

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET PANEL ON THE ENVIRONMENT

MEETING HELD VIRTUALLY VIA ZOOM
ON WEDNESDAY, 1ST APRIL, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Amy Allen (Chair), Emma Fernandes, Joe Graziano, Caroline McDonnell and Claire Strong.*

In Attendance: *Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Daisy Harris (Business Admin Apprentice - Policy), Ellie Hollingsworth (Policy & Strategy Officer), Louise Overington (Service Development and Support Manager), Amber Smith-Howell (National Graduate - Management Trainee) and Kate Yiannacou (Shared Waste Communication Officer).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting there were 5 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

Councillor Daniel Allen was also in attendance.

25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 24 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Dominic Griffiths.

26 MINUTES - 11 FEBRUARY 2026

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 40 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Emma Fernandes seconded and, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 11 February 2026 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

27 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 6 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 reminded Members that the Council had declared both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency, and that Officers and Members should have this in mind when carrying out their various roles and tasks for the District. More details on this could be found on the Agenda front sheet.

- (4) The Chair informed those present that the theme for this Panel meeting was 'Waste and Recycling' and that Officers from the Waste Team, as well as speakers from Veolia, Timberpak Pearce and Biogen were in attendance to present on this topic at Agenda Item 6.
- (5) The Chair clarified the procedure for asking questions.
- (6) The Chair advised of a change to the order of Agenda and Agenda Item 6 would be taken before Agenda Item 5.

28 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 1 second

There was no other business notified.

29 PRESENTATIONS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 6 seconds

The Chair invited Luke Ford from Biogen to give a presentation, supported by slides and images, on Food Waste Recycling. They thanked the Chair for the opportunity to present and advised that:

- Biogen operated 12 food waste plants, 12 food transfer stations, and 7 agricultural waste plants in the UK.
- Organic food waste material was pre-processed and treated to produce biogas, which was used to produce renewable electricity for the national grid.
- 691KG of carbon was offset by every tonne of food waste that they treated.
- Biogen treated 500,000 tonnes of food waste annually across the UK and had over 180 employees.
- Two of their food waste plants were in Hertfordshire, with one in Baldock, which treated the food waste collected in North Herts.
- Fertiliser was also produced from the food waste treatment process, and this was supplied to local farms and displaced the use of carbon intensive, artificial fertilisers.
- One tonne of food waste produced 450 kilowatt-hours of electricity and 900KG of fertiliser.
- They worked with more than 40 local authorities, national retailers such as Asda, Aldi and Ocado, in addition to national manufacturers and total waste management providers.
- Campaigns had been carried out with local authorities to encourage residents to segregate their waste to prevent contamination and increase recycling rates.
- They had also worked with local authorities to change the way that they reported waste data in terms of carbon savings.
- 15,000 tonnes of food waste was processed by Biogen in Hertfordshire per annum, which powered 2,500 homes.
- Educational visits were made to local schools to provide social value.
- Biogas production was projected to reach at least 50 terawatt-hours (TWH) by 2050 to help increase energy security.
- Three of their facilities generated biogas, with a fourth under construction and a fifth granted planning permission.
- Biogas would start to be used for sustainable aviation fuel under the Sustainable Aviation Fuel Mandate.
- The Government had also created a Renewable Transport Fuel Certificate, which would encourage the use of biogas in vehicles.

- 26.4 TWH would be required to power UK data centres annually by 2030, and biogas could offer more flexibility than other renewable energy sources to match the peaks of energy demand associated with these.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Strong
- Councillor Daniel Allen

In response to questions, Luke Ford advised that:

- The Baldock site was not open for the public to visit on an impromptu basis, but organised visits were accommodated when interest was raised.
- Garden waste could not be processed at food waste plants, but they had trialled grass trimmings and crops at their agricultural waste plants.
- The smell associated with the Baldock site was likely to come from the spreading of digestate across nearby fields rather than the anaerobic digestion process itself.

The Chair thanked Luke Ford for his presentation and invited the Shared Waste Communication Officer and Victoria Cooper from Veolia to give a presentation, supported by slides and images, on the New Waste Service Provision. They thanked the Chair for the opportunity to present and advised that:

- Weekly food waste collections had been introduced in East Herts and continued in North Herts.
- A blue lidded bin for cardboard and paper recycling had been introduced to replace the previous paper recycling boxes, which meant that the black lidded bin was repurposed for glass, metal and plastic recycling, with the addition of plastic bag and wrapping recycling.
- The purple lidded bin for non-recyclables had remained and collections for this and the black and blue lidded bins had changed to three-weekly.
- Bi-weekly garden waste bin collections remained the same.
- Following public consultation, 84% of respondents agreed that the Council should encourage residents to recycle more, and 49% detailed that their non-recyclables bin was only half or a quarter full when collected.
- The changes to bins and their collection frequencies had been made to motivate residents to recycle more in response to the consultation, and to meet new government legislation.
- Both districts had seen a 37% drop in non-recyclable waste since the service change when compared with the previous year, which equated to 6,000 tonnes less.
- An increase in the food waste tonnage in North Herts on the previous year highlighted the promotion on this as part of the service change.
- Strong engagement had been received from East Herts residents in response to the introduction of food waste recycling.
- Waste tonnage in the black lidded bin had decreased as cardboard was being collected in the blue lidded bin instead, and both plastic bags and wrappings did not contribute substantially to the data as they were lightweight.
- There had been approximately a 20% increase in cardboard and paper recycled across both districts.
- Initial backlash from some residents had been balanced out by others recognising the positive impacts of the change.
- Bin day confusion had been alleviated by the Council app that had been launched in November.
- The Council had considered how the waste contract with Veolia could deliver social value through contributing to the economic, social and environmental wellbeing of the area.

- These were categorised by Veolia by their theme, outcome and measure, also known as the National TOMs indicators.
- Veolia had made several contract commitments such as providing sustainable employment to local disadvantaged cohorts, career progression and upskilling to staff, business advice, financial contributions to different communities, and a reduction in on-site emissions and single use plastics.
- All social value activities were recorded through their social value portal, and they had provided £23,323 of social value since May 2025.
- They worked with Step2Skills to integrate individuals into the workplace.
- £15,014 had been given to 21 community groups and grassroots projects from the Veolia Sustainability Fund.
- 16 different schools had been given fruit trees through the Veolia Orchards Project.
- A forum for managing agents and landlords had been created to encourage recycling by residents at communal properties.
- Work had been carried out with local groups to safeguard the environment through participation in events for Food Waste Action Week and Repair Week.
- Equipment had been supplied to volunteers for local litter picks.
- An annual report on the social value provided by Veolia would be made available after the first year of the contract had concluded.

The following members of the public and Members asked questions:

- Diane Ketcher
- Councillor Claire Strong

In response to questions, the Shared Waste Communication Officer advised that:

- Residents should refer to the Council website for recycling guidelines rather than product packaging.
- Residents were always encouraged to recycle plastics even if they were unsure whether it was recyclable, but it was acknowledged that this might lead to some contamination.
- Focus would be put on increasing food waste recycling as its rate was plateauing.
- They would continue to push the 'Recycle Right' message to residents to reduce non-recyclable waste and encourage the repurposing of items where possible.
- They were awaiting the completion of waste composition analysis in Hertfordshire, which would provide data for food contamination rates within the non-recyclables waste stream and inform their next steps on communications with residents.

In response to questions, Duncan Jones advised that:

- It was impossible to achieve a 100% purity for recycled plastics as there were 40-50 different polymers and not all of them were recyclable.
- Biodegradable and recyclable plastics supplied by businesses would be modulated through the Extended Producer Responsibility framework, and penalties would be imposed based on how recyclable the plastics were under the framework.
- There was a small amount of contamination caused by putting a non-recyclable item into a recycling bin, but this would not contaminate an entire load.
- The contamination rate of recycling in Hertfordshire was roughly 5%, which was low compared to London where the percentage varied from 15-30%.

In response to questions, the Chair advised that:

- Families with three or more children qualified for a larger non-recyclable waste bin.
- The change to three-weekly collections had encouraged recycling behavioural changes, but it was recognised that promotion might need to be done on food waste caddies to encourage more residents to participate in food waste recycling.

- Letchworth Garden Shed allowed residents to rent communal items.

The Chair thanked the Shared Waste Communication Officer and Victoria Cooper for their presentation and invited Duncan Jones from Timberpak Pearce to give a presentation, supported by slides and images, on Material Recovery Facilities. They thanked the Chair for the opportunity to present and advised that:

- Egger Timberpak and Pearce Recycling had entered a 50/50 joint venture in November 2023 to form Timberpak Pearce.
- Their operations focused on recovery rather than recycling, which involved the conversion of mixed materials into single stream materials that were ready for recycling.
- The facility in St Albans had a capacity to process 150,000 tonnes of waste per year, and approximately 50,000 tonnes of wood was also processed at this facility.
- Operation hours were 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- 5 optical sortation units were operational at St Albans to separate recyclable materials from the Dry Mixed Recycling (DMR) they received from various local authorities. AI would be implemented into the units to allow them to work in tandem more effectively.
- Each pellenc optical sorter was programmed to sort a specific material within the process to produce clean glass, films, cardboard, fibre, plastics and aluminium cans at the end.
- 'Project Aluminium' would introduce eddy current and electro magnetic separators that would improve the capture of aluminium and steel cans.
- Out of 86,000 tonnes of DMR received from local authorities, 79,000 tonnes of recyclables were recovered, which equated to a 92% recycling rate.
- Fibre from North and East Herts as a percentage of DMR received had dropped significantly as another company processed the cardboard and paper recycling.
- A change to three-weekly bin collections has not cause DMR contamination rates to spike significantly.
- There had been an upward trend in soft plastics received.
- They had 6 wood recycling facilities across the UK, which aimed to process 400,000 tonnes of wood per annum.
- The recycled wood material was sent to their chipboard production facilities to produce chipboard, which was sold to the commercial sector.
- £180M had been self-invested into their wood processing facilities.
- They had 22 plants in 11 countries around the world, with 11,000 employees.

In response to a question from Councillor Claire Strong, Duncan Jones advised that 20,000 tonnes of wood was received from household waste recycling centres in Hertfordshire, and a further 30,000 tonnes from the commercial sector in the county.

The Chair thanked Duncan Jones for his presentation.

30 INFORMATION NOTE: COUNCIL ACTIVITY UPDATE AND ACTION TRACKER

Audio recording – 1 hour 22 minutes 11 seconds

Officers from the Policy and Strategy Team provided a verbal update on the Information Note entitled 'Council Activity Update and Action Tracker' and advised that:

- There were no new actions on the Action Tracker, but this would be reviewed ahead of the next meeting in the new Civic Year.
- The third round of Solar Together had closed and installations for this would be ending soon. Of the 650 interests registered, 73 solar installations and 69 battery installations had been made.
- Hertfordshire County Council Flood Pilot Scheme to support communities become more resilient and prepared for future flooding remained open to applications.

- The Council were working with the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership to support the delivery of a Retrofit Strategy.
- 15,000 trees had been claimed across the district this year from the 'Your Tree Our Future' initiative.
- The Local Nature Recovery Strategy for Hertfordshire was available to view on the Hertfordshire County Council website and residents could help by planting bee-friendly wildflowers, avoiding astroturf and building fence holes for hedgehogs.
- Two areas in Hitchin were no longer Air Quality Management Areas as air quality had remained below national limits for 5 years. However, air quality would continue to be monitored in these areas.
- Decarbonisation works at Royston Leisure Centre had been complete with works at other leisure centres in the district due to be finished by the summer.
- Design work for the decarbonisation of Hitchin Town Hall, North Herts Museum and North Herts Leisure Centre learner pool was progressing.
- A report on greenhouse gas emissions for the Council and the wider district had been published on the Council website.
- John O'Connor would be holding a community bee event in Baldock on 4 April 2026 to expand the Bee Corridor in North Herts and more information about this could be found on the Council website and Climate Hive.
- The Council were partnering with Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation to host a community energy event at Broadway Cinema in Letchworth in June and tickets were available for this on the Broadway Cinema website.
- Work on delivering the actions within the Sustainability Strategy had continued.
- Use of hydrogenated vegetable oil in refuse vehicles had saved 368KG of carbon from May to November 2025 and new electric refuse vehicles would enable further reductions.
- 81% of staff had completed the Sustainability e-learning module and 11 staff were now certified as Carbon Literate.
- 12 installations had been made through the Warm Homes Local Grant scheme in the first year, and a further 10 properties had been surveyed for the second year.
- The Council app now had over 17,000 downloads.
- A process had been put in place to record and monitor the impact of extreme weather events on Council services.
- More wild areas had been established across the district, including a wild meadow at Wilbury Hills Cemetery.
- A salary sacrifice scheme had been launched for staff to help them invest in lower emission vehicles and support a reduction in commuting emissions.

The Chair thanked Members, officers and speakers for their participation at the Cabinet Panel during the Civic Year.

31 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 1 hour 29 minutes 44 seconds

It was advised that there was no specific participation from members of the public at this meeting, but that public participants had been included as part of discussions on Agenda Items 5 and 6.

The meeting closed at 9.02 pm

Chair