sustainability	New contract in place for April 2026	01/11/25	31/03/26	Debbie Hiscock	Finalising specification with a view to issuing the ITT in Late January early February.	Procurement, Legal	Yes	No

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

3 FEBRUARY 2026

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: LOCAL PLAN NEXT STEPS

REPORT OF: RACHAEL ROONEY, INTERIM STRATEGIC PLANNING MANAGER: PLACE

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: CLLR DONNA WRIGHT, EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR PLACE

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is to note Cabinet Report of 20 January 2026 which provided an overview of the new plan-making system and sets out a revised Local Plan programme aligned with the requirements of that system.
- 1.2 The Cabinet Report sought the approval of delegated powers to formally submit notice of the Council's intention to review the Local Plan and to publish a revised programme in line with the new regulations as soon as the new plan-making system is enacted.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. It is recommended that Overview and Scrutiny Committee note the broad 'direction of travel' for the Local Plan Review pending formal laying and enactment of the relevant legislation and regulation; and provide any commentary as required.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 To ensure the Council is well-positioned to progress preparation of the Local Plan as quickly as possible once the new plan-making system comes into effect. Cabinet previously first resolved, in principle, that a review of the Local Plan should take place in January 2024. However, the Council did not progress on the review which was held back due to the delays in the publication of the regulations and guidance on the new local plan system.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 An alternative option would be to wait for the new regulations to be published, including any amendments arising from stakeholder feedback to MHCLG, before revising the Local

Plan timetable. This could minimise the need for further changes and ensure full alignment with the finalised system.

- 4.2 This option is not recommended, as any additional delay poses a significant risk to North Herts Council's ability to submit a draft Local Plan to the Secretary of State before April 2028 and the potential dissolution of this authority under proposed Local Government Re-organisation. Early progress would allow the Council to leave a legacy of having prepared a final Local Plan under the current organisational structure and to meet key milestones set in the new system in a manner that is compatible with the civic cycle.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. Strategic Planning Project Board were consulted on, and endorsed, the proposed programme in December 2025. They were also advised of the key issues discussed in this report.
- 5.2. The Executive Member has been kept up to date with the development of the Local Plan programme.
- 5.3. A report was taken to Cabinet on 20 January 2026 to agree the broad direction of travel and delegated powers to the Director of Place to publish the formal notice of intention to undertake a review of the Local Plan; and approve and publish a revised Local Plan timetable, subject to any alterations necessary to ensure alignment of timings with the new statutory framework.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 19 September 2025.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 As per attached Cabinet Report.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Details of the new plan-making system and the revised Local Plan timetable are set out in the attached Cabinet Report. Members should note that the proposed timings assume the Government will lay the necessary legislation in January 2026; this has not yet occurred.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 As per attached Cabinet Report.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 As per attached Cabinet Report.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 As per attached Cabinet Report.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2. There are no direct equality, diversity or inclusion implications in this report. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be carried out for the Local Plan Update in accordance with The Equality Act 2010 or any specific requirements laid in relevant legislation and regulations.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report update.
- 14.2. However, the update of the Local Plan will allow the Council to put climate change mitigation and adaptation at the heart of the Development Plan to contribute to meeting the Councils environmental and sustainability objectives.
- 14.3. The Local Plan Review will be subject to statutory requirements to consider its environmental effects.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1. The Local Plan programme is subject to our Strategic Planning Team being fully resourced and staffed.
- 15.2. Currently the Strategic Planning Team is understaffed and whilst efforts have been made to recruit into vacant posts, these have not all been successful. This is a known issue within Planning Departments across Local Authorities, and we are not unique in this sense. Permanent, establishment staff are currently augmented by fixed-term and contract appointments.
- 15.3. The consequence of not being fully staffed may ultimately have an impact on the delivery of the timeline of the Local Plan Update and the meeting of the key milestones set out in the document. The timetable will be kept under review in line with resource availability and updated as appropriate.

16. APPENDICES

Appendix A - Local Plan Programme

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

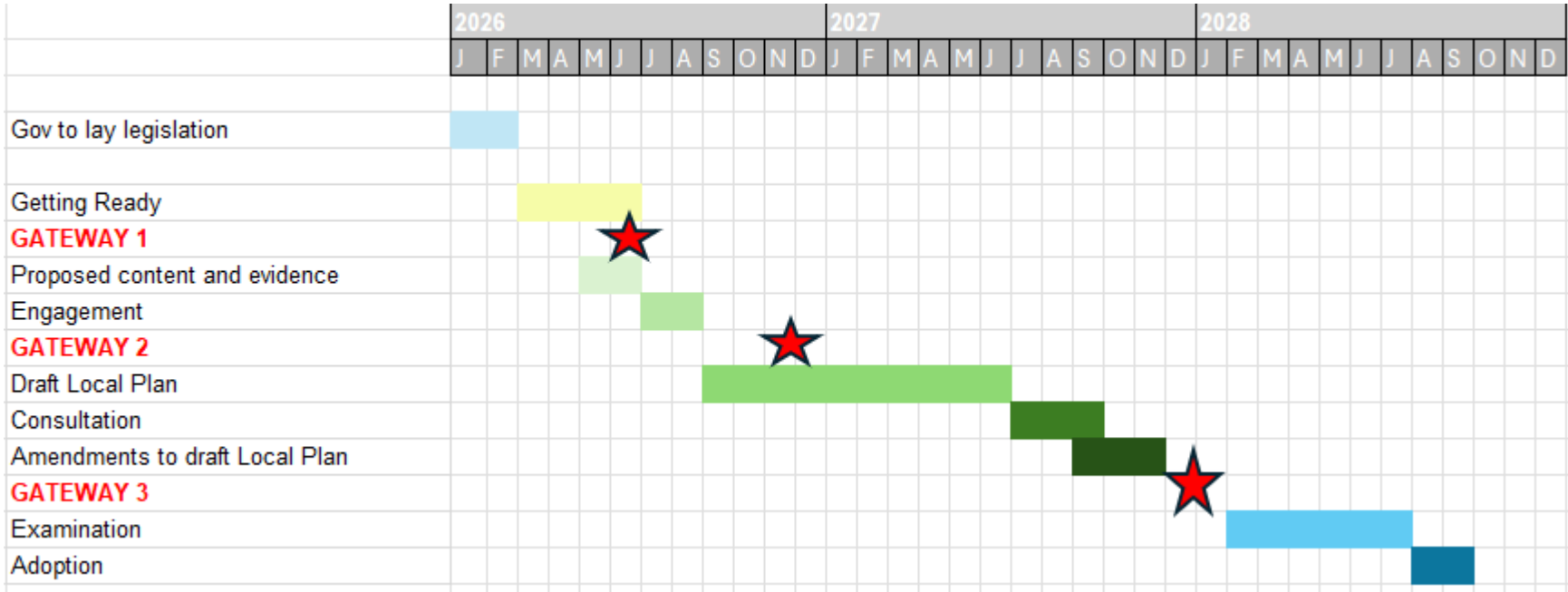
Rachael Rooney, Interim Strategic Planning Manager
01462 474328 rachael.rooney@north-herts.gov.uk

Nigel Smith, Director: Place
01462 474847 nigel.smith@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

[Local Plan next steps Cabinet Report 20 January 2026](#)

Appendix A: Local Plan Timetable



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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

3 FEBRAURY 2026

*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 2025-26

REPORT OF THE SCRUTINY OFFICER

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: NOT APPLICABLE

COUNCIL PRIORITY: THRIVING COMMUNITIES / ACCESSIBLE SERVICES / RESPONSIBLE GROWTH / SUSTAINABILITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report highlights items scheduled in the work programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2025-26 civic year. It also includes items that have not yet been assigned to a specific meeting of the Committee.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. 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.
- 2.2. 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.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 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.
- 3.2 The need to observe Constitutional requirements and monitor the Forward Plan for appropriate items to scrutinise remains a key aspect of work programming.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The Committee has varied its approach to overview and scrutiny activity over recent years. Currently it seeks to enter the process of policy development at an early stage and consequently may consider items associated with service action plans.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1 Each Committee meeting includes the opportunity for Members to comment on and input to the Committee's work programme.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report does not contain a recommendation on a key Executive decision and has therefore not been referred to in the Forward Plan.
- 6.2 The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee are sent the latest Forward Plan upon publication.
- 6.3 The Committee is asked to review the Forward Plan at each regular meeting to identify potential issues for inclusion in the work programme. Identification of a focus for the Committee's future activity should be identified at this stage wherever possible.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 The LGA Peer Committee Support was undertaken in 2022 and finalised in January 2023, which focused on the Overview and Scrutiny and Finance, Audit and Risk Committees. Recommendations for Overview & Scrutiny were made and are set out in an Action Plan, all actions in the plan have now been completed and the Action Plan will no longer be part of this report.
- 7.2 In line with the recommendation of the Corporate Peer Challenge 2023 Executive Members were invited to present reports that fall under their remit and to make presentations on specific issues that the Committee wish to consider.
- 7.3 The Committee now considers a wide range of issues, where appropriate, commencing its reviews early in the policy development process. By doing this it seeks to ensure assumptions are challenged at an early stage, mistakes are avoided, and eventual outcomes provide optimal benefit to the community.
- 7.4 The Committee seeks to ensure that consideration of agenda items minimises the additional burdens on staff resources. Wherever possible, requests are made for the presentation of documents already in existence rather than the production of new documents specifically for the Committee.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Work Programme

- 8.1 The Committee's work programme for the year requires reviewing at each meeting and direction is sought from the Committee on items they wish adding. Appendix A contains the work programme for 2025-26.
- 8.2 When considering additional topics their risk assessment and prioritisation will ensure that the most appropriate items taking forward to the work programme.

Forward Plan

- 8.3 The Forward Plan for January can be found at Appendix B. Members can view currently published forward plans here: [Browse plans - Cabinet, 2025 | North Herts Council](#)
- 8.4 Members are reminded that the Forward Plan acts as public notification of key executive decisions during the next four months and beyond that it is a working document subject to regular amendments.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Under section 6.2.5 the Constitution, the Committee is responsible for setting its own work programme however it must ensure it retains sufficient capacity within the programme to meets its statutory obligations.
- 9.2 Section 6.2.7 (u) of the constitution allows the Committee “to appoint time limited task and finish topic groups to undertake detailed scrutiny work and report back to the overview and scrutiny committee to make recommendations to the Cabinet.”
- 9.3 In accordance with the Council’s Constitution, the approval of the future scrutiny work programme falls within the remit of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 Depending on how they are applied in practice, the scope of the options presented in Sections 7 and 8 have the potential to be wide reaching. As detailed in Section 14: Human Resource Implications, the wider the reach, the more significant the impact on Officer time in terms of report writing, data analysis, and committee meeting attendance. Given recent funding pressures and the consequent reduction in Officer numbers, significant requests for scrutiny work will limit officer time available to spend on activities such as identifying and delivering cost reductions, income generation and project management.

- 10.2 Although not significant, a committee attendance allowance of £25.17 per Officer per evening meeting is payable to officers in attendance. This is in addition to providing time off in lieu or overtime as an alternative.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 Effective overview and scrutiny of policy, administrative, service delivery, and expenditure decisions helps reduce the risk of an inappropriate decision being made. The scope and timeframe for scrutiny interventions should be considered in light of the potential impact of inappropriate scrutiny leading to decisions not being made, inappropriately made or not made at the right time.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 12.2 There are no direct equality implications arising from this report. Effective scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring the local government remains transparent, accountable and open which ensures that the delivery of public services benefits all aspects of the community, where practical.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 There are no known environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 The widening of the reach of scrutiny reviews has the potential to significantly impact on officer time in terms of the reprioritisation of already agreed projects, their scope or timetabling or resources. There is also the potential for additional resource requirements in relation to report writing, information collection and analysis and committee attendance. Delivery of service plans to achieve the Council’s agreed Corporate Plan objectives might, therefore, be potentially negatively impacted.

16. APPENDICES

- 16.1 Appendix A – Work Programme of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025-2026

16.2 Appendix B – Forward Plan – 16 January 2026

16.3 Appendix C – Overview and Scrutiny Decisions and Monitoring Tracker

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1 Jeevan Mann, Scrutiny Officer, Jeevan.Mann@north-herts.gov.uk , ext 4295

17.2 James Lovegrove, Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager, james.Lovegrove@northherts.gov.uk , ext 4204

17.3 Isabelle Alajooz, Legal Commercial Team Manager and Deputy Monitoring Officer, Isabelle.Alajooz@north-herts.gov.uk , ext 4346

17.4 Tim Everitt, Performance and Risk Officer, Tim.Everitt@north-herts.gov.uk , ext 4646

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Previous Reports to the [Overview and Scrutiny Committee](#) and [Forward Plans](#).

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KEY
Items identified for work programme
Annual reports
Scrutiny reports
Completed

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME 2025-26

MEETING DATE	ITEMS AT MEETING	EXECUTIVE / REPORT AUTHOR
10 June 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> O&S Annual Report 3C's – info to note Waste Contract Work Programme & Decisions and Monitoring Tracker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councillor Matt Barnes Councillor Val Bryant Councillor Amy Allen Scrutiny Officer
9 September 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Council Delivery Plan & Performance indicators - Q1 Update Pay on Exit Parking Local government Reorganisation Work Programme & Decisions and Monitoring Tracker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councillor Ian Albert Councillor Donna Wright Councillor Laura Williams Scrutiny Officer
11 November 2025	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Town Centre Strategy Leisure and Active Communities Contract update Waste and Recycling Service change mobilisation Solar for Business Work Programme & Decisions and Monitoring Tracker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councillor Donna Wright Councillor Amy Allen Councillor Amy Allen Councillor Amy Allen Scrutiny Officer
6 January 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Crime and Disorder Issues – Hertfordshire Constabulary Council Delivery Plan & Key Performance Indicators – Q2 Update New Museum collection facility update Effectiveness of Council Tax Reduction Scheme Community Safety Work Programme & Decisions and Monitoring Tracker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Hertfordshire Constabulary Councillor Ian Albert Councillor Tamsin Thomas Councillor Ian Alber Councillor Mick Debenham Scrutiny Officer
3 February 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> LGA Progress Report Digital Transformation and Inclusion Enterprise portfolio Update Local Plan review Work Programme & Decisions and Monitoring Tracker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councillor Val Bryant Councillor Val Bryant Councillor Tamsin Thomas Councillor Donna Wright Scrutiny Officer
24 March 2026	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> RIPA 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Councillor Daniel Allen

MEETING DATE	ITEMS AT MEETING	EXECUTIVE / REPORT AUTHOR
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council Delivery Plan & Key Performance Indicators – Q3 Update • S106 Task and Finish Group Report • Work Programme & Decisions and Monitoring Tracker 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor Ian Albert • Councillor Ralph Muncer • Councillor Ralph Muncer (Chair of Task and Finish Group) • Scrutiny Officer

Items deferred / to be rescheduled

- Annual Safeguarding Review
- Environmental Health
- Update on Health Equalities

For further investigation

- Decarbonisation
- National Planning Changes
- Officer recruitment / retention – grow your own / apprentices / career grading

Candidate topics to be scheduled:

- Cabinet Panel
- Impact of the Council's grant policies
- Officer recruitment & retention
- Sustainability
- Tackling Homelessness in North Herts

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Forward Plan of Key Decisions - 16 January 2026

The Forward Plan contains brief details of Key Decisions that the Council is likely to take over the next four month period and beyond. You will also find details of contacts who can provide further information and hear your views. **Please note that the dates of some of the decisions may change from month to month, please check with Committee, Member and Scrutiny Services on (01462) 474655 before deciding to attend a meeting.**

Decision required	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision Maker	Date of Decision	Documents to be submitted to Decision Maker	Contact Officer from whom documents can be requested	Confirmation that other documents may be submitted to the Decision Maker	Procedure for requesting details of other documents
Revocation of Air Quality Management Areas in Hitchin		Cabinet	20 Jan 2026		Jo Doggett, Director - Regulatory jo.doggett@north-herts.gov.uk, Frank Harrison, Environmental Health Manager frank.harrison@north-herts.gov.uk, Lucy Tucker lucy.tucker@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
Local Plan next steps		Cabinet	20 Jan 2026		Rachael Rooney, Interim Strategic Planning Manager rachael.rooney@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
Garden Waste Charge 2026-27		Cabinet	20 Jan 2026		Sarah Kingsley, Director - Environment sarah.kingsley@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
Q2 Council Delivery Plan Update		Cabinet	20 Jan 2026		Ian Couper, Director - Resources ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6

Decision required	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision Maker	Date of Decision	Documents to be submitted to Decision Maker	Contact Officer from whom documents can be requested	Confirmation that other documents may be submitted to the Decision Maker	Procedure for requesting details of other documents
TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-YEAR REVIEW 2025/26		Cabinet	20 Jan 2026		Ian Couper, Director - Resources ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
CAPITAL PROGRAMME MID-YEAR REVIEW 2025/26		Cabinet	20 Jan 2026		Antonio Ciampa, Accountancy Manager antonio.ciampa@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
SECOND QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2025/26		Cabinet	20 Jan 2026		Ian Couper, Director - Resources ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
North Herts District Design Code		Cabinet	17 Feb 2026		Sohanna Srinivasan, Principal Planning & Urban Design Officer sohanna.srinivasan@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
Proposed Parking Tariffs for 2026/27		Cabinet	17 Feb 2026		Louise Symes, Strategic Planning and Projects Manager louise.symes@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
Lease on Letchworth Multi Storey Car Park		Cabinet	17 Feb 2026		Steve Crowley, Director - Enterprise steve.crowley@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6

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Decision required	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision Maker	Date of Decision	Documents to be submitted to Decision Maker	Contact Officer from whom documents can be requested	Confirmation that other documents may be submitted to the Decision Maker	Procedure for requesting details of other documents
Arrangements for carrying out Public Health Funerals		Cabinet	17 Feb 2026		Frank Harrison, Environmental Health Manager frank.harrison@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
Stray Dog Policy		Cabinet	17 Feb 2026		Frank Harrison, Environmental Health Manager frank.harrison@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
Homelessness Prevention Grant allocations and update		Cabinet	17 Feb 2026		Martin Lawrence, Strategic Housing Manager martin.lawrence@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
23 Council Delivery Plan Update		Cabinet	14 Apr 2026		Ian Couper, Director - Resources ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
TREASURY MANAGEMENT THIRD QUARTER REVIEW 2025/26		Cabinet	14 Apr 2026		Ian Couper, Director - Resources ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
THIRD QUARTER CAPITAL PROGRAMME REVIEW 2025/26		Cabinet	14 Apr 2026		Ian Couper, Director - Resources ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6

Decision required	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision Maker	Date of Decision	Documents to be submitted to Decision Maker	Contact Officer from whom documents can be requested	Confirmation that other documents may be submitted to the Decision Maker	Procedure for requesting details of other documents
THIRD QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2025/26		Cabinet	14 Apr 2026		Ian Couper, Director - Resources ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
Developer Contributions SPD		Cabinet	14 Apr 2026		Clare Skeels, Senior Planning Officer clare.skeels@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2026-2030		Cabinet	14 Apr 2026		Reuben Ayavoo, Policy & Community Manager reuben.ayavoo@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
Regulators Reform Act Enforcement Policy		Cabinet	14 Apr 2026		Frank Harrison, Environmental Health Manager frank.harrison@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
Debt Recovery Policy		Cabinet	14 Apr 2026		Frank Harrison, Environmental Health Manager frank.harrison@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6
Landlord Enforcement Policy		Cabinet	14 Apr 2026		Frank Harrison, Environmental Health Manager frank.harrison@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6

Decision required	Overview and Scrutiny	Decision Maker	Date of Decision	Documents to be submitted to Decision Maker	Contact Officer from whom documents can be requested	Confirmation that other documents may be submitted to the Decision Maker	Procedure for requesting details of other documents
Civil Penalties Policy		Cabinet	14 Apr 2026		Frank Harrison, Environmental Health Manager frank.harrison@north-herts.gov.uk	Yes	Via the Contact Officer named in Column 6

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DECISIONS

Item number	Recommendation/ Referral	Details from Cabinet	Status
COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2025-26 (QUARTER 2 UPDATE)			
27	<p>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.</p> <p>REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide the 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.</p> <p>O&S Committee meeting - Tuesday 6th January 2026 @ 7.30pm</p>	<p>RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted progress against Council projects and performance indicators, as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A), and approved new milestones and changes to milestones.</p> <p>REASON FOR DECISION: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide the 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.</p> <p>Cabinet meeting - Tuesday 20th January 2026 @ 7.30pm</p>	Open

Item number	Recommendation/ Referral	Details from Cabinet	Status
EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME AND PROPOSALS FOR 2026/27			
28	<p>RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:</p> <p>(1) To agree to amend the Council Tax discretionary policy to include the support provided to residents with a terminal illness, with the wording detailed in paragraph 8.7, and</p> <p>(2) To approve changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme bands to reflect the impact of the inflation.</p> <p>REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: To respond to the request from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and to consider changes for next year.</p> <p>O&S Committee meeting - Tuesday 6th January 2026 @ 7.30pm</p>	<p>RECOMMEND TO COUNCIL:</p> <p>That it:</p> <p>(1) Amend the Council Tax discretionary policy to include the support provided to residents with a terminal illness, with the wording detailed in paragraph 8.17.</p> <p>(2) Approve changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme bands to reflect the impact of inflation.</p> <p>REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: To respond to the request from Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and to consider changes for next year.</p> <p>Cabinet meeting - Tuesday 20th January 2026 @ 7.30pm</p>	Open