Public Document Pack

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

13 November 2026

Our Ref Cabinet Tuesday, 24 November 2026
Contact. Committee Services
Direct Dial. 01462 474655
Email. committee.services@north-herts.gov.uk

To: Members of the Cabinet:

Executive Members Councillors: Val Bryant (Chair), Sean Nolan (Vice Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Daniel Allen, Mick Debenham, Tamsin Thomas, Laura Williams and Donna Wright.

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE CABINET

to be held in the

COUNCIL CHAMBER - DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF

on

TUESDAY, 24TH NOVEMBER, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

Yours sincerely,

Isabelle Alajooz
Director – Governance

****MEMBERS PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU DOWNLOAD ALL AGENDAS AND REPORTS VIA THE MOD.GOV APPLICATION ON YOUR TABLET BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING****

Agenda
Part I

Item **Page**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. MINUTES - 22 SEPTEMBER 2026 (Pages 5 - 22)

To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 22 September 2026.

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

Climate Emergency

The Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to achieving a target of zero carbon emissions by 2030 and helping local people and businesses to reduce their own carbon emissions.

A Cabinet Panel on the Environment has been established to engage with local people on matters relating to the climate emergency and advise the council on how to achieve these climate change objectives. A Climate Change Implementation group of councillors and council officers meets regularly to produce plans and monitor progress. Actions taken or currently underway include switching to green energy, incentives for low emission taxis, expanding tree planting and working to cut food waste.

In addition the council is a member of the Hertfordshire Climate Change and Sustainability Partnership, working with other councils across Hertfordshire to reduce the county's carbon emissions and climate impact.

The Council's dedicated webpage on Climate Change includes details of the council's climate change strategy, the work of the Cabinet Panel on the Environment and a monthly briefing on progress.

Ecological Emergency

The Council has declared an ecological emergency and is committed to addressing the ecological emergency and nature recovery by identifying appropriate areas for habitat restoration and biodiversity net gain whilst ensuring that development limits impact on existing habitats in its process.

The Council has set out to do that by a) setting measurable targets and standards for biodiversity increase, in both species and quantities, seeking to increase community engagement, b) to work with our partners to establish a Local Nature Partnership for Hertfordshire and to develop Nature Recovery Networks and Nature Recovery Strategy for Hertfordshire and c) to investigate new approaches to nature recovery such as habitat banking that deliver biodiversity objectives and provide new investment opportunities.

Declarations of Interest

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. ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES (Pages 23 - 26)

6A) Finance, Audit and Risk Committee – Medium Term Financial Strategy 2027-30 – **to be considered with Agenda Item 10.**

7. FOOD SAMPLING POLICY (Pages 27 - 44)

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – REGULATORY

To enable the Council to meet its legal obligations in line with the Food Law Code of Practice (England) (FLCoP) as published by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) under the provisions of the Food Safety Act, 1990 (the 'Act'), which requires every Competent Food Authority (CFA) to produce and make available a food sampling policy.

8. HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY (Pages 45 - 80)

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – ENTERPRISE

This report seeks Cabinet approval of an updated Health and Safety Policy. The update responds to a recommendation in the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) audit report that the Policy should reflect the revised arrangements between the Council and Hertfordshire County Council's Health and Safety Team. The proposed Policy clarifies the Council's health and safety governance, responsibilities and access to competent advice under those revised arrangements.

9. ADOPTION OF HOMELESSNESS ACTION PLAN AND GRANT (Pages 81 - 110)
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – REGULATORY

The Council is required to produce a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan to meet new conditions for receipt of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government homelessness grant. This report contains a proposed Action Plan together with an updated temporary accommodation policy, also required. It also details proposals for an allocation of the recently announced Rough Sleeping Programme funding for the establishment of a new Rapid Prevention, Assessment and Resettlement service in the district which will provide on-the-day emergency accommodation and intensive support for people who are rough sleeping or at imminent risk of rough sleeping.

10. MEDIUM TERM FINANCIAL STRATEGY 2027-30 (Pages 111 - 126)
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

This report recommends the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2027/28 to 2029/30 to guide and inform the Council's Business Planning Process. The three-year period of the MTFS reflects the probable timelines related to Local Government Reorganisation.

11. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC
To consider passing the following resolution: That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following report will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

12. PART 2 MINUTES - 22 SEPTEMBER 2026 127 - 130
To take as read and approve as a true record the Part 2 minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 22 September 2026.

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

CABINET

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 22ND SEPTEMBER, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Val Bryant (Chair), Sean Nolan (Vice-Chair), Ian Albert, Amy Allen, Mick Debenham, Tamsin Thomas, Donna Wright and Daniel Allen.*

In Attendance: *Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Philip Doggett (Principal Estates Surveyor), Robert Filby (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Sarah Kingsley (Director - Environment), Martin Lawrence (Strategic Housing Manager), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Alan North (Service Manager - Greenspace), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive), Rachael Rooney (Interim Strategic Planning Manager), Nigel Smith (Director - Place) and Louise Symes (Transport, Parking & Projects Service Manager).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately* 3 *members of the public, including registered speakers.*

Councillor Jon Clayden was present as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Stewart Willoughby was present as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for the meeting on 9 September 2026.

25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 47 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Laura Williams.

26 MINUTES - 16 JUNE 2026

Audio Recording – 1 minute 56 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 16 June 2206 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

27 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 32 seconds

There was no other business notified.

28 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 36 seconds

(1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.

(2) The Chair reminded Members that the Council had declared both a Climate Emergency and an Ecological Emergency. These are serious decisions, and mean that, as this was an emergency, all of us, Officers and Members had that in mind as we carried out our various roles and tasks for the benefit of our District.

(3) 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.

(4) The Chair advised for the purposes of clarification that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting.

29 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 51 seconds

The Chair invited Mr David Cook to provide a 5-minute verbal presentation relating to Agenda Item 8 – Local Plan – Content and Evidence Base Consultation.

Mr Cook thanked the Chair for the opportunity and advised that:

- He was speaking as a North Herts resident with three daughters living at home due to not being able to afford to move out and remain in North Herts.
- He provided consultancy planning work on a commercial basis but had no work connection to the North Herts area.
- He wanted to note that the Interim Strategic Planning Manager was an asset to the Council and was a great ambassador in the community promoting interest and engagement with the process.
- His first point related to self-build, which was referred to within the document pack, which outlined there was a statutory duty to meet demand for this.
- Whilst two options were presented for the Cabinet to consider, they should also consider a third option which could establish a specific policy to encourage self-build development, as was the case in Central Bedfordshire.
- He did not want Cabinet to adopt this policy tonight, but rather to consult on this position.
- Secondly, many key workers cannot afford to live in the area local to which they work, with most housing still unaffordable even at reduced market rates. This included people like teachers, nurses and Council officers, who were having to travel into their place of work to provide services to villages which were unaffordable.
- Again, there should be a consideration as part of the consultation on how this could be addressed.
- Finally, there was an issue with the balance of urban and rural development, with most housing being provided as urban expansion and therefore there would be a higher proportion of urban properties. However, this was not beneficial to the surrounding villages, and consideration should be given to appropriate development to support rural life, such as farm worker properties previously built in the rural areas of the district.

In response to the presentation, the following Members raised points:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Donna Wright

The points raised included:

- There were specific self-build plots included in the permission granted for the Land North of the Grange development. This was an important step and reflected that self-build had always been part of the agenda of the Council.
- There were good points raised and these could be taken forward and considered as part of the next version of the Local Plan.
- The comments on urban versus rural expansion were interesting and the historical trend of this could be explored.
- Whilst rural communities did need to be sustainable and provide options for younger workers to remain local, there was also a need to consider the protection of the countryside, as well as providing housing with suitable transport options.
- It was important to provide a good balance of appropriate group across the settlements in the district.

The Chair thanked Mr Cook for his presentation.

30 ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Audio recording – 12 minutes 16 seconds

The Chair advised that the items referred from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee would be taken with the respective items on the Agenda.

31 CORPORATE PEER CHALLENGE ACTION PLAN UPDATE

Audio recording – 13 minutes 02 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant, as Leader of the Council, presented the report entitled 'Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan Update' and highlighted that:

- This report provided an update for Cabinet against the agreed Action Plan following the Corporate Peer Challenge in November 2024.
- The Action Plan was approved by Cabinet in March 2025, with further updates provided at meetings in September 2025 and February 2026.
- A follow up report from the Local Government Association Peers was also presented to Cabinet in February 2026.

The Chief Executive further highlighted for Members that:

- There were references to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Section 8 of the report. However, this process had been paused by the government since the report was written. This pause did not have any material impact on the recommendations proposed.
- Should the LGR process be cancelled, Cabinet may need to consider the Action Plan again and a further Corporate Peer Challenge visit may be conducted.
- However, the indications so far were that LGR was on pause and would proceed in the future.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ian Alber
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Mick Debenham

In response to questions, the Chief Executive advised that:

- The recommendations proposed were that no further reports would be provided to Cabinet and therefore it would not be relevant to add further detail on timescales for actions. However, this could be discussed outside of the meeting, if further clarification was required.
- Executive Members and their relevant Directors could continue to discuss actions which related to their areas and monitor any ongoing actions outside of Cabinet meetings.
- An assessment of how well the Action Plan had been delivered could form part of the ongoing discussion between Executive Members and Directors.
- The increased communication with staff has continued throughout the LGR process to date and had increased since the pause was announced, with an all-staff briefing arranged specifically to address the pause.
- A staff survey was being conducted at the time of the pause announcement, and it was agreed that this would be continued and results analysed to provide insight into the impact of the pause on staff.
- There was a Member Briefing arranged for Thursday 24 September to provide information on the LGR pause.
- The restructure of the Leadership Team and its success could be discussed at the next Political Liaison Board meeting.

Councillor Val Bryant, as Chair, proposed to approve the recommendations, as amended, and this was seconded by Councillor Mick Debenham.

As part of the debate, Councillor Daniel Allen noted that the Council had learnt a lot from this Peer Review process and it had brought staff and Councillors into a better way of working together. He would encourage all other authorities to engage with the Peer Review process to enhance working at their organisation.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the progress against the agreed Action Plan.

(2) Agreed no further progress updates are required at meetings, but ongoing actions should be appropriately continued and developed between Directors and relevant Executive Members.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: As the Action Plan is as complete as it is likely to be, plus the need to focus resource on Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), it is recommended that no further updates are provided to the Action Plan. To be clear this does not mean that the Council will now ignore the recommendations, but rather reflects that changes have been embedded in how we work and that these have now become business as usual.

32 LOCAL PLAN - CONTENT AND EVIDENCE BASE CONSULTATION

Audio recording – 25 minutes 57 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled ‘Local Plan – Content and Evidence Base Consultation’ and highlighted that:

- The report sought Cabinet approval the publish the Local Plan and Evidence Base documents for consultation, which would form the second stage of the Local Plan Review process.
- The consultation feedback would feed into the Local Plan Review process in 2027.

- The documents for consultation were included as appendices to the report, with a further 4 appendices included for information only.
- Following reforms to the plan making system in March 2026, there were five main stages to be completed, which were outlined in paragraph 7.1 of the report.
- An initial public scoping consultation took place between May and June 2026 and sought views on which issues and priorities should be included. There were 75 responses received and these were outlined at Appendix A, with most of the main issues having been incorporated already.
- As well as the public consultation, Member Workshops have been held on a regular basis and updates have been provided to the Strategic Planning Board.
- The Gateway 1 Assessment was required by the end of October 2026 and was a self-assessment on how prepared the Council was to begin the review process. This assessment was included at Appendix B.
- A site submission map had been added to the website which allowed stakeholders to review and discuss sites in advance of the formal consultation starting in October. The site map included all suggested sites and allocated sites from the last Local Plan which had not started as of March 2026. These sites were currently being assessed but no decisions on which would be taken forward had yet been taken.
- There was a Member Workshop scheduled for 18 January 2027 to allow members to consider some of the assessments before consultation later in 2027.
- The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) now outlined that Local Plans should cover a minimum of 10 years rather than a minimum of 15 years as per the previous NPPF. Therefore, it was suggested that this Plan cover 2029-2040. This was to align with the anticipated adoption in 2029, but should also ensure there is enough land available for future development, allowing for longer term projects to be brought forward.
- There remained several risks including Local Government. Reorganisation, future government policy changes, budget available to support the process and resourcing of the Strategic Planning team.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Daniel Allen

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

- Any changes to government policy would need to be considered as the Plan was prepared and that was normal practice. Some policy changes would be immediately introduced, whereas others would have transitional arrangements before the new policy applied.
- They had not considered using social media videos or the North Herts app to promote the consultation but would liaise with the Communications team to explore these options.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed to approve the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Val Bryant

The following points were made as part of the debate:

- The Council app had now had over 15k downloads in North Herts.
- Officers should be thanked for the work done and the comprehensive nature of the documents produced to date.

- The site submission maps on the website are a little unclear and could be more accessible on the website.
- The Member Workshops have been really valuable to attend.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the following documents:
- Consultation Summary Report – scoping consultation (Appendix A)
- Gateway 1 self-assessment (Appendix B)
- Consultation and Engagement Strategy (Appendix C)

(2) Approved the Local Plan using a plan-period of 11 years from 2029 – 2040

(3) Delegated authority to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Director of Place, to amend and update the Statement of Community Involvement.

(4) Approved for consultation, the following documents:
- Content and Evidence Base document (Appendix D)
- Sustainability Appraisal Scoping Report (Appendix E)
- Equality Impact Assessment (Appendix F)
- Health Impact Assessment (Appendix G)

and delegated to the Director of Place, in consultation with the Executive Member of Place, to make any minor updates of a non-substantive nature to these documents, including in relation to any updates on Local Government Reorganisation.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure the Council continues to meet the agreed milestones set out in the published timetable required under new Plan-making system.

33 STRATEGIC PLANNING MATTERS REPORT

Audio recording – 38 minutes 29 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled 'Strategic Planning Matters Report' and highlighted that:

- The final updated National Planning Policy Framework was published on 17 August 2026. It was not radically different from the draft version released in December 2025 but provided important clarifications and updated definitions.
- There were new National Development Management policies introduced, which could take precedence over local planning policies where there were conflicts.
- There were further updates in approach to greenbelt, climate change, health inequalities and building safe communities, where were outlined within the report.
- A new National Scheme of Delegation was being introduced, with the final regulations approved on 15 July, and would place all applications into two categories.
- There was a report going to Full Council in October 2026, which would provide constitutional changes required for adoption of the new National Scheme of Delegation, and a Member Briefing had been arranged for 30 September ahead of this decision. The National Scheme of Delegation would come into effect on 31 October 2026.
- New requirements for Biodiversity Net Gain were outlined in the report.
- The position on Housing Delivery and 5 Year Housing Land Supply was outlined in the report. The Council was still short of a 5 year supply, although the headline figure was declining, the reality was that housing delivery was improving. This was due to the 2 year delay in publication of the Housing Delivery Test by government.

- A briefing had been prepared for Members on this and had been uploaded to GrowZone, with details also included in the Five Year Housing Supply Position paper published on the website.
- Luton Rising were now taking steps to implement the Development Consent Order and this would include establishing groups to monitor various aspects of the impact of the expansion.
- All surrounding authorities were continuing to progress with their Local Plan work.
- The main upcoming risks were continuing to fail to achieve a 5 year housing land supply, the implementation of the planning system reforms which was increasing workload within the team, and recruitment and retention of key staff, although two posts had recently been filled.

N.B. Councillor Amy Allen left the Chamber at 20.09 and returned at 20.14.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed to approve the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Sean Nolan.

As part of the debate, Councillor Sean Nolan noted that it was good to get some clarity on the groups which would be established to monitor the developments surrounding Luton Airport expansion. This Council had an interest in ensuring the works would enhance travel in the neighbouring areas and there was a risk of an impact on Hitchin, but this provided clarity on the monitoring processes to be established.

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

RESOLVED: That the report on Strategic Planning Matters was noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep Cabinet informed of recent developments on Strategic Planning Matters.

34 NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE TOWN CENTRE STRATEGY

Audio recording – 46 minutes 24 seconds

Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, presented the report entitled ‘North Hertfordshire Town Centre Strategy’ and highlighted that:

- The adopted Local Plan required an up-to-date Town Centre Strategy to be produced, which would enhance existing Local Plan policies and would feed into the Local Plan Review process.
- Should the Town Centre Strategy be adopted, it would be a formal consideration in planning applications.
- A consultation had taken place on the proposed strategy, with 84 responses received, 75% of these were from North Herts residents. Consultation had also taken place with members of the Strategic Planning Board, as well as BIDs in the district and other business organisations.
- A summary of consultation responses received, as well as a response from the Council to points raised, was included at Appendix 2.
- The consultation highlighted a gap between stakeholder input and the purpose of the strategy, and the amended document sought to clarify the position of the strategy as a planning document and not a proposal for regeneration.
- There would now be a focus on delivery of the strategy, with achievable timescales and clear ownership of actions.
- A new Town Centre Officer had been recruited to support delivery of the strategy and they would lead on taking this forward with relevant stakeholders.

- Previous engagement between the Council and key town centre stakeholders had been fragmented and it was hoped this strategy would provide a more holistic approach to ensure that emerging issues were included within plans and projects developed.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to questions, the Transport, Parking & Projects Service Manager advised that:

- The Council would work together with partners in Letchworth, such as the BID and Heritage Foundation, to look to promote activities which would bring people into the town and consider improvements to transport to support this.
- Whilst this strategy could provide framework for planning decisions, there would need to be work conducted with partners in parallel with this strategy to address footfall and retail improvements.
- Work to install a separated cycle lane on Broadway Gardens roundabout was identified as part of the Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan and work was already underway to assess the feasibility of this.
- The strategy provided some priorities and aspirations for Town Centres, but partnership working would be required to ensure delivery of these.
- The new Town Centre Project Officer would be coming into post by the end of 2026. Therefore, it was expected that work would begin in January 2027 to meet with stakeholders and develop the scope of the delivery plans.
- There would be local workshops with organisations, including BID Managers, to discuss the delivery plans to progress this strategy.
- The intention was to include Councillors as part of the process, including at relevant Community Forums.

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

- It was not possible at this stage to put an end point on works, as work would be conducted by the new Officer when they were in post.
- The strategy had taken around 3 years to produce following the adoption of the Local Plan. This delay had, in part, been due to resourcing issues in the team.

In response to questions, the Executive Member for Place advised that the priority was to get 5-year delivery plans in place, and this would be the focus of the new Officer, once they were in post. This would include clear timescales, responsibilities and ownership of actions and regular updates would be provided to the Strategic Planning Board to monitor progress.

Councillor Donna Wright proposed to approve the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Mick Debenham.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Val Bryant

The following points were made as part of the debate:

- Having previously not funded economic development, it was positive to see this administration bringing needed funding and attention to this area. However, better demonstration and highlighting of the work completed already was required.

- This authority was providing a lot of support, but there were wider issues around the general decline of High Streets.
- Economic Development plans were in progress and conversations around these had been held with relevant stakeholders in communities.
- The new Officer post would be beneficial to support the rollout of this strategy and Cabinet would ensure progress against the strategy was monitored going forward.

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

RESOLVED:

(1) That the Town Centre Strategy attached as Appendix 1 was adopted.

(2) That authority was delegated to the Director, Place in consultation with the Executive Member for Place to make any minor non-material corrections, including but not limited to cosmetic additions or presentational alterations, to the adopted Town Centres Strategy as considered necessary for publication and publicity.

(3) That Officers proceed with the preparation of Delivery Plans for each of the town centres following adoption of the Town Centres Strategy.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

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

(2) To set key priorities which seek to maintain and enhance the unique character and vitality and viability of the district's four town centres through agreed partnership working and the preparation of Delivery Plan for each town.

(3) To reinforce and deliver the Council's ambitions as set out in the Council Plan (2024 - 2028).

35 CHARNWOOD HOUSE, HITCHIN

Audio recording – 1 hour 09 minutes 05 seconds

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'Charnwood House, Hitchin' and highlighted that:

- Charnwood House was the former site of the Hitchin Museum and was gifted to the Council for public benefit. Since the relocation of the museum, the site had been used as storage and then vacated ahead of exploration of longer term use.
- Applications were now being sought from organisations with vision and capacity to deliver a community asset at the site.
- The successful proposal should create opportunities for community activity and have a positive impact on, not only Hitchin, but the wider district.
- All proposals would be assessed fairly on specific aspects, which were outlined in the application form.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Amy Allen
- Councillor Mick Debenham

In response to questions, the Executive Member for Enterprise advised that:

- An application form had been developed which was clear as to what the assessment criteria would be.
- The aim of this was to find the best, and most viable, long-term option for the community.
- The length of the lease reflected the requirement of whoever was successful needing to attract grant funding in order to complete works on the site. Therefore, a guarantee of tenure would be required to open up these funding opportunities.
- The Council had allocated £400k towards capital repairs on the site, but this would not be sufficient for the works required and therefore the successful organisation would need to seek match funding from grants.
- Some works had been carried out by the Council, including removal of asbestos and ensuring the building was weathertight. However, there remained around £360k of the allocated budget available. This would help support the future tenant to attract grant funding.
- The application deadline was in October 2026, but there had been goon early engagement with the advertising process and there was clear interest and desire within the community to see the building used productively.
- The company running the advertising have been chosen for the experience in this area and have done similar work with properties in Luton.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed to approve the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Mick Debenham.

As part of the debate, Councillor Ian Albert thanked Councillor Thomas and the Enterprise team for their work on this exciting prospect. He noted that recommendation 2.3 was important, as it was not just about achieving a commercial rent, but about providing a suitable community use. The money set aside to support required works was a significant contribution towards the work which will be needed, and would assist with the successful option seeking grant funding.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Approved the basis and process for assessing and scoring applications from suitable interested parties (or groups).

(2) Delegated authority to the Executive Member for Enterprise in consultation with the Director of Enterprise, to finalise the terms for the lease and to complete any other documentation required to give effect to the decision.

(3) Approved grant of a long lease of Charnwood House, including a restriction to community use, and delegates to the Director of Enterprise in consultation officers in Estates and Legal Services to consider rental at a value less than best consideration where it can be shown that the disposal will promote and improve social well-being pursuant to the Local Government Act 1972: General Disposal Consent 2003.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(1) The Council has a policy for Charnwood House to be brought back into use to support community-based activities, recognising the potential value of the asset to local and regional groups and the wider town centre.

(2) The Council Plan 2024-2028 identifies Thriving Communities as one of the Council's priorities which includes looking for opportunities to develop community hubs that provide public spaces and support for communities.

(3) This recommendation sets out how the successful applicant will be selected to enable the Council to progress granting a lease of Charnwood House and deliver the policy for the property.

N.B. Following the conclusion of this item, there was a break in proceedings and the meeting reconvened at 21.01.

36 ALLOCATION OF MHCLG HOMELESSNESS GRANT

Audio recording – 1 hour 31 minutes 55 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Jon Clayden, as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Clayden advised that:

- Following receipt of funds from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG), the report proposed a multiyear funding settlement to allow the Council to meet its homelessness duties.
- The discussion at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting raised no significant or substantial comments on the proposals and the Committee were broadly in support.
- There was some discussion around the competition for housing places, including against other authorities, and how the Council approached this.
- There was some discussion about how prioritisation was given to those within the district against those outside.
- However, these discussions were the Committee trying to understand processes, rather than specific concerns with the proposals.

Councillor Mick Debenham, as Executive Member for Regulatory, presented the report entitled 'Allocation of MHCLG Homelessness Grant' and highlighted that:

- The Council had received ringfenced funding from MHCLG to provide support for homelessness in line with its statutory duties.
- The report proposed a 3-year funding settlement for the spend of the remainder of the grant and would leave around £426k outstanding.
- The Council was required to work with key partners, such as OneYMCA, Lets4U, Citizens Advice, Herts Young Homeless and the Rough Sleeper Outreach service, to deliver on duties.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Amy Allen

In response to questions, the Strategic Housing Manager advised that:

- The government announcement to end homelessness was not a change in legislation, but there had been a funding announcement which was around £250 over 3 years for North Herts.
- There were historically low numbers of homelessness in the district, but the Council acted in excess of the legal minimum requirements.
- The biggest issue faced was with engagement with the services.
- The additional funding would mean that a full time member of the team could be employed to specifically look at outreach to support homeless people.

Councillor Mick Debenham proposed to approve the recommendation and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

As part of the debate, Councillor Daniel Allen noted that the team had been dealing with the issue of homelessness well and the service being provided by OneYMCA at Anderson House, Hitchin was good quality.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet approved the funding proposals for the allocation of Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant received from the MHCLG as outlined in Table 1 in paragraph 8.13.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(1) There is a need to secure housing services for homeless households in the district, including key existing services on the single homeless pathway. Adopting the recommendation at 2.1 secures the provision of high-quality local services to help those in need and provides stability into the first year of the new unitary authority.

(2) The recommendation at 2.1 is consistent with the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (2024 – 2029) and the Council Plan.

37 2026-27 Q1 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN UPDATE

Audio recording – 1 hour 41 minutes 35 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled '2026-27 Q1 Council Delivery Plan Update' and highlighted that:

- The Royston Learner Pool had now been added as a project on the Council Delivery Plan.
- The next round of the Churchgate procurement exercise went live last week, which would take forward the policy agreed at Full Council in July. This had been promoted across the website and social media channels.
- The Local Government Reorganisation Corporate Risk required updating following the announcement of a pause from government, as this report had been written ahead of this announcement.
- Details of projects reporting as amber risk, including Public EV Charging and Decarbonisation of Council Buildings Phase 2, were outlined at paragraph 8.4 of the report.
- The Performance Indicators which were currently red were provided at paragraph 8.6 of the report. There were some actions being taken to address this status and whilst these were minor issues, work would always be conducted to see what further actions could be taken.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Mick Debenham

In response to questions, the Executive Member for Enterprise advised that the primary reason for the slippage in relation to the Museum Storage Project was related to the initial design received by the external organisation working with the Council and further work was needed to develop ideas to ensure that the design required was achieved within the budget allocation.

In response to questions, the Director – Place advised that a contractor had been appointed to undertake the stage 4 of the Decarbonisation project, who would design the air source heat pumps at the North Herts Leisure Centre learner pool and Hitchin Town Hall and Museum. A report would be brought to Cabinet in January with further details on the delivery of this work.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

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

REASON FOR DECISION: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide Cabinet, with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks or opportunities. Overview and Scrutiny Committee have the opportunity to review the monitoring reports sent via the Members Information Bulletin (MIB) and request more detailed updates to be presented.

38 FIRST QUARTER REVENUE BUDGET MONITORING 2026/27

Audio recording – 1 hours 48 minutes 43 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Stewart Willoughby, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for the meeting on 9 September 2026, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Willoughby advised that:

- The report presented to Finance, Audit and Risk Committee was in draft form, with the final version provided in this report to Cabinet tonight. The changes related to the treatment of leases and reduced the General Fund balance at the end of 2025/26.
- There was a decrease of £740k in the working budget for Quarter 1, but the ongoing impact was an £84k increase.
- There was a request to carry forward £303k into the next financial year, which was outlined at Table 3 of the report.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled ‘First Quarter Revenue Budget Monitoring 2026/27’ and highlighted that:

- The budget setting process had started and part of that would include a more detailed review of carry forwards.
- A lot of the carry forwards related to ongoing resourcing pressures.
- A debt write off relating to Housing Benefit was outlined at paragraph 8.19 of the report.
- An additional line had been included in Table 3 of the report which related to increased Planning Fees from December 2026 and the need to fund a joint position to transition a new Development and Conservation Manager, as the current employee was taking flexible retirement. This proposal would ensure cover was available and support the planning and development service.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed to approve the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Amy Allen.

As part of the debate, Councillor Sean Nolan highlighted that it was positive to be able to fund a position to cover for the Development and Conservation Manager whilst the person currently in this post took partial retirement. This would help ensure an effective transition for this service area.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted this report.

(2) Approved the changes to the 2026/27 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a £753k decrease in net expenditure.

(3) Noted the changes to the 2027/28 General Fund budget, as identified in table 3 and paragraph 8.2, a total £337k increase in net expenditure. These will be incorporated in the draft revenue budget for 2027/28.

(4) Approved the debt write-off as detailed in paragraph 8.19.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

(1) Members are able to monitor, make adjustments within the overall budgetary framework and request appropriate action of Services who do not meet the budget targets set as part of the Corporate Business Planning process.

(2) To comply with the financial regulations in relation to debt write-offs.

39 FIRST QUARTER CAPITAL BUDGET MONITORING REVIEW 2026/27

Audio recording – 1 hour 56 minutes 36 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Stewart Willoughby, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for the meeting on 9 September 2026, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Willoughby advised that:

- The details of the changes in Capital Expenditure were outlined at Table 1 of the report.
- The Capital Expenditure for 2026/27 was now £13.57m, which was an increase of £4.438m against the budget.
- There needed to be a balance against Capital Expenditure, as the more spent would reduce the amount available for investment.
- Amendments to budgets had largely been due to revised timetables of projects, which was often due to resourcing demands.
- Some existing Capital Expenditure commitments would need to be reviewed to ensure that the amounts accurately reflected costs going forward.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled ‘First Quarter Capital Budget Monitoring Review 2026/27’ and highlighted that:

- As part of the 2027/28 Budget setting process, Executive Members were encouraged to speak to Directors to consider possible saving and investment requirements.
- There would be a review of allocations as part of the budget setting to ensure amounts available for Capital Expenditure were still appropriate.

- The impact on capital receipts was outlined in paragraph 8.7 of the report.
- Overall, the position was positive, but some recognition was needed of the slippage and resourcing pressures.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted the forecast expenditure of £13.570M in 2026/27 on the capital programme, paragraph 8.3 refers.

(2) Approved the adjustments to the capital programme for 2027/28, as a result of the revised timetable of schemes detailed in table 2 and 3, increasing the estimated spend by £0.67M.

(3) Noted the position of the availability of capital resources, as detailed in table 4 paragraph 8.6 and the requirement to keep the capital programme under review for affordability.

REASON FOR DECISION: Cabinet is required to approve adjustments to the capital programme and ensure the capital programme is fully funded.

40 FIRST QUARTER TREASURY MANAGEMENT REVIEW 2026/27

Audio recording – 2 hours 01 minute 05 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Stewart Willoughby, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for the meeting on 9 September 2026, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Willoughby advised that:

- The main point noted was that investment income was continuing above expectation, due to higher than expected interest rates.
- The details of the investments made were outlined at paragraph 8.5 of the report, with most being with either government or other local authorities, in accordance with the Investment Strategy.

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled ‘First Quarter Treasury Management Review 2026/27’ and highlighted that:

- The higher than expected interest rates reflected the national, as well as wider international, outlook.
- However, inflation remained higher than previously forecast, which meant that the interest rates had not been reduced.
- Surplus cash has been invested in accordance with the strategy adopted by Full Council in February 2026.
- The forecast return of investment had been exceeded for this financial year.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the position of Treasury Management activity as at the end of June 2026 and as set out in Appendix 1.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: To ensure the Council’s continued compliance with CIPFA’s code of practice on Treasury Management and the Local Government Act 2003 and that the Council manages its exposure to interest and capital risk.

41 GROUNDS MAINTENANCE CONTRACT REVIEW

Audio recording – 2 hours 04 minutes 32 seconds

Councillor Amy Allen, as Executive Member for Environment, presented the report entitled 'Grounds Maintenance Contract Review' and highlighted that:

- The report proposed a 5 year extension to the current contract with John O'Conner to ensure green spaces were appropriately and sensitively maintained, with John O'Conner being responsible for the management of this.
- The Greenspaces team carried out regular inspections and were satisfied from these that work was being undertaken to expected levels.
- The extension would be broadly in line with the current agreement, with some minor changes.
- The Council was awaiting confirmation from settle as to whether they wanted to continue as part of the agreement for the further 5 year extension.
- Under current Local Government Reorganisation proposals some of the North Herts green space would fall within a different authority and further detail on this would be provided when there was more clarity on the decision and process.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Donna Wright
- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Mick Debenham

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

- Work had been conducted to map litter bins in the district previously, including ownership of responsibility. Therefore, if a bin was reported by residents, it should be forwarded onto the correct team to provide a response without needing to consider who had responsibility.
- There was a mechanism within the contract to monitor the performance of John O'Conner.

In response to questions, the Greenspaces Manager advised that:

- The Greenspace team had regular performance review meetings with John O'Conner and these were structured to consider whether overall performance had been satisfactory. This has been the case and therefore it was not considered to look at alternative options.
- A report was produced each month which provided details on performance.
- There had not been additional land brought into the remit of the Council recently, but should this occur conversations would be held on providing for these spaces and there was flexibility with John O'Conner to meet additional demands.
- All green spaces were managed, although there were some specific issues raised by residents and Councillors where ownership was unclear.
- Settle provided a higher specification of service than the Council and therefore would provide more regular services. It would be difficult for the Council to increase services without increasing budget allocation.
- There were no major changes proposed to the current contract.

Councillor Amy Allen proposed to approve the recommendations and this was seconded by Councillor Mick Debenham.

As part of the debate, Councillor Daniel Allen noted that he was happy to support this extension with John O'Conner as they have done lots of good, award-winning work on behalf of the Council, such as establishing bee corridors and the Green Flag award winning parks.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Approved a five-year contract extension of the Grounds Maintenance Contract with John O'Conner (Grounds Maintenance) Ltd to 31st March 2032.

(2) Commented on the proposal at 8.1 to include a proposal as part of the budget setting process for 2027/28, to enhance the contract specification for border maintenance at key town centre green spaces – at a cost of approximately £25k per year.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: A contract review process has been undertaken in the lead up to a potential break clause (31 March 2027) in the existing contract with John O'Conner for delivering our grounds maintenance services. The recommendations arise following that review process.

42 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 2 hours 17 minutes 58 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That under Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the Press and Public be excluded from the meeting on the grounds that the following report will involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

43 PART 2 MINUTES - 25 JUNE & 9 JULY 2024 AND 16 JUNE 2026

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recordings were available.

Councillor Val Bryant, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Part 2 Minutes of the meetings held on 25 June 2024, 9 July 2024 and 16 June 2026 were approved as a true record and signed by the Chair.

44 KEYSTAGE AND THE TREATMENT OF HOUSING BENEFIT

N.B. This item was considered in restricted session and therefore no recordings were available.

Details of decisions taken on this item are restricted due to the disclosure of exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972.

The meeting closed at 10.28 pm

Chair

This page is intentionally left blank

Item No	Referred from:	Finance, Audit and Risk Committee
6A	Date:	11 November 2026
	Title of item:	Medium Term Financial Strategy 2027-30
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Agenda Item 10

The report considered by the Finance, Risk and Audit Committee at the meeting held on 11 November 2026 can be found here: Agenda for Finance, Audit and Risk Committee on Wednesday, 11th November, 2026, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

(1) That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2027 – 2030 attached as Appendix 1 to the report can be recommended on to Council to be adopted.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

(1) Adoption of a Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2027/2028 onwards, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2027/28 in February 2027. Alongside the Council Plan, this will support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.

(2) The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee support the development of the MTFS through reviewing and commenting on the underlying assumptions and risks.

Audio recording – 16 minutes 02 seconds

The Director – Resources presented the report entitled 'Medium Term Financial Strategy 2027-2030' and advised that:

- The strategy covered a three-year planning horizon and reflected the uncertainty surrounding Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- The additional year within the Strategy ensured the Council was planning towards a balanced budget position by 2029/30 regardless of the timing of any future local government reorganisation.
- Assumptions had been made regarding future Government funding, Council Tax increases and collection rates.
- The Council Tax base had increased slightly, although further growth remained uncertain due to wider economic conditions and housing delivery rates.
- Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) funding represented a significant opportunity and risk within the forecasts, and a prudent reduction assumption had been included.
- General Fund reserves remained above the minimum required level and provided resilience against short-term pressures.
- Reduced forecast capital receipts were expected to create an estimated additional revenue pressure through borrowing costs and minimum revenue provision requirements.
- Inflation remained above previous forecasts and revised assumptions had been incorporated into the medium-term projections.

- The Medium Term Financial Strategy was aligned with the Council Plan and Council Delivery Plan.
- Current forecasts indicated a funding gap of approximately £400,000 by 2029/30.
- The focus of the 2027/28 budget process would be to avoid creating additional ongoing budget pressures whilst developing proposals to address the forecast future funding gap.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Chris Lucas
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Independent Member John Cannon

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

- Proposed legislative changes would make a 12-month Council Tax payment period the default arrangement for any new Council Tax payment arrangements, although residents could still opt for the current 10-month payment arrangement.
- Assumptions within the Strategy would be updated prior to the report being presented to Cabinet, in particular to the Bank of England interest rate.
- Should parking charges not be increased that would create a budget pressure when compared with the current assumption of annual increases of 2%.
- Current estimates suggest that the Museum Collection Facility could still be delivered within its approved budget, although estimates continued to be refined.
- The use of reserves and capital investment to support future transformational savings remained an option for future budget proposals.
- Funding received for specific services was incorporated within service budgets rather than identified separately as a strategic funding source within the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- A more detailed breakdown of external funding streams could be provided within future budget reports.
- Expenditure associated with the Churchgate project was currently being treated as revenue expenditure until a defined capital scheme had been established.
- Procurement was underway to appoint a delivery partner for the Churchgate project and future reporting arrangements would be considered as the project progressed.
- Work continued across the Council on service transformation, digital delivery and efficiency improvements, whilst balancing resources available for Local Government Reorganisation preparations.
- Decarbonisation projects remained under review, with future operating and capital implications to be reported through the budget process.
- Further budget reports would be presented to the Committee during January and February.

In response to questions, Executive Member – Resources advised that:

- Public Health funding received from Hertfordshire County Council for Healthy Hubs totalled approximately £38,000.
- The Healthy Hubs programme continued to provide valuable community outreach benefits.
- Increasing conditions attached to some external funding streams could create delivery challenges for local authorities .

- Significant work was being undertaken across Council services, including Customer Services, Carline and ICT, to identify transformation opportunities, improve service delivery and explore the appropriate use of new technologies.

Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham proposed and Councillor Elizabeth Dennis seconded the recommendation.

As part of the debate, Councillor Elizabeth Dennis requested that Cabinet should take account of the matters raised by the Committee when considering the Medium Term Financial Strategy.

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

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

(1) That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2027 – 2030 attached as Appendix 1 to the report can be recommended to Council to be adopted.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

(1) Adoption of a Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2027/2028 onwards, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2027/28 in February 2027. Alongside the Council Plan, this will support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.

(2) The Finance, Audit and Risk Committee support the development of the MTFS through reviewing and commenting on the underlying assumptions and risks.

This page is intentionally left blank

CABINET
TUESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2026

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: North Herts Council Food Sampling Policy

REPORT OF: Director - Regulatory

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Cllr Mick Debenham, Executive Member - Regulatory

COUNCIL PRIORITY: All Priorities

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

To enable the Council to meet its legal obligations in line with the Food Law Code of Practice (England) (FLCoP) as published by the Food Standards Agency (FSA) under the provisions of the Food Safety Act, 1990 (the 'Act'), which requires every Competent Food Authority (CFA) to produce and make available a food sampling policy.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. It is recommended that this Policy be adopted as presented.

2.2. In considering this policy, it should be noted that section 9 seeks to delegate future amendments of this Policy to the Director – Regulatory in consultation with the Executive Member for Regulatory in accordance with the provisions of the Council's Constitution.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. The reason for recommending the approval of this Policy is to enable the Council to fulfil its legal obligations under the FLCoP as required by the Act.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. The Council has the statutory duty to make available to consumers and businesses a food sampling policy. The Council can decide to reject the policy as presented in which case the Council would be failing to fulfil its statutory obligation as set out in the FLCoP.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. This Policy states how the Council will meet its obligations as required by the FLCoP, and as such, consultation was limited to key Elected Members, key services of the Council and appropriate external agencies only.

5.2. Given that the work applicable to this policy is already undertaken by the Commercial Team of Environmental Health and accommodated within the existing resources available to this service, the Council's financial, human resources or risk teams were not included in this consultation.

5.3. The consultation took place during July 2026.

5.4. The Consultees were:

Councillor Mick Debenham, Executive Member for Regulatory
Councillor Bryony May, Shadow Member for Regulatory
Council Policy Services
Council Legal Services
Kent Scientific Services – authorised food sampling organisation
UKHSA food, water and microbiology service

5.5. Responses to the consultation were received from:

Councillor Mick Debenham, Executive Member for Regulatory
Council Policy Services
Council Legal Services
UKHSA food, water and microbiology service

5.6. All responses were considered and where appropriate, the Policy was amended to its current, presented form. A summary of the responses and their impact on the Policy is given in Appendix D.

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 25th September 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. This report has been written to enable the Council to consider adequacy of the Policy, as presented, to enable the Council to meet its obligations as set out in the FLCoP as presented in Appendices B and C.

7.2. It is recognised by the FSA that food sampling, including all matter considered to be food under the provisions of the Act, and environmental sampling of a food business, including surface swabbing, cleaning cloths, etc., is a useful means of gathering information about the safety and quality of our food and the presence of harmful microorganisms in food produced, sold, used and consumed locally. As such, food sampling is therefore considered to be an Official Control available to a CFA. This Policy facilitates this provision, and once adopted, will be available to consumers and food businesses as required.

7.3. The Policy also seeks to delegate the decision for future amendments to the Director – Regulatory in consultation with the Executive Member for Regulatory, as this will offer a more effective and efficient process to accommodate future changes

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. In accordance with the FLCoP, as published by the FSA, all CFA, including the Council, are required to produce and make available a Food Sampling Policy.

8.2. This Policy therefore fulfils this requirement and sets out the legal provisions under which this obligation exists, and the general approach the Council, as the local CFA adopts in taking food samples. The Policy also states the nature of the samples we may take; it sets out the annual sampling plan the Council proposes to follow, which agencies will formally analyse what type of samples and what actions may be considered subject to the results obtained. The Policy also sets out the steps to follow should a complaint or appeal be considered by anyone affected by the sample or its result.

8.3. The Policy, once adopted, enables the Council to implement a permitted food sampling programme in accordance with the FLCoP, as per Appendices B and C.

8.4. As food sampling can be used to instigate or support enforcement under the Act, the Policy sets out how results from the sampling can be considered and what action may be taken as a result. The clarification of these considerations support the ability to use of food sampling as an Official Control, and this is provided for by the Policy.

8.5. By including the provision to delegate future decisions to amend this Policy to the Director- Regulatory, in consultation with the Executive Member for Regulatory, is in accordance with the Council's Constitution whilst still maintaining a safe level of control thus allowing only necessary and required amendments to be incorporated.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. The FLCoP published by the FSA requires CFA to produce and publish a Food Sampling Policy which, once approved, is to be made available to consumers and businesses. This Policy meets that requirement, and once approved, will be made available via the Council's website.

9.2. The Council, as the local CFA is also required to set out an annual Food Sampling Programme which supplements the local food control delivered by the Council. The Policy enables this, and allows any necessary enforcement arising from the food sampling to be considered as part of any food enforcement deemed to be necessary.

9.3. The Cabinet's Terms of Reference is provided under the Council's Constitution at paragraph 5.7.15; "To oversee the provision of all the Council's services other than those functions reserved to the Council", and paragraph 5.7.28; "To make a decision where a policy or strategy does not exist."

9.4. In considering delegating future decisions affecting this Policy, the Cabinet's Terms of Reference are provided in paragraph 14.6.2: "This scheme [of delegating powers to offices] operates under Section 101 of the Local Government Act, 1972 (council functions) and sections 9E Local Government Act, 200 (executive functions), as facilitated by paragraph 14.6.11(b)(iv).

9.5. In approving this Policy, the Cabinet would therefore be acting in accordance with its statutory requirements and in accordance with the Council's constitution.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. This Policy sets out how the Council will fulfil its legal obligations under the Act but does not seek to challenge the funding already provided to deliver this service. As such, this Policy has no additional financial implications beyond those already in place for this service.

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 Council has a duty to produce and make available a Food Sampling Policy. By adopting this Policy, as presented, the Council will meet this obligation thus mitigating the risks posed by not having such a policy.

11.3. As previously highlighted, the Policy fulfils all of the requirements expected of it, as imposed by the FLCoP and allows for enforcement to take place using or supported by food samples taken in accordance with the terms of this Policy. This, in turn, supports the Council obligation to ensure, as far as reasonably practicable, that food manufactured, sold or consumed in its district, is safe and legally compliant.

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. As this Policy only sets out how the Council will fulfil its legal obligations under the Act, there are no equalities implications associated with this.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

Use <u>one</u> of the following paragraphs only

13.1. As the recommendations in this report apply only to how the Council will fulfil its obligations under the Act, 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 Policy.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 Whilst the Policy and this report outline how the Council will fulfil its obligations under the Act, it does so on the basis that officers already in post, or accommodated under the existing establishment will deliver the Policy as part of their existing roles. As such, there are no human resource implications arising from this Policy.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix A: Food Sampling Policy

16.2 Appendix B: Extract from Section 2.3.13 Food Law, Code of Practice, 2025 showing the requirements for an annual Food Sampling Programme

16.3 Appendix C: Extract from Section 2.3.20 of the Food Law, Code of Practice, 2025 showing the requirements for an annual Food Sampling Programme

16.4 Appendix D: Summary of responses to the Consultation.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1. Report Author: **Frank Harrison, Environmental Health Manager, frank.harrison@north-herts.gov.uk; ext. 4861**

17.2 Responsible Officer: Liz DeVere, Commercial Team Manager, Liz.DeVere@north-herts.gov.uk; ext. 4520

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None.

This page is intentionally left blank

Food Sampling Policy

1. Introduction

In line with the Food Law Code of Practice (England) published by the Food Standards Agency (FSA), Competent Food Authorities are required to make available to consumers and business a food sampling policy. North Herts Council (the Council) is the Competent Food Authority for the purposes of food hygiene legislation and responsible for the delivery of the Food Hygiene Sampling Programme required by the FSA.

This policy sets out the Council's general approach to food sampling and its approach to specific food associated situations. It does not include sampling for food composition or labelling which are the responsibility of Hertfordshire Trading Standards. Water is regarded as food. However, mains supplied tap water is generally sampled by the local water undertaker and is therefore not covered by this policy. The Council does have a duty to ensure the wholesomeness of private water supplies, but the sampling of these supplies is determined by separate legislation and guidance, is also not covered by this policy.

2. General Approach

The Council recognises that food sampling plays an important role in protecting public health and supporting the Council's food law enforcement responsibilities. It is used to gather information about the safety and quality of our food and the potential presence of harmful microorganisms in foods produced, sold or used locally. This information forms part of the Official Controls required by the FSA and helps ensure that appropriate action can be taken to protect consumers. Food sampling is carried out by officers in the Commercial Team within the Council's Environmental Health Service.

Each year the Council develops a sampling programme which is outlined in appendix 1 of the Food Law Service Plan. When developing the annual sampling programme, the Council will have regard to the results of the previous year's sampling, local businesses that produce or sell high risk foods, food complaints, local intelligence and national or regional sampling surveys, as well as guidance offered by the FSA.

Wherever possible food sampling activities will include current coordinated sampling programmes which are determined by national, regional and local programmes. These are intelligence led and centrally coordinated by the FSA or UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA).

Sampling activities will normally be carried out in accordance with appendix 1 of the food service plan but will also be determined by the level of resources available. However, there may be times when sampling is required as a result of a food poisoning outbreak, emerging risk or other food incident. The sampling carried out for such unplanned emergencies will be determined according to public health risk and in conjunction with the guidance offered by the FSA or UKHSA.

3. Types of sampling

3.1 Routine

Routine sampling may take place to monitor the microbiological safety of foods manufactured or sold in the local area. The Food Safety and Hygiene (England) Regulations 2013 and the Food Safety Act 1990 (the Act) allow samples to be procured either by 'purchasing' or 'taking'.

Officers will attempt to purchase all routine samples. Where this is not possible or payment is refused the authorised officer is authorised and permitted to take the sample from the premises without payment.

Routine sampling will include those taken as part of national, regional and local food sampling programmes. These can include swabbing of equipment or food-contact surfaces and food sampling at food manufacturers, retailers or other providers within the district.

3.2 Informal

The majority of samples taken will be informal and assist with the monitoring / surveillance of food and food businesses within the local area.

3.3 Formal

Formal samples will be purchased or taken in accordance with the FSA's Code of Practice and Practice Guidance, by suitably trained, qualified and experienced authorised Officers. The samples will be examined or analysed by the appointed Food Examiner or Public Analyst. Formal samples will be taken where enforcement action may result if an adverse report is received following examination or analysis.

3.4 Process monitoring

Samples may be taken from manufacturers of foods, during the manufacturing process, for the purpose of ensuring the safety of the end product and for assessing the effectiveness of the critical controls in the associated process.

3.5 Primary Authority

In support of the Government's Primary Authority scheme, the Council will notify the Primary Authority of a food business of any adverse results following sampling carried out.

3.6 Routine inspection

Sampling may form part of a routine food hygiene inspection. For example,

- Where an inspecting officer identifies a particular issue with food handling or cleaning practices or identifies a problem that would benefit from obtaining sampling results to support further investigation.
- In specific food manufactures
- Where sampling is used as an official control instead of an inspection on an alternating basis in broadly compliant or low risk food businesses, or on occasions when sampling is used as an intervention either individually or in combination with another official control.

3.7 Food complaints

On receipt of a food complaint, the food may be sampled. That is, submitted for analysis, examination, or for expert identification, if the inspecting officer deems it necessary for the suitable investigation of the complaint.

3.8 Investigating food borne disease

Where a particular premises or food produced or sold in North Hertfordshire is implicated in a case or cases of food borne disease, food samples may be taken and submitted for examination for the purposes of identifying any likely source of infection and controlling any risk to public health. These samples are likely to be taken formally. In the event of an outbreak of food-borne disease, officers will work in consultation with the UKHSA to identify relevant samples.

3.9 Special Investigations

Food samples may be taken and submitted as part of a special investigation, e.g. in response to a food hazard warning, or to other intelligence received about potential food safety issues. This may form part of a ‘food incident’ issued by and involving working with the FSA.

3.10 Environmental sampling

In addition to food sampling, swabs may be taken within food premises to monitor cross contamination, check the effectiveness of cleaning and disinfection or look for specific pathogens. Officers may also take items such as cleaning cloths, sponges or other cleaning items for submission to the laboratory to ensure these do not pose a contamination risk.

The Team has access to an adenosine triphosphate (ATP) detection device which can detect organic residue (food waste or microorganisms) on surfaces providing an informal instant demonstration the effectiveness, or otherwise, of the cleaning.

4. Sampling plan

The council produces an annual sampling plan with regard to the factors listed above. The plan is included in appendix 1 of the food law service plan and could consists of some or all of the following

- Co-ordinated Surveys which can include a variety of food premises and foodstuffs
- locally organised programmes focusing on commonly encountered issues such as cross contamination in businesses handling raw and ready to eat foods
- monitoring and surveillance sampling of other high-risk foods in addition to above
- sampling as a result of a food complaint or allegation of food poisoning
- formal sampling as a result of a food premises implication in an outbreak of food borne illness, findings of an inspection or detention and seizure of foodstuffs
- from premises or sectors where food sample results were previously unsatisfactory
- from premises or sectors where local or national intelligence identifies potential risks to public health.
- product specific statutory sampling – should it be required of a local premises approved under assimilated regulation (EC) 853/2004
- any food type or food business type as required by the FSA.

5. Sampling procedure

All samples will be taken by suitably qualified, trained, authorised officers in accordance with the Food Law Code of Practice, Practice Guidance, relevant legislation, food, water and environmental microbiology (FWEM) guidance and the councils sampling procedure.

Formal samples will be taken in accordance with the guidance and techniques required to collect and take samples that may be used in enforcement or a prosecution.

6. Submission of samples

Samples are submitted to the following:

Food, Water, Environmental and Microbiology Service Laboratory

UK Health Security Agency
FW&E Microbiology Service Laboratory, London
UKHSA Colindale
61 Colindale Avenue
London
NW9 5EQ

The County-appointed Public Analyst

Hampshire & Kent Scientific Services
Kent County Council
8 Abbey Wood Road
West Malling
Kent
ME19 4YT

7. Follow up action

When the results of a laboratory examination or analysis of the sample(s) are received, Officers will decide the appropriate follow-up action with due regard to any expert advice from the Food Examiner or Public Analyst. Reference will also be made to the Council's enforcement policy and sampling procedure. Where appropriate, liaison with the Primary Authority will be carried out.

All sampling results are interpreted using the appropriate table from the UKHSA Guidelines for assessing the microbiological safety of ready to eat foods placed on the market. The FWEM laboratory categorises results as satisfactory, borderline or unsatisfactory for each sample, and each result will lead to a specific appropriate response by the authorised officer:

7.1 Satisfactory results

The authorised officer or officer acting under the supervision of the authorised officer will notify the Food Business Operator (FBO) or manager of the food business of the result and interpretation in writing without delay.

7.2 Borderline results

This category indicates the sample was at the level of borderline acceptable microbiological quality. Within 10 working days of receipt, an authorised officer will normally visit the premises and hand the FBO or manager the printed sampling results issued by the laboratory. The officer will offer advice on the improvements that should be made. In most cases, a resample may be taken.

7.3 Unsatisfactory results

This category indicates that the food sample did not meet the acceptable microbiological standard. An authorised officer will visit the premises without delay. The results will be handed to the FBO or Manager and an investigation carried out, and advice given. Where the FBO is not at the premises the results, along with any advice will also be sent to them by post. Resampling would normally be carried out.

8. Complaints and appeal

Any person wishing to complain about the service they have received or appeal against any decisions that affect them can do so using the councils Comments, Compliments and Complaints policy.

9. Governance

This policy sets out how the Council meets its obligations under food hygiene legislation and guidance. This policy will be reviewed periodically to ensure that it fully meets the requirements of the law. Reviews will be undertaken by the senior officers of Environmental Health and where amendments are required, and in accordance with the provisions of the Council's Constitution, the decision to authorize a revised policy will be delegated to the Director – Regulator in consultation with the Executive Member for Regulatory, with the decision being recorded as a Delegated Decision in due course.

APPENDIX B – Extract from Section 2.3.13 of the Food Law, Code of Practice

Extract from the Food Law, Code of Practice, issued by the Food Standards Agency, October 2025, showing the title page and section 2.3.13 showing the necessity for a food sampling policy.

Food Law

Practice Guidance (England)

(Issued October 2025)

Food Standards Agency

2.3.13 Sampling policy

The purpose of the sampling policy is to set out the Competent Authority's approach to food sampling. To support this, it is recommended that Competent Authorities ensure the policy:

- is published and readily available to businesses and consumers
- sets out the Competent Authority's approach in specific situations such as:
    - surveillance
    - imported food monitoring
    - businesses with an inspection plan issued by the primary authority
    - official controls
    - complaints
    - special investigations
    - national, regional, and local co-ordinated programmes
- covers all samples taken
- details the factors taken into account when formulating their sampling programme, including any national or local consumer issues that will influence the level of sampling to be undertaken
- outlines who will undertake the sampling.

APPENDIX C – Extract from Section 2.3.20 of the Food Law, Code of Practice

Extract from the Food Law, Code of Practice, issued by the Food Standards Agency, October 2025, showing section 2.3.20 outlining the requirements and consideration of a food sampling programme as permitted by the Food Sampling Policy.

2.3.20 Sampling programme

The purpose of the sampling programme is to set out the details of the Competent Authority's risk-based food sampling activities. To support this, it is recommended that Competent Authorities ensure the programme:

- takes into account the main objectives of food sampling:
    - protecting health
    - detecting deceptive and fraudulent activities
    - compliance with labelling requirements
    - providing advice to FBOs
    - promoting fair trade and deterring bad practice
- is risk based and takes account of:
    - the procedures adopted by the food business to ensure compliance and their history of compliance
    - the Competent Authority's primary authority, home authority or originating authority responsibilities
    - the need to ensure that the provisions of food law are enforced
    - whether there are food manufacturers in the area and the degree of control and monitoring exercised by manufacturers for all potential faults
    - whether any distribution centres deliver food to a wide area
    - the type of food additives FBOs (for example, food manufacturers, and importers) use in the area
    - whether national sampling programmes highlight any food types which relate to specific premises in the area
    - national or regional imported food priorities/surveys and the UK's National Control Plan
    - emerging national and international concerns
    - local consumer and business concerns
    - the severity of the effect of any given fault with the food, including the likelihood of the occurrence of the fault, the consumption pattern applicable to the food, the degree and distribution and the stage in the production and distribution chain at which the problem can occur or could be more easily detected
- takes account of imported food, in particular:
    - any statutory requirements for sampling laid down in assimilated law
    - any agreed UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA)/FSA sampling programmes

    - any sampling required following a Food Alert, Early Warning System (EWS) or relevant notification
    - information from any regional liaison group, local or other sampling survey
    - any imported food where there is no known history or information on the product
    - local priorities, including consumer complaints relating to imported food
- is planned to avoid foods that are already being looked at on a wider basis, for example, those sampled as part of imported food controls at BCPs.

Appendix D – Food Sampling Policy Consultation Responses

Consultee	Date Consulted on	Comments	Result
Cllr Debenham	09/07/26	Received on 16/07/26 "This all makes perfect sense to me. One minor point, we state that borderline results may be re-tested. There's probably a good reason for it but wouldn't it be safer to re-test all borderline results ?"	Responded to Cllr Debenham on 22/07/26 regarding the results. Policy updated on 03/08/26 to reflect this comment
Cllr May	09/07/26	None received	
Food & Water Lab	10/07/26	From Nigel Pittock, Outposted Scientist on 10/07/26 "All looks very good, well done! The only suggestion I might make is to mention, in Section 3.10, that, in certain circumstances, swabs can be taken to look for specific pathogens (e.g., *Salmonella* or *Listeria,* etc.) rather than for general hygiene. But please feel free to ignore."	Policy updated on 03/08/26 to reflect this comment
Kent SS Services	09/07/26	None received	
Policy Team at NHDC	09/07/26	From Daisy Harris, Policy & Strategy Officer, on 17/07/26. "Thanks for sending this, I have reviewed and it all looks good to me. My only comment is a superficial one, the font seems to be different in different sections. Please could you standardise it?"	Requested that Linda Hopkins updated the policy on 03/08/26 to reflect this comment
Legal	13/8/26	From Dimple Roopchand, changes made within the returned document and a suggestion that we include a 'complaint and appeals' section linking to the corporate complaints policy.	Changed the policy using the comments provided in the document but decided not to put the

			complaints section in as this is not required by the FSA and

CABINET
TUESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2026

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: Health and Safety Policy

REPORT OF: Director - Enterprise

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Enterprise

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Accessible Services.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report seeks Cabinet approval of an updated Health and Safety Policy. The update responds to a recommendation in the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) audit report that the Policy should reflect the revised arrangements between the Council and Hertfordshire County Council's Health and Safety Team. The proposed Policy clarifies the Council's health and safety governance, responsibilities and access to competent advice under those revised arrangements.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That Cabinet approves the updated Health and Safety Policy.

2.2 That Cabinet authorises the Director - Enterprise, in consultation with the Executive Member for Enterprise, to make minor amendments to the Policy that do not materially alter its purpose or effect.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 Approval will address the SIAS audit recommendation and ensure the Council's corporate Health and Safety Policy accurately reflects the revised arrangements with Hertfordshire County Council's Health and Safety Team.

3.2 An up-to-date Policy will provide clear governance, responsibilities and arrangements for managing health and safety across the Council.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 The alternative option is to retain the existing Health and Safety Policy without amendment. This option is not recommended because the Policy would not reflect the revised arrangements with Hertfordshire County Council's Health and Safety Team and the SIAS audit recommendation would remain outstanding.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 There is no statutory duty to undertake public consultation on this internal governance policy. The updated Policy and this report have been considered by the Chief Executive, Director - Enterprise, Legal Services and the Executive Member for Enterprise. Their comments have been taken into account in finalising the documents for Cabinet.

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 Council is required to maintain suitable arrangements for managing health and safety and to communicate those arrangements through an appropriate corporate policy.

7.2 The SIAS audit report recommended that the Health and Safety Policy be updated to reflect the revised arrangements between the Council and Hertfordshire County Council's Health and Safety Team. This report brings the updated Policy to Cabinet for approval and enables that recommendation to be addressed.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The updated Health and Safety Policy sets the Council's overarching commitment to protecting employees and others who may be affected by its activities. It establishes the governance framework through which health and safety risks are identified, assessed, controlled, monitored and reviewed.

8.2 The existing and proposed Health and Safety Polices are attached as appendices 1 and 2 respectively. The key updates are: -

- Introduces a dedicated section explaining the Service Level Agreement with Hertfordshire County Council, clarifying HCC's advisory role whilst confirming that North Herts Council retains overall legal responsibility for health and safety.

- Restructured from a traditional policy document into a clearer governance framework with dedicated sections on risk management, incidents, fire safety, training, consultation and monitoring.

- Introduces clearer accountability. Responsibilities have also been streamlined and updated.

- Introduces specific requirements for risk assessments, incident reporting, near-miss reporting, corrective actions, escalation procedures, fire drills and training compliance, providing greater auditability and assurance.

- Establishes formal monitoring arrangements, performance reporting, Health & Safety Tracker reviews, operational meetings with HCC and defined policy review triggers, which were either absent or less defined in the current policy.

8.3 The Policy defines the responsibilities of elected Members, senior management, managers and employees and supports consistent health and safety management across the Council. Service-specific procedures, risk assessments and operational controls will continue to sit beneath the corporate Policy.

8.4 Following approval, the updated Policy will be communicated to employees and relevant stakeholders, published through the Council's established internal channels and incorporated into management arrangements, guidance and training as appropriate.

8.5 Implementation and effectiveness will be monitored through the Council's existing health and safety governance and assurance arrangements. The Policy will be reviewed periodically and where there is a material change in legislation, guidance, organisational arrangements or a variation in the service provided by Hertfordshire County Council's Health and Safety Team..

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Approval of this policy is an Executive function and must therefore be discharged by Cabinet.

9.2 Section 2 of the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 places a duty on the Council, so far as is reasonably practicable, to ensure the health, safety and welfare at work of its employees. Where the Council employs five or more employees, section 2(3) requires a written statement of general policy, together with the organisation and arrangements for carrying it out, and for that statement and any revision to be brought to employees' notice. The Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 also require suitable arrangements for the effective planning, organisation, control, monitoring and review of preventive and protective measures.

9.3 Approval of the Policy does not transfer the Council's statutory duties to Hertfordshire County Council. The revised arrangements provide access to competent advice and support, while responsibility for compliance and implementation remains with the Council as employer and service provider.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 There are no additional revenue implications arising directly from approval of the updated Policy. Implementation will be managed within existing service budgets and officer resources.

10.2 There are no capital implications arising from this report.

10.3 Any future expenditure arising from service-level actions, training, risk controls or remedial works identified through the Council's health and safety arrangements will be considered through the normal budget, procurement and approval processes.

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 principal risk arising from this report is that, if the updated Health and Safety Policy is not approved and implemented, the Council's documented governance arrangements will not reflect the revised arrangements with Hertfordshire County Council's Health and Safety Team and the SIAS audit recommendation will remain outstanding. This may result in unclear responsibilities, inconsistent application of health and safety controls and reduced assurance that statutory duties are being effectively managed.

11.3 Failure to approve and implement an up-to-date Policy would leave the Council's documented arrangements inconsistent with the revised support arrangements and the SIAS recommendation outstanding. This could weaken accountability, create uncertainty over responsibilities and increase the risk of inconsistent health and safety management, non-compliance, injury, service disruption, enforcement action and reputational damage. Approval, communication, implementation, monitoring and periodic review of the updated Policy are the principal mitigations.

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 Policy applies across the Council and supports a consistent approach to protecting employees and others, including consideration of individual needs and reasonable adjustments where required. An Equality Assessment has been completed at Appendix 3 and no adverse equality impacts have been identified from approval of the updated governance arrangements. Equality considerations will continue to be addressed through service-level risk assessments, procedures and implementation activity.

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 arising directly from approval of the updated Health and Safety Policy.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 The updated Policy clarifies the health and safety responsibilities of senior management, managers and employees and the arrangements for obtaining competent advice. It does not propose changes to staffing structures or terms and conditions. Following approval, the Policy will be communicated to employees and supported by appropriate guidance, training and local management arrangements.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix 1 - Existing Health and Safety Policy.
16.2 Appendix 2 - Proposed Health and Safety Policy.
16.3 Appendix 3 – Completed Equality Assessment.
16.4 Appendix 4 – Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS) Audit Report

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Michael Clark	**Building and Facilities Manager**	**michael.clark@north-herts.gov.uk**
Steve Crowley	Director	Steve.crowley@north-herts.gov.uk
Ian Couper	Director	ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk
Luke Franklin	Service Accountant	luke.franklin@north-herts.gov.uk
Jo Keshishian	HR Operations Manager	Jo.Keshishian@north-herts.gov.uk
Natasha Jindal	Legal Team Manager	Natasha.Jindal@north-herts.gov.uk
Ellie Hollingsworth	Policy & Strategy Officer	ellie.hollingsworth@north-herts.gov.uk
Tim Everitt	Performance & Risk Officer	Tim.Everitt@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 None.

This page is intentionally left blank

NORTH HERTS COUNCIL
HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

This policy applies to:	
Members	Yes
Officers	Yes
Managers	Yes
Others	*All other persons visiting or working on our premises that may be affected by our operations*

You must:

- Understand your own responsibilities as defined by the policy
- Take reasonable care of your health and safety while at work and that of others who may be affected by your acts or omissions and to co-operate with management on all matters relating to health and safety
- Follow all provided training, safety rules, procedures and safe systems of work at all times and report all health and safety concerns through line management, particularly those which might present a serious or imminent danger
- Use correctly all items provided in the interests of your health and safety and not to interfere with or misuse anything provided for your health, safety or welfare

Policy author and further advice from: *Health and Safety Officer*

Contents:

1. Introduction
2. Statement of Intent
3. Organisational Structure
4. Responsibilities
    a. The Council
    b. Managing Director
    c. Elected Members
    d. Service Directors
    e. Service Director for Resources
    f. Managers and Team Leaders
    g. Health and Safety Officer
    h. Health and Safety Committee
    i. Employees
5. Arrangements
6. Implications of Non-Compliance

1. Introduction

North Herts Council will actively promote high standards of health, safety and welfare at work across the full range of its operations.

By effectively managing health and safety risks North Herts Council can maximise the wellbeing and productivity of all its employees and preserve its reputation as a caring and committed employer.

This corporate safety policy for North Herts Council is applicable across the entirety of its undertaking, covering those aspects of health and safety which North Herts Council has a legal responsibility for.

This version supersedes all other previous policies and shall be reviewed on a periodic basis or where changes in legislation or working practices dictate. It will be revised as necessary in the light of any changes or developments.

The policy accords the same duty of care to both employees and non-employees to safeguard the health, safety and welfare of all.

The policy is augmented by Corporate Health and Safety Procedures and directorate local operating procedures; method statements and safe systems of work as are deemed appropriate.

As required under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, Section 2.3, this policy provides a statement of intent, the organisational structure responsible for effecting this policy and the arrangements which comprise the procedures and systems for ensuring the protection of all people who could be put at risk from North Herts Council activities.



Steve Crowley

Director: Enterprise



Anthony Roche

Chief Executive

May 2025

2. Statement of Intent

- Health and safety is recognised as a core duty to be integrated into the mainstream of the North Herts Council organisation and all that is reasonably practicable will be done to provide a safe and healthy environment for North Herts Council employees.
- North Herts Council recognises its duties to all who may be affected by its operations and will seek to minimise the risk of foreseeable injury and ill health, so far as is reasonably practicable.
- It shall ensure that all operations, as a minimum, meet with the relevant statutory requirements and associated codes of practice.
- It shall establish and maintain an effective system of communication on health and safety matters through all levels of the organisation and ensure that employees are actively consulted and involved in matters affecting health and safety in the workplace.
- All employees with specific health and safety responsibilities shall have job descriptions that reflect those duties, be adequately trained and be made fully aware of how to discharge their duties and be allowed time and resource to discharge them effectively.
- Employees having no specific health and safety responsibilities shall also be given adequate induction, information, training and supervision to ensure that they understand their role in implementing this policy,
- Clear standards shall be set down and both reactive and active monitoring undertaken to check that these standards are being met.
- Audits and reviews shall also be carried out to continuously improve health and safety performance, with improvement programmes implemented where deemed necessary.
- As far as is reasonably practicable, the impact on health and safety performance of advances in knowledge and technology shall be regularly assessed with action taken as necessary.
- Health and safety implications should always be considered when procuring or changing plant, equipment or processes. Health and safety implications must be given priority over cost issues; most especially if low-cost goods or services are being procured
- Procedures shall be established for managing serious & imminent danger and regular liaison undertaken with external services both in Hertfordshire and neighbouring counties.
- All non-employees shall be made aware of the full range of health & safety controls in force.
- Contractors shall be selected with due regard to competence and resources for health and safety and their performance monitored to ensure that all agreed health and safety standards are being met, with non-conformance being deemed a material breach of contract.

3. Organisational Structure



4 Responsibilities

a) The Council

The Council as a corporate body is responsible for discharging the organisation's duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

b) Chief Executive

The Chief Executive will help ensure that there is a clear shared responsibility for Health and Safety amongst Managers, Employees and Elected Members.

c) Elected members

Shall:

Ensure that suitable resources and strategic direction are available to discharge the Council's health and safety responsibilities.

Monitor, via reports, the overall performance of the Council's health and safety management systems.

d) Chief Executive / Directors

Shall:

- afford health and safety an equal status with other primary organisational duties and ensure that all Leadership Team decisions reflect the intent of this policy.
- advise members of the Council of the health and safety responsibilities of North Herts Council in matters of staffing, finance and materials considered necessary to meet its obligations under statutory law.
- accept formally and publicly their individual and collective role in providing health and safety leadership in the organisation and recognise their role in engaging the active participation of employees in improving health and safety.
- ensure that management systems provide for effective monitoring and reporting of the organisation's health and safety performance.
- ensure that North Herts Council policy, procedures and notices, relating to health and safety are observed and implemented within their areas of responsibility and ensure that sufficient resources are allocated for health, safety and welfare.
- ensure the availability of professional expertise on health and safety to provide adequate awareness of legislative requirements and good safety management practices.
- ensure the existence of adequate consultative arrangements involving management and employee representation.
- establish and maintain a safe place of work and safe systems of work by ensuring that the requirements of any health and safety arrangements in place are met in activities under their control.
- appoint key staff responsible for health, safety and welfare, allocate sufficient resources and ensure that health and safety training needs are identified and acted upon.
- ensure that staff and contractors responsible to them are aware of, understand and implement this policy.
- ensure that all hazardous work situations are identified, risk assessed, and appropriate control measures are implemented.

e) Director for Enterprise

- In addition to the above duties for Directors the Director for Enterprise will be responsible for setting the Council's corporate health and safety policy and ensuring the provision of relevant advice and systems, in accordance with legislation.

4

f) Managers & Team Leaders

Managers & Team Leaders shall:

- ensure that all health and safety rules and procedures are applied in activities under their control and that sufficient time is allowed for staff to conduct all tasks in a safe manner.

- as necessary, implement and maintain method statements and local operating procedures concerning work activities not covered by Corporate Health and Safety Procedures.
- identify hazards and carry out regular risk assessments of their areas of responsibility, recording their findings as appropriate and implement control measures which, as far as is reasonably practicable, minimise the risk of injury or ill health to all those who may be affected.
- monitor work related ill health and accident statistics to identify where control measures are failing to adequately control risk and conduct preliminary accident investigations and initiate any remedial action.
- ensure that all employees under their control receive adequate information, instruction, training and supervision appropriate to the nature of the work, giving particular attention to new employees and young persons.
- consider employees' capabilities with regard to health and safety before allocation of tasks and pay particular regard to young persons and new or expectant mothers.
- ensure that all non-employees who may be affected by work under their control are given adequate information to ensure their health and safety.
- put in place effective measures to communicate and co-operate with third parties working on behalf of the organisation.
- encourage staff participation in all matters relating to their health and safety at work and ensure that all defects in the management of health and safety brought to their attention are investigated and acted upon in a timely manner.
- keep and make available records of health and safety activities as may be required by law.

g) Health and Safety Officer

shall:

- act as the principal advisor for North Herts Council on all corporate health and safety issues and provide specialist advice, guidance and support to North Herts Council to ensure that all statutory obligations are met and best practice applied.
- develop, review and draft corporate health and safety policies & procedures in consultation with appropriate employee and management representatives.
- ensure a consistent and definitive approach to health and safety matters across North Herts Council by the implementation of a corporate safety management system against which performance standards can be set with specific and measurable targets.
- monitor and audit compliance with the requirements of policies and procedures and assist this process through the development and implementation of health and safety training.

- report as required to Leadership Team and the Risk Management Group on health and safety performance and bring to their attention any particular areas of risk and report on injuries, diseases and dangerous occurrences to external authorities.
- investigate accidents and occurrences as appropriate, report on findings and recommend actions to prevent a recurrence.
- Stop any activity which is considered to present an unacceptable risk to the health and safety of employees & others.
- seek specialist advice as necessary.

h) Health and Safety Group

The Health and Safety Group shall review and make recommendations on all preventative and protective measures employed by North Herts Council to ensure the health, safety and welfare of employees at work and others who may be affected by its operations. It shall also assist and advise in the development, implementation and review of this policy and any associated arrangements.

i) Employees

shall:

- take reasonable care of their own health and safety while at work and that of others who may be affected by their acts or omissions and co-operate with management on all matters relating to health and safety.
- follow all provided training, safety rules, procedures and safe systems of work at all times and report all health and safety concerns through line management, particularly those which might present a serious or imminent danger.
- use correctly all items provided in the interests of their own health and safety and not interfere with or misuse anything provided for their health, safety or welfare.

5 Arrangements

The arrangements comprise the procedures and systems in place to ensure the protection of all people who could be put at risk from North Herts Council activities.

The full details of these arrangements are not contained within this policy document. The Corporate Health and Safety Procedures are accessible via the health and safety pages on SharePoint, departmental managers or from the Safety officer. The procedures are augmented by Directorate Local Operating Procedures, risk assessments, method statements, safe systems of work etc, held locally in each directorate.

6 Implications of non-compliance

North Herts Council shall regard all breaches of this policy by an employee as a potential disciplinary offence.

This page is intentionally left blank

NORTH HERTS COUNCIL
HEALTH AND SAFETY POLICY

This policy applies to:	
Members	Yes
Officers	Yes
Managers	Yes
Staff	Yes
Others	All other persons visiting or working on our premises that may be affected by our operations

You must:

- Understand your own responsibilities as defined by the policy
- Take reasonable care of your health and safety while at work and that of others who may be affected by your acts or omissions and to co-operate with management on all matters relating to health and safety
- Follow all provided training, safety rules, procedures and safe systems of work at all times and report all health and safety concerns through line management, particularly those which might present a serious or imminent danger.
- Use correctly all items provided in the interests of your health and safety and not to interfere with or misuse anything provided for your health, safety or welfare

Policy author: Buildings & Facilities Manager
Advisor: Health and Safety Officer (HCC)

Contents

1. Statement of Intent
2. Scope
3. Policy Objectives
4. Roles and Responsibilities
5. Service Level Agreement with Hertfordshire County Council
6. Risk Assessment and Safe Systems of Work
7. Incident, Hazard and Near-Miss Reporting
8. Fire Safety and Emergency Arrangements
9. Training, Competence and Communication
10. Consultation
11. Monitoring, Assurance and Review
12. Implication of Non-Compliance

1. Statement of Intent

North Herts District Council is committed to ensuring, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health, safety and welfare of its employees and to protecting others who may be affected by its activities, including contractors, visitors, service users, tenants, partners and members of the public.

The Council recognises its duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974, the Management of Health and Safety at Work Regulations 1999 and other relevant legislation. This policy sets out the Council's approach to managing health and safety, including how responsibilities are allocated between the Council and Hertfordshire County Council under the Service Level Agreement for corporate health and safety advice.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all Council employees, elected Members, agency workers, volunteers, contractors and others working on behalf of the Council. It applies to all Council workplaces, services, activities, events, premises and work-related travel where the Council has responsibility or management control.

3. Policy Objectives

- Provide clear leadership, accountability and governance for health and safety.
- Maintain suitable arrangements for identifying, assessing and controlling health and safety risks.
- Ensure health and safety responsibilities are understood by managers, employees and partner organisations.
- Use competent corporate health and safety advice provided through the Service Level Agreement with Hertfordshire County Council.
- Maintain effective systems for incident reporting, investigation, escalation, training, communication, monitoring and review.
- Promote a positive health and safety culture where risks are reported, acted upon and learned from.
- Consult with staff and union representatives.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

The Council

The Council as a corporate body is responsible for discharging the organisation's duties under the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974.

Elected Members

Shall:

Ensure that suitable resources and strategic direction are available to discharge the Council's health and safety responsibilities.

Monitor, via reports, the overall performance of the Council's health and safety management systems.

Chief Executive has overall responsibility for ensuring that the Council has effective arrangements for managing health and safety and that adequate resources, governance and assurance processes are in place.

Directors are responsible for providing strategic leadership, ensuring health and safety risks are considered in decision-making, reviewing performance information and ensuring significant matters are escalated appropriately.

Service Managers are responsible for ensuring that health and safety arrangements are implemented within their service areas, that managers understand their responsibilities for day-to day implementation of this policy within their areas and that service risks are identified, assessed, controlled and monitored. . This includes ensuring suitable and sufficient risk assessments are completed and reviewed, safe systems of work are followed, staff receive appropriate training and instruction, incidents and hazards are reported, and corrective actions are completed.

Building and Facilities Manager acts as the Council's operational lead for corporate health and safety coordination, including liaison with Hertfordshire County Council's Health and Safety Team, oversight of relevant premises-related compliance activity, coordination of the corporate health and safety inbox and maintenance of central records where required.

Hertfordshire County Council – Health and Safety Team

Hertfordshire County Council will act as the principal advisor for North Herts Council on all corporate health and safety matters and have authorisation to intervene and stop any activity which is considered to present an unacceptable risk to health and safety.

Employees must take reasonable care of their own health and safety and that of others affected by their work, follow Council procedures, complete required training, use equipment safely, report hazards, incidents and near misses promptly, and cooperate with managers and advisers on health and safety matters.

Contractors and partners must comply with relevant legislation, Council procedures and contractual requirements, and must cooperate with the Council to ensure that risks arising from their activities are properly managed.

All employees with specific health and safety responsibilities shall have job descriptions that reflect those duties, be adequately trained and be made fully aware of

how to discharge their duties and be allowed time and resource to discharge them effectively.

5. Service Level Agreement with Hertfordshire County Council

North Herts District Council has entered into a Service Level Agreement with Hertfordshire County Council for the provision of competent corporate health and safety advice. The purpose of this arrangement is to support the Council in meeting its statutory duties while retaining clear internal accountability for managing health and safety risks arising from Council services and activities.

Under the Service Level Agreement, Hertfordshire County Council's Health and Safety Team provides professional advice, guidance and support on corporate health and safety matters. This may include advice on policies, procedures, risk management, incident reporting and investigation, training requirements, compliance monitoring and other health and safety matters agreed within the scope of the Service Level Agreement.

The Council remains responsible for implementing health and safety arrangements, allocating resources, making management decisions, ensuring actions are completed, maintaining appropriate records and providing assurance through its governance arrangements. The Service Level Agreement does not remove the Council's legal duties as an employer, premises controller or service provider.

6. Risk Assessment and Safe Systems of Work

Managers must ensure that suitable and sufficient risk assessments are completed for work activities, premises, equipment and services under their control. Risk assessments must identify hazards, assess who may be harmed and how, define proportionate control measures, assign responsible officers and specify review dates.

Risk assessments must be reviewed at appropriate intervals and when there is a significant change, incident, near miss, new activity, change in legislation, change in premises or evidence that existing controls may no longer be effective. Service Managers must ensure completed risk assessments are retained locally and submitted or recorded through the agreed corporate process to enable central oversight.

7. Incident, Accidents, Hazards and Near-Miss Reporting

All accidents, incidents, near misses, hazards and dangerous occurrences must be reported promptly using the Council's agreed reporting arrangements. Managers must ensure that incidents are investigated proportionately, corrective actions are recorded and completed, and any trends and learning is shared where appropriate.

Significant incidents, major risks, enforcement contact, reportable events, serious injuries, diseases, dangerous occurrences, repeated incidents or matters with potential

corporate, legal, financial or reputational impact must be escalated to the relevant Director and Hertfordshire County Council's Health and Safety Team in line with agreed escalation arrangements.

8. Fire Safety and Emergency Arrangements

The Council will maintain suitable fire safety and emergency arrangements for premises under its control. This includes fire risk assessments, fire evacuation procedures, trained fire marshals where required, inspection and maintenance of fire safety systems, and scheduled fire drills.

Fire drills must be completed at least annually for relevant Council premises, or more frequently where risk assessment, occupancy, building use or best practice indicates this is necessary. Fire drills must be documented and retained to provide evidence of completion, outcomes, learning and follow-up actions.

9. Training, Competence and Communication

The Council will provide employees, managers and other relevant persons with appropriate health and safety information, instruction, training and supervision. Mandatory training requirements will be defined, monitored and reviewed, including refresher periods where appropriate.

Managers are responsible for ensuring that employees complete required training and are competent to carry out their duties safely. Health and safety information will be communicated through induction, team briefings, intranet guidance, training, manager communications and other appropriate channels.

10. Consultation

The Council will consult with staff and trade union members via the Corporate Health and Safety Group.

11. Monitoring, Assurance and Review

The Council will monitor health and safety performance through appropriate reporting, review of incidents and actions, risk assessment completion, premises compliance information, audit activity, inspections, training records and other assurance sources, Reporting to the Corporate Health and Safety Group

Periodic operational meetings will be held between the Building and Facilities Manager and Hertfordshire County Council's Health and Safety Team to review service delivery, the Health and Safety Tracker, incidents, actions, emerging risks, advice requirements and any matters requiring escalation to leadership and/or Risk Management Group.

This policy will be reviewed at least every two years, or sooner where there are significant organisational changes, legislative changes, audit findings, changes to the

Service Level Agreement, serious incidents or evidence that the policy is no longer effective.

12. Implication of non-compliance

North Herts Council shall regard all breaches of this policy by an employee as a potential disciplinary offence.

Approval and Signatures

Anthony Roche Chief Executive Signature: _____ Date: _____	**Steve Crowley** Director Enterprise Signature: _____ Date: _____

Last reviewed:
07/09/2026_

Appendix 3 – Equality Analysis Impact Assessment

1. Name of activity:	Corporate Health and Safety Policy
2. Main purpose of activity:	Policy clarifies the Council's health and safety governance, responsibilities and access to competent advice under those revised arrangements.
3. List the information, data or evidence used in this assessment:	The content of the report

4. Assessment				
Characteristics	**Neutral** (x)	**Negative** (x)	**Positive** (x)	Describe the person you are assessing the impact on, including identifying: community member or employee, details of the characteristic if relevant, e.g. mobility problems/particular religion and why and how they might be **negatively or positively** affected. **Negative: What are the risks?** **Positive: What are the benefits?**
Community considerations (i.e. applying across communities or associated with rural living or Human Rights)	☐	☐	☒	**Negative** **Positive** Policy applies to those visiting our premises and operations.
A person living with a disability	☐	☐	☒	**Negative** None **Positive** The policy requires managers to have risk assessments and safe systems of work. There may be specific measures/reasonable adjustments that will need to be considered for a person with a disability that should be considered when preparing a risk assessment.
A person of a particular race	☒	☐	☐	**Negative** None **Positive** None
A person of a gay, lesbian or bisexual sexual orientation	☒	☐	☐	**Negative** None **Positive** None
A person of a particular sex, male or female, including issues around pregnancy and maternity	☐	☐	☒	**Negative** **Positive** The policy requires managers to have risk assessments and safe systems of work. There may be specific measures/reasonable adjustments that will need to be considered for a person is pregnant that should be

				considered when preparing a risk assessment.
A person of a particular religion or belief	☐	☐	☒	**Negative** If not managed properly **Positive** The policy requires managers to have risk assessments and safe systems of work. There may be specific measures/reasonable adjustments that will need to be considered for religious purposes. For Example: When assessing risks associated with the wearing of PPE this could have an impact. Most FF P2 face masks require the wearer to be clean shaven. Therefore, the risk assessment will need to take account of a particular religious beliefs and consider alternative options.
A person of a particular age	☒	☐	☐	**Negative** None **Positive** None
Transgender	☒	☐	☐	**Negative** None **Positive** None

5 Results

	Yes	**No**	
Were positive impacts identified?	☒	☐	
Are some people benefiting more than others? If so explain who and why.	☐	☒	
Were negative impacts identified (what actions were taken)	☐	☒	

6. Consultation, decisions, and actions

If High or very high range results were identified who was consulted and what recommendations were given?
Legal Services have reviewed the proposed Health and Safety Policy and advised it will need Cabinet approval.
Describe the decision on this activity
Cabinet to review and agree revised Health and Safety Policy.
List all actions identified to address/mitigate negative impact or promote positively

Action	Responsible person	Completion due date
Cabinet to approve revised Health and Safety Policy and if approved the policy should be signed and uploaded to the Hub.	Michael Clark – Building & Facilities Manager	December 2026

Review the recommendations of the SIAS Health and safety audit and implement the recommendations.	Steve Crowley – Director-Enterprise	December 2026
When, how and by whom will these actions be monitored?		
Steve Crowley, Director – Enterprise upon completion of the SIAS Audit. The Policy will be due for review every two years or sooner where there are significant legislation or organisational changes.		
7. Signatures		
Assessor (Report Author)		
Name: Michael Clark	Signature** Michael Clark	
Validated by (relevant Senior Manager)		
Name: Steve Crowley	Signature** Steve Crowley	
Forward to the Policy & Strategy Team		
Signature** E A Hollingsworth		
Assessment date: **22nd October**	Review date: **22nd April 2027**	

** **Please type your name to allow forms to be sent electronically. Please send to policy@north-herts.gov.uk for review by the team.**

A copy of this form should be forwarded to the corporate policy team and duplicate filed on the council's report system alongside any report proposing a decision on policy or service change.

This page is intentionally left blank

SIAS 924

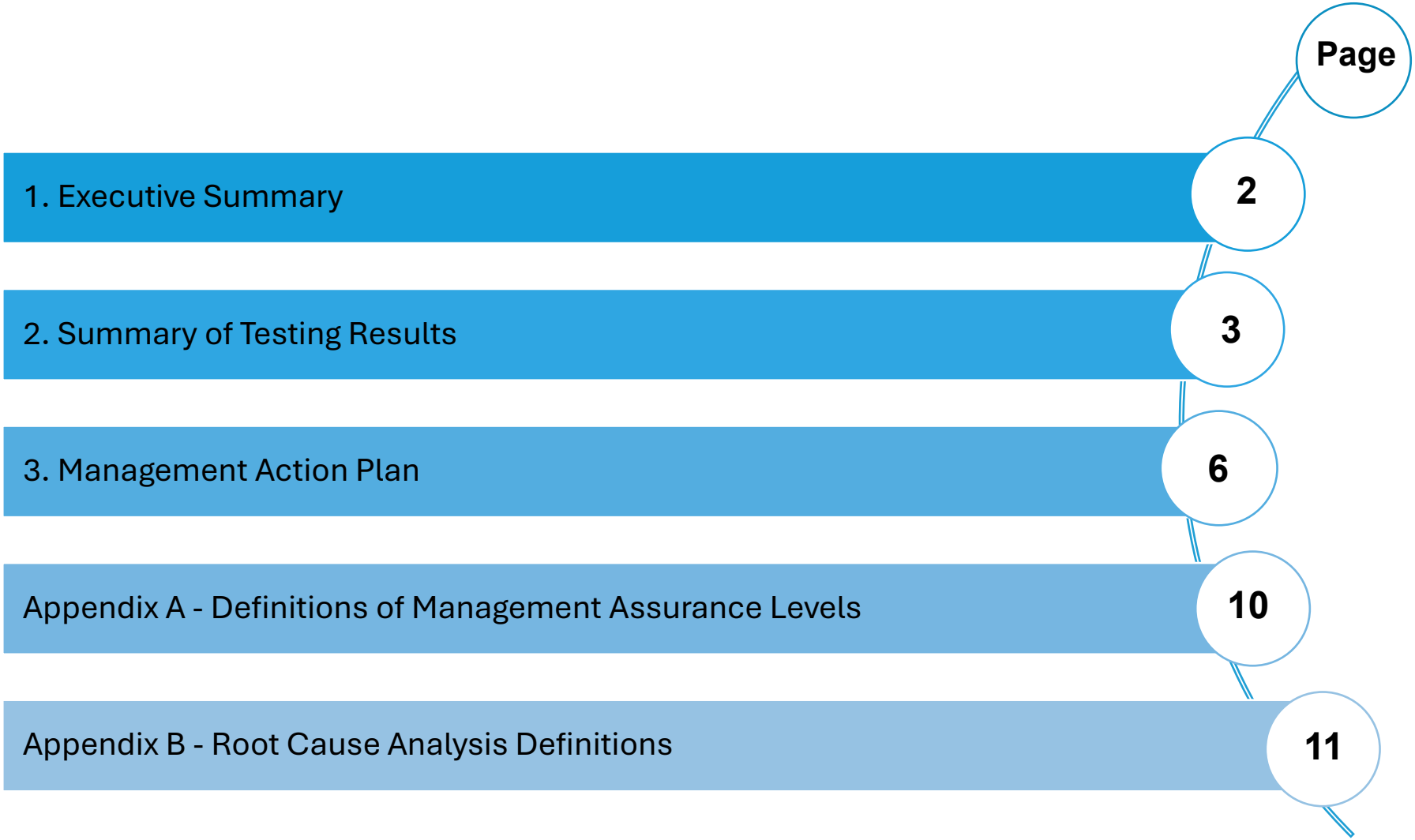
Final Internal Audit Report
North Herts Council
Health & Safety Audit 2026/27

Reasonable Assurance

July 2026

Issued to:	**Michael Clark –** Buildings & Facilities Manager **James Ottery –** Health & Safety Manager, Herts County Council **Steve Crowley –** Director (Enterprise)
Copied to:	**Anthony Roche** – Chief Executive **Ian Couper –** Director (Resources) **Tim Everitt –** Performance and Risk Officer **FAR Committee Members**
Recommendations:	**One High and Three Medium Priority**

INDEX


Page
1. Executive Summary
2
2. Summary of Testing Results
3
3. Management Action Plan
6
Appendix A - Definitions of Management Assurance Levels
10
Appendix B - Root Cause Analysis Definitions
11

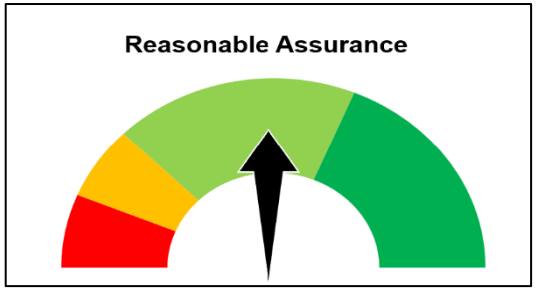
1. Executive Summary – Health & Safety 2026/27

Objective

The purpose of this audit was to assess whether any gaps exist in health and safety duties, governance arrangements, service provision, or record-keeping, because of responsibilities falling between the respective parties.

Key Risk

Unclear or fragmented allocation of health and safety responsibilities between the Council and Herts County Council may result in gaps in duties, governance, service provision, and record-keeping, leading to non-compliance with statutory obligations, increased risk of harm to employees, service users or the public, potentially leading to legal, financial and reputational consequences for the Council.



There is generally a sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

Assurance Areas	System Strengths	Areas for Improvement	Root Cause	Description (see Appendix B)
• Governance, Accountability and Ownership. • Provision of Health & Safety Duties and Services. • Monitoring, Oversight and Information Management. • Communication & Escalation.	• An appropriate Service Level Agreement with the Herts County Council Health & Safety Team clearly defining the scope of services and responsibilities. • Regular management monitoring of health & safety performance, with reporting to appropriate officer groups and evidenced review, challenge, and follow-up of issues. • Clear procedures for reporting incidents, near-misses, and hazards, with defined responsibilities for investigation, corrective action, and escalation. • Clear, documented health and safety roles distinguishing Herts County Council and in-house responsibilities, with defined accountability and named officers for delivery.	Fire drills are not being completed on an annual basis as required by regulation.		Standards & Policies
		The Council's Health & Safety Policy and internal processes do not reflect the updated Service Level Agreement with the Herts County Council Health & Safety Team.		Accountability and Resources
		Operational meetings between the Council and the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team are infrequent and ad hoc.		Standards & Policies and Accountability
		The Council has no centralised recording of risk assessments completed by individual service areas.		Standards & Policies

Recommendations		Summary of Recommendations
Critical	High	Recommendations made fall within the following areas of testing: • **Governance, Accountability and Ownership –** Update the Health & Safety Policy to reflect revised Council and Herts County Council arrangements, define clear escalation thresholds, review and align all supporting documents, and implement regular, comprehensive health & safety risk management training. • **Provision of Health & Safety Duties and Services** - Ensure annual fire drills are conducted at all relevant Council properties and documented to confirm compliance. Implement a formal system for filing and monitoring team-based risk assessments to enable central oversight. • **Monitoring, Oversight and Information Management** – Hold periodic operational meetings between the Council and the Herts County Council Health & Safety Team, including documented review of the Health & Safety Tracker and maintenance of centralised records with regular checks to ensure completeness and consistency across all areas.
0	1	
Medium	Low	
3	0	
Advisory Actions		
0		

2. AUDIT SUMMARY

Summary of Testing Results

2.1 A further summary is included below to outline the control areas reviewed and any matters raised with reference to the associated findings as outlined in this report.

Control Area Reviewed	Outcome
Governance, Accountability and Ownership	
The Council have a clearly defined Health & Safety Policy incorporating in-house roles and responsibilities, alongside a documented framework outlining those delivered by the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team.	Medium Recommendation No 2
The formal Service Level Agreement with Herts County Council should clearly define service scope, responsibilities, and reporting requirements, supported by Council policies that confirm accountability and governance arrangements for both parties.	Medium Recommendation No 2

Named responsible officers should be identified for overall accountability, in-house delivery, and liaison with the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team, alongside clearly defined escalation routes and thresholds for operational issues and significant risks or incidents.	Medium Recommendation No 2
Management should regularly monitor health & safety delivery, including performance and the effectiveness of Herts County Council's provision, with matters reported to the appropriate committee and supported by evidence of review, challenge, and follow-up actions.	No Matters Arising.
Regular communication between Council officers and the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team should be maintained, supported by appropriate training to ensure roles are understood, with periodic reviews of responsibilities and arrangements to address any gaps or changes	Medium Recommendation No 2 and 3
Provision of Health & Safety Duties and Services	
Day-to-day health & safety responsibilities should be clearly documented, distinguishing duties delivered by the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team and those retained in-house, with defined ownership for key activities and named officers responsible for delivery and coordination.	No Matters Arising.
Consistent processes should be in place for risk assessments, safe systems of work, and hazard management, with evidence that these are effectively applied across all relevant services and sites, including those managed in-house.	High Recommendation No 1
Clear procedures should be in place for reporting incidents, near-misses, and hazards, with defined responsibilities for investigation, corrective action, and escalation, supported by centralised logging and tracking accessible to both the Council and the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team.	Medium Recommendation No 4
Regular monitoring of operational health and safety performance should be in place, supported by coordinated reporting between the Council and the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team, with management oversight and appropriate escalation to senior leadership or Members where required.	Mo Matters Arising
Monitoring, Oversight and Information Management	
Responsibilities between the Council and the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team should be clearly defined, with structured arrangements for inspections, compliance monitoring, reporting, escalation, and follow-up actions, supported by accurate and consistent record-keeping.	No Matters Arising.
Regular reviews should be completed to ensure records, processes, and compliance activities remain effective and up to date.	Medium Recommendation No 3

Centralised processes should ensure issues, actions, responsible officers, and deadlines are recorded, with ongoing monitoring and clear accountability for completion, supported by accurate, aligned, and accessible records that are subject to periodic quality checks.	Covered in Medium Recommendation No 4
Communication and Escalation	
A documented framework should set out how health and safety information is communicated between the Council and the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team, including named contacts, defined update arrangements, and clear, aligned escalation procedures covering triggers, thresholds, responsibilities, and timescales	Areas covered in Medium Recommendation No 2
Regular reporting and coordination arrangements should provide assurance on health & safety performance, risks, and actions, with appropriate review and challenge by management or Members, clear accountability for follow-up, and periodic review to ensure ongoing effectiveness.	Areas covered in Medium Recommendation No 2

2.2 The matters raised in this report are based on a mixture of management response and testing completed. They are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the weaknesses that exist, or of all the improvements that may be required.

Annual Governance Statement

2.3 This report provides reasonable levels of assurance to support the Annual Governance Statement

3. Management Action Plan

High Priority	1. Provision of Health & Safety Duties and Services		
Audit Finding	**Root Cause**	**Recommended Action**	**Management Response**
We were advised that no fire drill has been conducted at the Council offices since 26 April 2024, with the only record being from a book kept at the rear door to the Council offices. We acknowledge that, following the transition of health & safety provision to Hertfordshire County Council's Health & Safety Team, they are currently undertaking fire risk assessments across all Council buildings. Once the fire risk assessment for the Council offices has been completed, the Buildings & Facilities Manager intends to arrange and conduct a fire drill.	**Standards & Policies** The frequency and completion of fire drills as defined by regulation is not noted in the Council's Health & Safety Policy.	We recommend that the Council establishes and implements an annual fire drill programme for all relevant properties as a minimum, with best practice being twice a year. Fire drills should be fully documented and retained to provide a clear audit trail and demonstrate compliance with the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005.	We will identify all buildings that the council has direct management control of and implement a process for scheduling fire evacuations and recording these. Consider buildings that are not regularly populated and if regular fire drill are appropriate. We will conduct a review of fire marshals and training history. **Responsible Officer**: Buildings & Facilities Manager **Due date**: 01 October 2026
Medium Priority	**2. Governance, Accountability and Ownership**		
Audit Finding	**Root Cause**	**Recommended Action**	**Management Response**
During the audit we reviewed the new Service Level Agreement that the Council has in place with the Hertfordshire County Council's Health & Safety Team, since September 2025, against the Council's Health & Safety Policy, to ensure that there	**Resources**	We recommend that the following actions are considered: • the Health & Safety Policy is updated to reflect the revised arrangements between the Council	We will work with HCC Health and Safety team to review North Herts Health and Safety Policy and consider thresholds, triggers and escalations.

are no duplication of roles and equally no legal or statutory requirements that are not covered by either party. We identified that: • there is no mention of the new provision that Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team now provide to the Council within the Health & safety Policy. • the current Health & Safety Policy and the internal health & safety documents still refer responsibility to the Health & Safety Officer, who retired last year • the Health & Safety Policy does not specify thresholds such as what constitutes a significant incident / a major risk / a reportable event escalation trigger or when escalation should move from operational level to senior management to Members • Service Managers are responsible for ensuring staff complete required health & safety training; however, the current Risk Management course supporting this is delivered as a one-off with no refresher.	**Accountability** Following the retirement of the Health & Safety Officer, the Council experienced a capacity gap and not all tasks as part of the transition of health & safety provider from in-house to the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team have been completed or allocated.	and the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team: • A housekeeping exercise is completed to review all internal health & safety documents and update / amend where required, including confirmation of who the "Health & Safety Officer" duties now fall to. • The policy does not specify thresholds such as what constitutes a significant incident / a major risk / a reportable event escalation trigger or when escalation should move from operational level to senior management to Members. • Risk management training is refreshed every 2 years, as managers are responsible for training their staff this could lead to misinformation or outdated practices. We acknowledge that since the Health & Safety Officer retired the generic health & safety inbox is now monitored by the Building & Facilities Manager.	Where an existing policy or guidance document states 'Health and Safety Officer' this will mean Herts County Council's Safety Officer. A limited review of documents was completed in Oct/Nov 2025. However, we will work with HCC Health and Safety team to review and update North Herts Health and Safety documents to include details of who the "Health & Safety Officer" duties now fall to. The SLA with HCC does include schedule 2 that sets out various health and safety tasks and details responsibilities. However, this will be reviewed in collaboration with HCC Health and Safety team. In conjunction with Human Resources we will review mandatory training requirements and training renewal periods aligned to risk. **Responsible Officer**: Buildings & Facilities Manager **Due date**: 31 December 2026

Medium Priority	3. Monitoring, Oversight and Information Management		
Audit Finding	**Root Cause**	**Recommended Action**	**Management Response**
We reviewed the Health & Safety Tracker, a register that is used to record, track and evidence statutory health and safety compliance across Council premises, however this is maintained independently by the Buildings & Facilities Manager and the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Manager. We also found that operational communication and monitoring of health & safety are limited to ad-hoc meetings, with oversight conducted independently by the Buildings & Facilities Manager and the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Manager and not supported by regular formal meetings or coordinated review of the Health & Safety Tracker.	**Accountability** **Standards & Procedures** The Service Level Agreement does not specify requirements for regular operational meetings or coordinated monitoring arrangements, resulting in unclear responsibilities and inconsistent communication between the Council and Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team.	We recommend that periodic meetings are held between the Building & Facilities Manager (or other nominated representative from the Council) and the Herts County Council's Health & Safety Team. This should be proportionate to the level of responsibility and incorporate a documented review of the Health & Safety Tracker to ensure that data accuracy, consistency and timely oversight is maintained across both parties.	We will agree a schedule of regular meetings with HCC Health and Safety team. It's proposed that bimonthly meetings will be sufficient. **Responsible Officer**: Buildings & Facilities Manager **Due date**: 31 July 2026

Medium Priority	4. Provision of Health & Safety Duties and Services		
Audit Finding	**Root Cause**	**Recommended Action**	**Management Response**
The Buildings & Facilities Manager advised that service areas are responsible for completing and retaining their own health & safety risk assessments. However, the absence of centralised records means that we could not confirm that the health & safety risk assessments had been completed.	**Standards and Policies** De-centralised recording of health & safety risk assessment means the Council cannot easily track whether they have been completed.	We recommend implementing a formal process for filing and monitoring team-based risk assessments to ensure that annual health and safety risk assessments completed by Service Managers are centrally tracked, enabling effective oversight and monitoring of submission and completion rates.	We will agree a method for service managers to store risk assessments and a process of verifying these have been completed, reviewed and updated on an annual basis. **Responsible Officer**: Buildings & Facilities Manager **Due date**: 31 December 2026

Assurance Level	Definition
Substantial	A sound system of governance, risk management and control exist, with internal controls operating effectively and being consistently applied to support the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Reasonable	There is a generally sound system of governance, risk management and control in place. Some issues, non-compliance or scope for improvement were identified which may put at risk the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
Limited	Significant gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance were identified. Improvement is required to the system of governance, risk management and control to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.
No	Immediate action is required to address fundamental gaps, weaknesses or non-compliance identified. The system of governance, risk management and control is inadequate to effectively manage risks to the achievement of objectives in the area audited.

Priority Level			Definition
Page 69	**Critical**		Audit findings which, in the present state, represent a serious risk to the organisation as a whole, i.e. reputation, financial resources and / or compliance with regulations. Management action to implement the appropriate controls is required immediately.
Service	**High**		Audit findings indicate a serious weakness or breakdown in control environment, which, if untreated by management intervention, is highly likely to put achievement of core service objectives at risk. Remedial action is required urgently.
	Medium		Audit findings which, if not treated by appropriate management action, are likely to put achievement of some of the core service objectives at risk. Remedial action is required in a timely manner.
	Low		Audit findings indicate opportunities to implement good or best practice, which, if adopted, will enhance the control environment. The appropriate solution should be implemented as soon as is practically possible.

Root Cause	Icon	Definition
Resources		The extent to which the service has sufficient, capable resources, enabling it to carry out all aspects of its operational duties efficiently and effectively.
Competencies & Training		The extent to which staff are appropriately qualified, trained or experienced to carry out their role.
Systems		The extent to which systems are fit-for-purpose and support the service to carry out its operations effectively.
Motivation & Incentives		The extent to which factors such as organisational or personnel change have impacted on staff desire to carry out their role efficiently and effectively.
Standards & Policies		The extent to which expected standards have been made clear to staff and the necessary policies are in place to support these standards.
Governance		The extent to which the service is governed by a clear structure that sets out the roles and responsibilities of officers, and the service is supported by appropriate risk management and control systems.
Process & Procedures		The extent to which established processes are operating effectively and are supported by defined procedures.
Accountability		The extent to which roles and responsibilities for decision-making have been defined and are accepted and acted on by all parties.
Assurance & Monitoring		The extent to which internal and/or external checking controls exist to monitor the effectiveness of, and provide assurance to, the service.

CABINET
TUESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2026

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: Adoption of Homelessness Action Plan and grant allocations

REPORT OF: Director - Regulatory

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Regulatory

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Accessible Services;

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The Council is required to produce a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan to meet new conditions for receipt of Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government homelessness grant. This report contains a proposed Action Plan together with an updated temporary accommodation policy, also required.

1.2. This report also details proposals for an allocation of the recently announced Rough Sleeping Programme funding for the establishment of a new Rapid Prevention, Assessment and Resettlement service in the district which will provide on-the-day emergency accommodation and intensive support for people who are rough sleeping or at imminent risk of rough sleeping.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet approves the draft Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan at Appendix 1.

2.2 That Cabinet approves the updated Temporary Accommodation Policy at Appendix 2.

2.3 That Cabinet approves the funding proposal of £238k for a new Rapid Prevention, Assessment and Resettlement service in the district (outlined in paragraphs 8.4-8.7).

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. The Council is required to produce a Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan as a condition of MHCLG grant funding by the 1st December 2026.

3.2. This also includes the obligation to update Temporary Accommodation Policies to ensure they reflect current requirements.

3.3. The proposed funding for a new Rapid Prevention, Assessment and Resettlement service in the district will improve provision of on-the-day emergency accommodation, which is currently lacking, strengthening the local single homeless pathway and offering improved opportunities for engagement with those sleeping rough.

3.4. The recommendation within this report are consistent with the priorities set out in the Council's Housing Strategy (2024 – 2029), the proposed Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan and the Council Plan.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. Cabinet could decide against approving funding for the proposed new service, however this would reduce options for accommodating and engaging effectively with people facing rough sleeping in the district as well as resulting in ongoing reliance on hotel placements for on-the-day accommodation.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 Consultation on the draft Action Plan was undertaken with local partners including the North Herts Homelessness Forum and was advertised via the Council's website and e-newsletter to residents. A very low level of response was received.

5.2 The Executive Member for Regulatory, Cllr Mick Debenham has been consulted and is supportive of the proposals contained in this report.

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 23rd October 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The government has prioritised ending homelessness and rough sleeping. As part of this drive, statutory guidance has been updated to require all local housing authorities to have an Action Plan in place that underpins the delivery of local homelessness strategies by 1st December 2026. This is now a grant funding requirement for all in receipt of Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant (HRSDAG).

7.2. Additional funding, via a new Rough Sleeping Programme, was also announced in August this year, providing funding for immediate provisions for a 'route off the streets' by Christmas this year and longer-term accommodation and intensive support for people who have experienced long-term rough sleeping. The Council has been awarded a total of £213,643 over three years 2026/27 to 2028/29.

7.3. Homelessness remains an ongoing challenge in the district due to continuing cost of living pressures, the affordability of local accommodation and increasing support needs. The Council receives around 1,000 enquiries around homelessness and housing issues each year. In 2025/26, 370 of these households were assessed as being owed a homelessness duty by the Council, meaning that we worked with these households for at least 56 days to prevent or relieve homelessness. Around two-thirds of households have a support need, most commonly poor mental health (25% of those owed a duty in the past two years) and physical ill health (19%), but also risk of abuse (12%), learning disability (9%) and substance dependency (8%). In the first half of 2026/27, the Council has owed a duty to 181 households.

7.4. The Council also has legal duties to accommodate families with dependent children and vulnerable individuals temporarily whilst we conduct inquiries, and also until settled accommodation is secured. In 2025/26, we made 268 placements into temporary accommodation, half of which were hotel placements due to lack of capacity in purpose-built temporary accommodation (which mainly caters for families) or this accommodation not being suitable for individuals' support needs. Increased capacity on the single homeless pathway, primarily at Anderson House in Hitchin, has helped to ensure that stays in hotels are typically short however, lasting up to a few weeks.

7.5. There are very few people sleeping rough in North Hertfordshire, on average three over the course of any one month. However, those who do sleep rough are typically entrenched with complex support needs and require accommodation solutions that reflect this.

7.6. The Council has also received a three-year settlement of HRSDAG totalling £2.9 million over 2026/27 to 2028/29. The Grant is ringfenced for initiatives to tackle homelessness in line with local authorities' legal duties and the government's policy aims. Cabinet has approved allocations for the majority of this settlement at meetings on 16 June 2026 and 22 September 2026, for specialist prevention services, to secure capacity on the single homeless pathway and for work with private sector landlords.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The Council's current Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is incorporated within the North Herts Housing Strategy 2024 – 2029. This sets out the challenges the district faces and our strategic approach to prevention, accommodation and support. The Council's proposed Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan is attached at Appendix 1. It sets out how we will deliver the key priorities identified within our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy with a strong continued focus on prevention work.

8.2 Local authorities are required to set targets against specified homelessness and rough sleeping metrics in their action plans in order that performance can be monitored and measured. Our Action Plan contains the following targets (with a number of interim 'checkpoints' not reproduced here for brevity):

Table 1. Action Plan targets

		Baseline Autumn 2025	Target 31/03/29
Households with children in temporary accommodation	Rate per 1,000 households (Sept 25), snapshot	1.01 (59 households)	0.85 (50 households)
Families in B&B over 6 weeks	No. of households (Sept 25), snapshot	0	0
Success at preventing and relieving homelessness	Successful outcomes / duties owed (Q2 25/26), measured over each quarter	57%	66%
Success at preventing and relieving homelessness for those experiencing multiple disadvantage	Successful outcomes / duties owed (Oct-Dec 25), measured over each quarter	57%	60%
People sleeping rough on a single night	No. of households* (Autumn 25), snapshot	1	0
People sleeping rough long-term	No. of households* (Nov 25), monthly	1	0

*The households concerned normally comprise single people, however, occasionally include couples too

8.3 The Action Plan identifies a number of key risks to achieving our targets, foremost of which is the Council's reliance, as a non-stock holding authority, on housing providers to bring forward housing to meet local needs. To mitigate this risk, the Council works proactively with local providers and partners, including YMCA Chiltern Group, Keystage Housing, Lifestone Homes (formerly settle) and Hertfordshire County

Council to leverage funding from central government, Homes England and other sources and to identify potential sites for development.

8.4 The Council has most recently been working with YMCA Chiltern on plans for specialist on-the-day emergency accommodation in the district, to deliver the aims of the government's Rough Sleeping Programme. It is proposed to use our Rough Sleeping Programme allocation of funding to support the establishment of a new, small Rapid Prevention, Assessment and Resettlement Service, to be managed by YMCA Chiltern. This would be located at the existing Sanctuary site in Hitchin; this is owned by a charity called Helping Herts Homeless and the current service is managed by YMCA as part of our single homeless pathway. Should the recommendations in this report be agreed, we will work with YMCA to ensure the existing residents are supported into alternative accommodation at the right time.

8.5 The proposed new service will offer on-the-day emergency accommodation for up to five individuals plus an additional emergency 'sit up space' which would provide an immediate safe space overnight. Placements would be for up to eight weeks, aiming not just to provide an emergency bed, but also active intervention by creating a period of stability during which an individual's support needs can be meaningfully assessed and an appropriate housing pathway progressed. The target cohort would be people who are currently rough sleeping in the district and those at imminent risk of rough sleeping, with referrals managed in partnership between YMCA and the Council. The service would consider individuals with dogs on a case-by-case basis.

8.6 The proposed cost of this service would be a total of £238k, to support the service from 1st December 2026 until the end of March 2029. The majority of the cost is for staffing capacity in order to provide specialist prevention and resettlement interventions, practical support and security, including overnight. Appropriate overnight arrangements are an important part of maintaining a safe service as the service may receive people at a point of housing crisis, including individuals whose needs and risks have not been fully assessed at the time of approach. The service would also provide food and essentials as well as flexible personalisation funding to help individuals overcome small practical barriers such as travel costs and replacement identification.

8.7 The proposed new service would complement existing provision at the former Lord Lister hotel and Anderson House (both in Hitchin), which provide longer-term accommodation up to 18 months and therefore require bedspace interviews and risk assessments to be undertaken prior to an individual being accommodated. We would have to continue to use hotel placements where suitable for on-the-day accommodation until the service is up and running and in order to meet the 'route off the street' commitment by Christmas.

8.8 The MHCLG Rough Sleeping Programme (RSP) funding allocation for the Council is outlined below:

Table 1. Proposals for homelessness grant allocations for 2026/27 onwards

	2026/27	2027/28	2028/29	Total
Rough Sleeping Programme funding	**£113,643**	**£50,000**	**£50,000**	**£213,643**

The cost of the proposed service - £238k – exceeds the funding RSP allocation, however an announcement was made by the government prior to the recent budget that these allocations would be doubled. MHCLG colleagues have since advised they are currently working through revised funding allocations and hope to have news

in the coming weeks, adding they expect any uplift will be applied to 2027/28 and 2028/29, rather than the current year.

8.9 As part of the development of the action plan, local authorities have also been required to review their temporary accommodation policies, to ensure they are up-to-date and compliant. The Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy details how the Council ensures that sufficient suitable temporary accommodation is available to meet anticipated demand. Our revised policy is attached at Appendix 2, with tracked changes to highlight the proposed amendments.

8.10 Action plans must be published by 1st December 2026 and reviewed regularly (recommended annually).

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. The Housing Act 1985 Section 1 (1) confirms that the District Council is the Local Housing Authority (LHA).

9.2 LHAs' homelessness duties are contained within the Housing Act 1996 Part VII, as amended by the Homelessness Reduction Act 2017 which placed significant new duties on English local housing authorities to prevent homelessness.

9.3 LHAs have a legal duty to provide interim (also known as emergency) accommodation to homeless applicants, if, at any point during their enquiries, there is a reason to believe that an applicant may be:

- homeless
- eligible for assistance, and
- in priority need

9.4 The LHA also holds the 'Relief Duty' which applies when a council is satisfied that an applicant is homeless and eligible for assistance; it requires the Council to take reasonable steps to help the applicant secure that suitable accommodation becomes available for the applicant's occupation for at least six months. This therefore requires the Council to work with the applicant to help them find and retain accommodation to meet this legal duty.

9.5 The Cabinet's Terms of Reference provides at paragraph 5.7.15; "To oversee the provision of all the Council's services other than those functions reserved to the Council".

9.6 In approving the funding proposals the Cabinet would therefore be acting in accordance with its statutory requirements and in accordance with the Council's constitution.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The Council has been notified of a total allocation of £213,643 in Rough Sleeping Programme funding, covering the three-year period 2026/27 – 2028/29. Funding is to meet the Programme objectives, namely, to provide immediate accommodation and support for people sleeping rough or at immediate risk of rough sleeping, and to strengthen local pathways into long-term accommodation.

10.2 It was announced in the October budget that total central government funding committed to Rough Sleeping Grant would be approximately double the amount previously announced in August 2026. North Herts has not yet received communication from Central Government confirming the revised allocation for North Hertfordshire. It has been assumed that North Herts Council's revised Rough

Sleeping grant allocation would be in the region of £400k – which would be sufficient to fully fund the proposed service.

10.3 However, if the revised grant allocation does not increase North Herts allocation from the £213,643 already announced this would leave a shortfall of just over £24k. If this scenario were to materialise, Housing would use unallocated balance in the Homelessness reserve to cover the shortfall.

10.4 The proposals contained in this report are consistent with MHCLG grant requirements.

10.5 A subsidy assessment has been conducted and is being considered by Legal Services.

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 YMCA deliver the majority of the Council's single homeless pathway and without the addition of this extra service there is a risk that some our most vulnerable clients remain on the street for extended periods.

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. An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached as Appendix 3. The assessment notes the potential positive impacts this decision will have for some of the most vulnerable members of the community in North Hertfordshire.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and "go local" requirements do not apply to this report; however, the proposals contribute to social value by providing community benefits that would otherwise not be realised.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to the proposals in this report.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 None.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix 1 – Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan

16.2 Appendix 2 – Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy

16.3 Appendix 3 - Equality Impact Assessment

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

17.1 Jo Doggett, Director - Regulatory jo.doggett@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4470

17.2 Martin Lawrence, Strategic Housing Manager martin.lawrence@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4250

17.3 Daisy Harris, Policy and Strategy Officer, daisy.harris@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4209

17.4 Ian Couper, Director Resources, ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk; ext 4243

17.5 Luke Franklin, Service Accountant, luke.franklin@north-herts.gov.uk

17.6 Natasha Jindal, Legal Team Manager (Approver), natasha.jindal@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 MHCLG's Homelessness, Rough Sleeping and Domestic Abuse Grant Determination 2026 to 2027

18.2 MHCLG's Rough Sleeping Programme

This page is intentionally left blank

Appendix 1

North Hertfordshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan 2026 - 2029

Our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy

Our current Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy is incorporated within the North Herts Housing Strategy 2024 – 2029. This sets out the challenges we face and our strategic approach to prevention, accommodation and support.

Core to our Strategy is the recognition that a decent, affordable home is so much more than a roof over a person's head – it provides safety and stability from which individuals can lead healthy, productive and fulfilling lives.

Preventing homelessness from happening in the first place is key to ending homelessness and rough sleeping. It is the first of four key priorities identified in our Strategy:

- Prevent homelessness in all its forms
- Increase provision of good quality accommodation and support for homeless people facing multiple disadvantage, including people sleeping rough
- Support victims and survivors of domestic abuse
- Improve access to affordable, local housing options

North Herts Council does not own or manage any housing and we therefore rely on strong partnerships with local housing providers, government bodies, statutory services (such as health and social care) and a range of voluntary and other third-sector organisations to help us to deliver our priorities.

Our Action Plan

We are keen to continue to improve our core service to local residents and our Action Plan sets out how we will deliver the priorities identified in our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy.

Within a fast-evolving policy environment, this Action Plan has been developed within the context of a suite of existing documents:

Housing Strategy 2024 – 2029: Two Year Achievement review
This reviews the first two years of our Housing Strategy

Housing Strategy Action Plan 2026/27
Sets out wider actions to deliver the Housing Strategy

Review of Homelessness in North Hertfordshire
A comprehensive review of the scale of homelessness and accommodation, support and resources available to tackle the issue

We have also taken the opportunity to review our policy on the suitability of temporary accommodation placements [LINK].

This Action Plan has been published in response to the government's A National Plan to End Homelessness and includes actions to bolster our single homeless pathway so that we can continue to offer a "Route off the Street" for people sleeping rough. Our Plan also

includes specific actions to reduce homelessness amongst other vulnerable groups including: people leaving public institutions, young people leaving care, survivors of domestic abuse and those with support needs such as physical or mental health needs.

The Action Plan will be reviewed and updated annually.

Action	Milestones	Targets	Progress
Prevent homelessness in all its forms			
Work with partners to improve opportunities for early intervention, ensuring services are accessible to all.	Identify gaps and engagement opportunities. Agree arrangements for drop-in sessions, co-location and other opportunities with partners.	By end 2026/27: early intervention plan agreed with partners and in place.	Discussion underway with partners. Drop-in sessions with Citizens Advice and domestic abuse services successfully trialled.
Secure the ongoing provision of specialist services to support young people facing homelessness.	Secure necessary approvals for allocation of funding.	By end 2026/27: provision secured until the end of 2028/29 for secondary school education sessions.	Approved by Cabinet Sept 2026.
Secure the ongoing provision of specialist housing advice services from Citizens Advice.	Secure necessary approvals for allocation of funding.	By end 2026/27: provision secured until the end of 2028/29, to include free legal/court representation.	Approved by Cabinet Sept 2026.
Refine tenancy sustainment activities including pre-eviction protocols with our LSVT registered provider following recent merger.	Tenancy sustainment work embedded across entire homelessness team (rather than with one dedicated officer as previously). Reconfirm procedures etc with newly merged registered provider.	By end 2026/27: tenancy sustainment measures, protocols etc embedded in NHC and RP working relationship.	Regular meetings between Housing Options Team and Lifestone Neighbourhood Team.
Review our local offer to care-experienced young people.	Working with Hertfordshire County Council, review and implement updated guidance due Autumn 2026.	By end 2026: clear local offer and pathways accessible via Council website.	Local connection exemption implemented in allocation policy. Exemption from intentionally homeless decisions in place.

Action	Milestones	Targets	Progress
Continue to embed implementation of the Renters' Rights Act within Housing services.	Continue to work with landlords, ensuring compliance with new legislation and grounds for eviction. Together with Environmental Health, work to ensure landlord compliance with registration deadlines for the PRS database.	Ongoing.	Training undertaken by all officers.
Work with partners to improve early interventions for people leaving institutions, including those leaving hospitals and prisons.	Key contacts with local health and justice service partners identified and engaged, intervention points and key risks mapped.	By end 2027: early intervention plans/discharge protocols agreed with key partners, improved outcomes for individuals leaving institutions.	Building relationships with local mental health teams, encouraging shared assessments and joint planning.
Establish an additional officer post to focus on early interventions particularly around family/friend exclusions.	Scope out officer role. Secure necessary approvals for new post.	By end 27/28: new post in place.	Funding bid proposed and roles evolving with additional responsibilities.
Increase provision of good quality accommodation and support for homeless people facing multiple disadvantage, including people sleeping rough			
Continue to seek opportunities to reinforce the single homeless accommodation pathway.	Review pathway, identify gaps and seek opportunities for securing Houses in Multiple Occupation and 'Housing First' units in particular.	Ongoing (ongoing need for additional units particularly for those with the most complex needs).	Funding secured Sept 2026 for 17 additional units in main Anderson House service for single homeless people with complex needs. Discussions for on the day placements and other move opportunities.
Secure provision of additional move-on units.	Ongoing work with partners to leverage opportunities and funding.	Ongoing (ongoing need for additional units).	Funding secured Sept 2026 for additional eight move-on units at Anderson House.

Action	Milestones	Targets	Progress
Secure improved provision of on-the-day emergency accommodation.	Ongoing work with partners to leverage opportunities and funding.	Ongoing: to reduce reliance on hotel and nightly paid accommodation.	Potential opportunity is being costed.
Continue to work with partners on joint arrangements to secure lasting outcomes for individuals with complex needs.	Continue to participate in all relevant multi-agency conferences as appropriate.	Ongoing.	Proposed changes to CHAS to increase move on from supported accommodation.
Continue to work with provider to ensure that Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme provision continues to meet young persons' local need including programme requirements.	Reviewed at regular monitoring points.	Ongoing to end of 2028/29.	Review opportunities for step down accommodation.
Implement new temporary accommodation notification duty.	Training and operational needs identified.	By 31/08/26: arrangements in place to meet duty.	Complete
Explore viability of establishing a framework agreement for the procurement of emergency accommodation, to regularise activity and ensure standards.	Feedback from PME to determine viability.	By end Feb 2027: framework agreement in place, if viable, or alternative.	Preliminary Market Engagement underway (6th Oct – 5th Nov 2026).
Explore options for a local, responsive support service for people with substance misuse issues.	Work with partners to identify options.	By end 26/27: proposals ready for approval.	Initial meetings with potential provider underway.
Secure the ongoing provision of local rough sleeping outreach service.	Secure necessary approvals for allocation of funding.	By end 2026/27: provision secured until the end of 2028/29.	Approved by Cabinet Sept 2026.
Develop and publish a new Local Supported Housing Strategy.	Initial findings due November 2026.	By end 2026/27: new Supported Housing Strategy in place.	Work co-commissioned with Hertfordshire County Council and all ten Herts district/borough councils.

Action	Milestones	Targets	Progress
Implement further requirements of the Supported Housing Regulatory Oversight Act.	Develop action plan to implement Supported Housing Strategy once in place. Along with Environmental Health, implement/manage impacts of new provisions as they rollout, including new national supported housing standards.	2027/28 onwards.	Not yet actioned.
Support victims and survivors of domestic abuse			
Secure the ongoing provision of specialist services for domestic abuse survivors.	Secure necessary approvals for allocation of funding.	By end 2026/27: provision secured until the end of 2028/29.	Approved by Cabinet Sept 2026.
Determine if a viable model is possible to extend the pilot women's only scheme in the district.	Potential proposal (if viable) to be submitted to Cabinet in early 2027.	By end 2026: provision secured until the end of 2028/29.	Proposals being costed.
Improve access to affordable, local housing options			
Develop the Council's private rented sector offer for private landlords to secure additional properties for our clients.	Secure necessary approvals for allocation of funding.	By end 2026: new offer in place.	Approved by Cabinet Sept 2026.
Implement the Council's Empty Homes Strategy.	Statutory Nuisance interventions in place. Aim to work with other services to implement more of the Strategy.	By end 2026/27: review existing Strategy. Start drafting new Strategy for 2028-2032	Staffing issues have prevented Environmental Health progressing further implementation of the Strategy.

Action	Milestones	Targets	Progress
Review options to expand provision of temporary accommodation in the district.	Commission research via CHoSS.	Ongoing: to reduce reliance on hotel and nightly paid accommodation.	Work undertaken with Council Housebuilding Support Service (CHoSS) with final report submitted Sept 2026.
Continue to ensure that affordable housing is allocated to those in most need.	Regular reviews including review of income thresholds due 2027.	Ongoing.	Recent review identified minor amendments, to seek approval Nov 2026.

How we will measure our progress

Our Action Plan will help us improve performance against each of the homelessness and rough sleeping metrics in the government's Local Outcomes Framework by the end of the Parliament (ie August 2029).

These metrics are listed below, together with targets and milestones that have been developed using local performance data, operational intelligence and known service pressures.

They align with government's national targets:

- Eliminate the use of B&B accommodation for families
- Increasing success at preventing and relieving homelessness
- halve long-term rough sleeping

The government also announced a new national Rough Sleeping Programme in September 2026, which aims to provide a route off the street for everyone before Christmas this year.

The number of people sleeping rough in North Herts is typically very low, although the small numbers we do see tend to be very entrenched. Nevertheless we are clear that one rough sleeper is one person too many, which is reflected in our targets and our continuing commitment to developing our single homeless pathway and resourcing outreach work.

		Baseline Autumn 2025	Checkpoint 1 31/03/27	Checkpoint 2 31/03/28	Target 31/03/29
Households with children in temporary accommodation	Rate per 1,000 households (Sept 25)	1.01 (59 households)	0.97 (57 households)	0.92 (54 households)	0.85 (50 households)
Families in B&B over 6 weeks	No. of households (Sept 25)	0	0	0	0
Success at preventing and relieving homelessness	Successful outcomes / duties owed (Q2 25/26)	57%	60%	63%	66%
Success at preventing and relieving homelessness for those experiencing multiple disadvantage	Successful outcomes / duties owed (Oct-Dec 25)	57%	58%	59%	60%
People sleeping rough on a single night	No. of households (Autumn 25)	1	0	0	0
People sleeping rough long-term	No. of households (Nov 25)	1	0	0	0

Our ongoing commitment to prevention work means that we are able to prevent homelessness for a significant proportion of people who approach us for assistance. The Action Plan contains new early intervention measures which will help to strengthen our approach, particularly around family and friend exclusions which is the most common reason for homelessness.

Almost two-thirds of households that we work with have support needs, with physical and mental ill health being the most prevalent. In particular, the pandemic revealed a previously hidden cohort of vulnerable single homeless people and we have worked hard to develop our pathway to meet this demand. New work outlined in our Action Plan aims to further bolster this pathway although our targets reflect the ongoing challenges of sourcing viable sites for supported accommodation in the district and of affordability issues.

The number of households in temporary accommodation is a small proportion of our total population, currently one family in every thousand households in the district. The baseline rate recorded in the table above corresponds to 59 households with children in temporary accommodation. Given the small numbers involved, modest improvements are not demonstrably visible via the target as prescribed – our final target of 0.85 (50 households) means 9 fewer families in temporary accommodation at any one time by the end of 2028/29. This is an ambitious reduction which will be driven by early intervention measures, improved move-on pathways and better access to private rented options.

Risks

The Council is committed to reducing homelessness in our district and improving outcomes for our residents. We recognise the challenge this involves and have a identified a number of key risks which lead officers will be responsible for monitoring and mitigating.

- As a non-stock holding authority, reliance on housing providers for accommodation in an uncertain market including recent merger of our largest provider.
- Increasing homelessness demand, including from ongoing cost of living pressures.
- Ongoing affordability challenges in the district, with a small private rented sector.
- Increasing complexity of support needs, requiring resourcing from key partners including health and criminal justice partners.
- Local Government Reorganisation: current uncertainty and possible disruption with creation of new authority.
- Staffing and morale: we rely on a small team of highly experienced and capable officers and work hard to look after them in what is often a highly stressful job. Small changes such as an officer leaving can have a significant impact.

Local Governance Structures

The Council is responsible for its statutory housing and homelessness functions. This Action Plan supports the delivery of those functions and will be subject to clear and effective oversight and coordinated partnership working. At its core is:

Officer accountability and performance monitoring The Homelessness & Housing Advice Manager and the Housing Register & Accommodation Manager will lead implementation of the Action Plan with strategic oversight provided by the Strategic Housing Manager. Progress, including against targets, will be monitored regularly using internal case level data and published H-CLIC data to benchmark against nearest neighbours. Monitoring will link to the Council's corporate performance, risk and management arrangements.

Member oversight and decision-making The Action Plan and annual updates will be taken to the Council's Cabinet for review, scrutiny and approval.

Local partnership oversight We will agree proportionate delivery reviews with housing providers, other statutory services and voluntary sector partners, dependent upon commissioning arrangements for specific services. Wider oversight will be through the North Herts Homelessness Forum, on which key partners sit.

County-wide coordination This will be provided through Hertfordshire Heads of Housing and other regular meetings, which are key for joined up working on shared prevention, accommodation and support priorities.

How we work with our partners

Delivery of this Action Plan is dependent on strong partnership working with local housing providers, statutory, voluntary and community sector organisations. We have consulted with our partners and residents during the development of this Action Plan.

We will continue to work closely with our key housing providers, particularly those providing accommodation on the single homeless pathway and temporary accommodation for local residents. We have collaborated successfully over the years to secure additional funding for provision in the district, including most recently with YMCA Chiltern on the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme.

We grant fund specialist support services provided by Survivors Against Domestic Abuse, Herts Young Homeless, Citizens Advice and YMCA Chiltern (rough sleeper outreach services) and work closely with these partners to maximise positive outcomes for individuals and ensure delivery in line with expectations.

The Council also participates fully in countywide arrangements to bring partners together to support individuals facing multiple disadvantages, including Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA), Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) and Team Around Me meetings, Joint Housing Protocol MDT.

This page is intentionally left blank

Appendix 2

North Herts Council

Temporary accommodation placement policy

1. Introduction

1.1 This policy sets out North Herts Council's approach to the placement of homeless households in temporary accommodation, whether within or outside of the district, and details how suitability requirements will be met

1.2 The policy covers both interim temporary accommodation placements made under Section 188 of the Housing Act 1996, whilst homelessness inquiries are undertaken, and longer term temporary accommodation placements for households accepted as homeless under Section 193 of the Housing Act 1996.

1.3 In developing this placement policy, the Council has taken into account the following:

- the Housing Act 1996 (as amended), including Sections 206, 208 and 210;
- relevant case law;
- the Homelessness (Suitability of Accommodation) (England) Orders 1996, 2003 and 2012;
- relevant government guidance, including the Homelessness Code of Guidance for Local Authorities;
- section 11 of the Children Act 2004;
- the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026; and
- the Equality Act 2010.

1.4 This policy should be read in conjunction with the Council's most recent Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy (encompassed within our Housing Strategy 2024 -2029), which sets out our priorities and plans for securing that sufficient accommodation is available for local homeless households.

2. Aims and Objectives

2.1 The Council aims to ensure that sufficient temporary accommodation is available to meet the needs of local homeless households and that temporary accommodation is suitable for the needs of individual households in line with legal duties and statutory guidance.

2.2 All offers of temporary accommodation will be made on a case-by-case basis, following consideration of the individual applicant's needs and circumstances to ensure that accommodation is suitable for the household[1], in accordance with relevant legislation and government guidance.

2.3 Wherever reasonably practicable, the Council will provide suitable temporary accommodation within North Hertfordshire, unless there is a specific reason why

[1] Including all members of the household who would normally reside with the applicant or who might reasonably be expected to reside with them.

a household should not be accommodated within the district (most commonly where applicants are at risk of domestic abuse or other violence).

2.4 In instances where suitable temporary accommodation cannot be secured within the district, the Council will seek to make an out of area placement as close as possible to the district boundaries or to where the applicant was previously living. Wherever practicable, the Council will aim to minimise the time spent in out of area accommodation and offer a suitable in-district placement when availability arises.

3. Availability of and demand for temporary accommodation

3.1 The Council no longer owns any housing stock and is therefore reliant on housing provider partners to bring forward opportunities for additional provision. The current stock of purpose-built temporary accommodation in the district is owned and managed for the Council by a local housing provider, Lifestone Homes. This comprises just under 80 units of accommodation, mostly for families, with a small number of units for single people.

3.2 Demand for the Council's homelessness services is likely to remain high into the foreseeable future and the risk of increased homelessness due to ongoing cost of living pressures (amongst others) is flagged as a risk in our Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Action Plan [LINK]. Temporary accommodation for single households is a particular pressure point given the profile of our purpose-built stock. Our Action Plan includes measures to continue to target prevention of homelessness, reducing the number of households who will need temporary accommodation. It also includes plans to further bolster our single homeless pathway which has increased in capacity over recent years but remains vulnerable to pressures for on-the-day and move-on accommodation in particular.

3.3 Temporary accommodation within purpose-built stock in North Herts is therefore currently supplemented by flexible use of nightly paid accommodation (such as hotels) when full capacity is reached or where a household's needs cannot be met in the available accommodation. The Council will source alternative suitable temporary accommodation which best meets the household's needs and circumstances and includes nightly paid accommodation which may be outside of the district.

3.4 It should also be noted that there is high demand for affordable housing in the district and there are typically around 2,000 households registered to bid for affordable housing at any one time. In contrast, last year, just over 400 lets to affordable housing were made[2]. Households owed a main housing duty may therefore have to remain in temporary accommodation for some time, until a suitable affordable let becomes available. The Council may also discharge its main housing duty via a private rented sector offer[3].

3.5 The availability and use of temporary accommodation is kept under review as an action under the Council's Housing Strategy and we continue to explore options to increase capacity. These are, however, heavily dependent on the availability of government grant funding and viable local sites. Long-term plans for the

[2] See our website for latest statistics on local affordable housing lets. CHECK LINKS

[3] See also our website for Private Rented Sector Offer policy.

delivery of good quality temporary accommodation will also be informed by the forthcoming Supported Housing Strategy and the needs assessment undertaken as part of this.

4. Suitability of temporary accommodation

4.1 The Council will provide suitable temporary accommodation placements for homeless households in line with legislation and statutory guidance. The placement of homeless applicants and an assessment of the suitability of temporary accommodation will always be made on an individual, case by case basis.

4.2 Placements of temporary accommodation will be made based on the facts available to the Council at the time that duty is discharged, however the Council has a continuing obligation to keep the suitability of accommodation under review and to respond to any relevant change in circumstances which may affect suitability.

4.3 Suitability of accommodation is covered in detail by the Homelessness Code of Guidance which explains that space and arrangement will be key factors in determining the suitability of accommodation, in light of the relevant needs, requirements and circumstances of the homeless person and their household. Location of accommodation will also be a relevant factor (section 5 below addresses this in more detail), as is affordability of accommodation.

4.4 Accommodation should be safe and healthy and as a minimum be free of Category 1 hazards. The Council will require confirmation of this from accommodation providers and undertake on-site visits where appropriate.

Households with children

4.5 The Council will ensure that cots are made available for children under the age of two and that accommodation has adequate space for a cot.

4.6 The Council will notify schools, GP practices and health visiting services when a child is placed in temporary accommodation.

5. Out of district placements

5.1 The Council will secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, suitable temporary accommodation within North Hertfordshire district when it is discharging its housing functions under Part VII of the Housing Act 1996. This is in accordance with section 208(1) of the 1996 Act.

5.2 However, as set out at paragraph 3.3 above, there will be occasions when it is not reasonably practicable to secure suitable temporary accommodation within the district. This is either because of lack of capacity locally (usually for single person placements) or because available accommodation is not suitable for an individual's (or their household members') needs.

5.3 Where out of district placements are made, these will usually be placements made under the interim accommodation duty, whilst we carry out inquiries, and their duration will be minimised as far as is reasonably practicable. We will aim to mitigate disruption to a household's support and essential services, in particular

health services, education and other vital support networks where relevant. Further details are provided in section 7.

5.4 In other circumstances, there may be specific reasons why a household should be accommodated outside of the district. Examples include where an applicant (and/or a member of their household) would be at risk of domestic abuse or other violence in the district or to enable ex-offenders to break links with negative contacts in the district.

5.5 The Council will notify the authority whose district the accommodation is situated in of the placement.

6. Safeguarding vulnerable people

6.1 Where there are concerns for the wellbeing of an individual, the Council will make safeguarding referrals to Hertfordshire County Council in line with established procedures. The Council will work with all relevant partners including adult social care, children's services, health and police in order to seek the best outcomes for individuals.

6.2 If a household is placed outside of the district, the Council will ensure that relevant agencies are alerted as soon as possible in order to ensure that vulnerable people are appropriately supported.

6.3 The Council is particularly mindful of our duties regarding the need to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. This includes minimising the disruption to the education of children and young people especially at critical points in time such as leading up to taking GCSE (or their equivalent) examinations.

7. Suitability of out of district placements

7.1 Government guidance sets out the factors that the Council must consider when assessing the suitability of temporary accommodation. Overarching considerations which are particularly pertinent to location include:

Affordability The Council will take into account whether accommodation is affordable to the applicant. This will include consideration of whether they can afford to pay for their temporary accommodation without being deprived of basic essentials such as food, clothing, heating and transport.

North Hertfordshire, in common with many areas across the region, faces a high demand for housing with a resulting shortage of local affordable accommodation in the private sector. Nightly paid accommodation out of district may therefore in some cases be more suitable for an individual household than in-district accommodation.

Distance from North Hertfordshire The Council will aim to secure temporary accommodation as close as possible to the district based on the practicality of sourcing units on any given day. We have established working relationships with a number of accommodation providers who provide accommodation of a reasonable standard, including some who are located in neighbouring districts/boroughs. If an out of district placement is required, we will normally approach one of these providers and will always seek to move the household back to the district at the earliest opportunity.

Distance from last settled accommodation The Council will take this into consideration where there are established links with schools, doctors, social workers and other key services and support. Note that in some instances, placements outside of the district might be closer to where the applicant was previously living.

7.2 In determining the suitability of a placement, the time likely to be spent in that accommodation will also be taken into account. A placement may be suitable for a short period, for example accommodation used to discharge an interim duty pending inquiries, or a placement made on an emergency basis, but may not be suitable for a longer period. Every effort will be made to minimise disruption to support and essential services in particular health services, education and other vital support networks where relevant.

7.3 In addition, in assessing whether an out of area placement would be suitable for a household, the Council will take into consideration the following factors set out in paragraphs 7.4 – 7.8. Households meeting these criteria will be prioritised for temporary accommodation within the district, subject to suitable units being available. It is important to note that this does not mean that such households are guaranteed to receive an offer of accommodation within North Herts. If they are placed out of district however, they will receive priority for a suitable offer of temporary accommodation within the district as soon as is reasonably practicable to do so. Note also that a final assessment will be dependent upon a consideration of all the factors pertinent to suitability including those set out at paragraphs 7.1 – 7.2.

7.4 Households with children at secondary school in the district As part of its duties to safeguard and promote the welfare of children, the Council will aim to minimise disruption to the education of children and young people, particularly at critical points in time such as leading up to taking GCSE exams and other national level qualifications.

7.5 Households requiring medical facilities and other support locally The Council will consider the potential impact on an household if such facilities or support were no longer accessible following an out of area placement. The availability of alternative facilities will be considered.

7.6 Households requiring social services support or a need to maintain links with other essential services in the district Particular consideration will be given to applicants with a mental illness or learning disability who have a particular need to remain in the district and to families with children who are subject to safeguarding arrangements.

7.7 Caring responsibilities Households with a long standing arrangement to provide care and support to another family member in the district and where that family member would be likely to require statutory health and social care support if the support arrangement ceased. Priority for a local placement will be considered where there are no other relatives able to provide this care and no other suitable alternative arrangements are available.

7.8 Disruption to employment Where possible, the Council will aim to place households with a member(s) in permanent and settled employment in temporary accommodation as close as possible to their place of work.

8. Offers of accommodation and right to review

8.1 When making an offer of temporary accommodation, the Council will make it clear in the offer letter why it considers the property to be suitable, taking into account the needs of the applicant (and their household).

8.2 Applicants will be given a reasonable amount of time to consider offers of accommodation outside of the district. This will take into account how familiar the applicant might be with the area offered and the length of time the applicant is likely to be living there.

8.3 Applicants have a right to ask for a statutory review of the suitability of temporary accommodation offered to them under the main housing duty provisions (ie longer term temporary accommodation placements). The right to review applies whether or not an applicant accepts the temporary accommodation. Applicants do not however have the right to ask for a statutory review of the suitability of interim temporary accommodation, but such decisions may be subject to judicial review in the High Court.

Appendix 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

1. Name of activity:	Provision of a Rapid Prevention, Assessment and Resettlement service in North Herts
2. Main purpose of activity:	On-the-day emergency accommodation and intensive support for people sleeping rough and those at imminent risk of sleeping rough
3. List the information, data or evidence used in this assessment:	Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (2025), *A National Plan to End Homelessness*. Available: www.gov.uk Public Health England (2020), *Health matters: rough sleeping*. Available: www.gov.uk Crisis, *Cost of Homelessness*. Available: www.crisis.org.uk Taylor, G., Vale, J., Gay Jackson, B., and Turtle, M. (2025) *Dying Homeless Project 2024*. Museum of Homelessness North Herts Council (2024) *Review of Homelessness in North Hertfordshire* Available: www.north-herts.gov.uk Stonewall (2024) *LGBT In Britain. Home and Communities*. London: Stonewall MHCLG, *Statutory homelessness live tables 2024-25*

4. Assessment				
Characteristics	**Neutral** (x)	**Negative** (x)	**Positive** (x)	Describe the person you are assessing the impact on, including identifying: community member or employee, details of the characteristic if relevant, e.g. mobility problems/particular religion and why and how they might be **negatively or positively** affected. **Negative: What are the risks?** **Positive: What are the benefits?**
Community considerations (i.e. applying across communities or associated with rural living or Human Rights)	☐	☐	x	**Negative** **Positive** Rough sleeping is associated with poor health outcomes, premature mortality, social exclusion and increased demand for NHS, social care and criminal justice services. The estimated cost of one person sleeping rough for 12 months is approximately £20,000. The proposed service will provide rapid interventions to provide a route off the streets, reduce risks associated with exposure, violence and exploitation, and improve access to support and accommodation. This will deliver positive benefits both for individuals and the wider community.
A person living with a disability	☐	☐	x	**Negative** **Positive** Almost two-thirds of households owed a homelessness duty by the Council have a support need whilst over one-third have two or more support needs. These include support needs owing to poor mental health (35%), physical ill health and disability (28%) and learning disability (14%). People

				sleeping rough are significantly more likely to experience mental ill health, learning disabilities, neurodiversity, physical disabilities and long-term health conditions. Around 41% of rough sleepers for instance have long-term physical health problems such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes. The proposed service will provide rapid assessment, access to emergency accommodation, referrals to specialist services and tailored support planning.
A person of a particular race	☐	☐	x	**Negative** **Positive** In common with national data, data for North Herts district shows that a disproportionate number of people from ethnic minority backgrounds require homelessness assistance – making up 18% of those owed a duty whilst comprising 12% of the North Herts population.
A person of a gay, lesbian or bisexual sexual orientation	☐	☐	x	**Negative** **Positive** National evidence points to LGBTQ+ people being at greater risk of homelessness and rough sleeping. District level data suggests a very small number of LGBTQ+ people owed a homeless duty by the Council (3%), although a significant proportion – 20% - of applicants chose not to disclose information about their sexual orientation.
A person of a particular sex, male or female, including issues around pregnancy and maternity	x	☐		**Negative** **Positive** Men comprise the majority of rough sleepers, whilst women experiencing rough sleeping often face heightened risks of violence, exploitation and domestic abuse. The service will provide rapid access to safe accommodation and specialist support pathways, benefitting both men and women and particularly those facing significant vulnerability.
A person of a particular religion or belief	x	☐	☐	**Negative** **Positive**
A person of a particular age	x	☐		**Negative** **Positive**

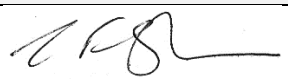
				Young adults experiencing rough sleeping are vulnerable to exploitation and long-term homelessness, whilst older rough sleepers may experience complex physical and mental health needs. Early intervention, assessment and resettlement support are expected to have positive impacts across all age groups.
Transgender	☐	☐	x	**Negative** **Positive** National evidence points to LGBTQ+ people being more at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping, however local data suggests a very small number of LGBTQ+ people owed a homeless duty by the Council (3%), although with a significant non-response rate.

5 Results

	Yes	No	
Were positive impacts identified?	x	☐	The proposal service will deliver significant positive impacts for people sleeping rough or at immediate risk of rough sleeping, offering emergency accommodation and intensive support. These individuals include some of our most vulnerable residents, mostly men but some women and across the age ranges. Positive impacts are also identified for those living with a disability and minority groups, as well as the wider community.
Are some people benefiting more than others? If so explain who and why.	x	☐	The service is particularly targeted at people sleeping rough or at immediate risk of rough sleeping and will therefore disproportionately benefit individuals experiencing severe social exclusion and multiple disadvantage (such as mental or physical ill health, substance abuse support needs, people at risk of abuse or exploitation).
Were negative impacts identified (what actions were taken)	☐	x	No significant negative equality impacts have been identified.

6. Consultation, decisions, and actions

If High or very high range results were identified who was consulted and what recommendations were given?		
n/a		
Describe the decision on this activity		
Continue with implementation of proposed service.		
List all actions identified to address/mitigate negative impact or promote positively		
Action	Responsible person	Completion due date
Regular monitoring of service provision (including as per contractual requirements)	Housing Register and Accommodation Manager	ongoing
When, how and by whom will these actions be monitored?		

Monitoring and reporting in line with contractual arrangements and MHCLG funding requirements.	
7. Signatures	
Assessor (Report Author)	
Name: Tiranan Straughan	Signature** 
Validated by (relevant Senior Manager)	
Name: Martin Lawrence	Signature** M Lawrence
Forward to the Policy & Strategy Team	
Signature** Daisy Harris	
Assessment date: 10/11/26	Review date: 02/06/27

** **Please type your name to allow forms to be sent electronically. Please send to policy@north-herts.gov.uk for review by the team.**

A copy of this form should be forwarded to the corporate policy team and duplicate filed on the council's report system alongside any report proposing a decision on policy or service change.

CABINET
TUESDAY, 24 NOVEMBER 2026

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: Medium Term Financial Strategy 2027-30

REPORT OF: Director - Resources

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Resources

COUNCIL PRIORITY: All Priorities;

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report recommends the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for 2027/28 to 2029/30 to guide and inform the Council's Business Planning Process. The three year period of the MTFS reflects the probable timelines related to Local Government Reorganisation.

The MTFS supports and is supported by the Council Plan. This reflects that the Council can only deliver priorities and projects that it can afford and should prioritise its spending around delivering its priorities.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Cabinet recommend to Council the adoption of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, as attached at Appendix 1.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. Adoption of a Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and communication of its contents will assist in the process of forward planning the use of Council resources and in budget setting for 2027/2028 onwards, culminating in the setting of the Council Tax precept for 2027/28 in February 2027. Alongside the Council Plan, this will support the Council in setting a budget that is affordable and aligned to Council priorities.

3.2. Finance, Audit and Risk Committee support the development of the MTFS through reviewing and commenting on the underlying assumptions and risks.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. The Council needs to have a strategy for setting its budget to ensure that it meets its statutory duty to set a balanced budget over the medium term and ensure that spend is prioritised towards delivering statutory services and its strategic aims (as set out in the Council Plan).

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Consultation will take place as part of the overall budget-setting process. As in previous years, Member workshops will have been held in November to discuss budget proposals and priorities in advance of them being considered by Cabinet.

5.2. The Council undertook a budget survey during summer 2025. The results of this were presented alongside setting the 2026/27 budget. The findings from that survey remain relevant in setting the 2027/28 budget.

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. The ultimate decision on adopting the MTFS is taken by Full Council.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The Council is required to set a balanced budget each year. This can include using reserves if this is affordable over the medium term. The Council therefore sets a MTFS each year to help determine the approach that it will take to setting the detailed budget for the following year.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1 The MTFS is attached as Appendix 1. It details the uncertainties and assumptions used to estimate our future finances. The wording of the strategy can be updated if there is more certainty over the Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) process prior to it being adopted.

8.2 Reserves can be used in a managed way to support the implementation of savings required. But they cannot be used in the medium term without a plan to achieve a balanced budget. The MTFS details a principle that the Council should be a good LGR ancestor and provide any successor Council with a balanced budget.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Finance, Audit and Risk Committee's Terms of Reference include at 10.1.5 (b) "[t]o review and recommend the Medium Term Financial Strategy to Cabinet (including, although not limited to consideration of associated procedures, policies and process)".

9.2 Cabinet's terms of reference include at 5.7.38 the power, by recommendation "to advise the Council in the formulation of those policies within the Council's terms of reference". Council's terms of reference include at 4.4.1(b) "approving or adopting the budget". The MTFS is part of the budget setting process. Paragraph 2.7 of the Council's Financial Regulations (Section 20 of the Constitution) details that "[t]he Medium Term Financial Strategy … require[s] approval by Full Council".

9.3 Councillors are reminded of the requirement, under section 30 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992, to set a balanced budget prior to the commencement of the financial year in question; and also that the Local Government Act 2003 requires the Chief

Finance Officer to report on the robustness of estimates and the adequacy of reserves allowed for in the budget.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Revenue financial implications are covered in Appendix 1.

10.2 The main purpose of the Medium Term Financial Strategy is to consider the revenue funding, income and expenditure for the Council. This includes considering the revenue implications of capital expenditure.

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 key risks within the budget assumptions are referred to in Appendix 1.

11.3 There are financial and reputational risks involved in arriving at a balanced budget. These risks are mitigated through the established corporate business planning process and early involvement of members in the process.

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 MTFS attempts to align resources to the delivery of the Council Plan, which sets the corporate objectives. Through its corporate objectives the Council is seeking to address equality implications in the services it provides. Equalities Impact Assessments will be carried out for relevant efficiency or investment options.

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. All recommendations/actions of the council, and those identified in this report strive for positive impacts on the environment as per the Council’s Sustainability priority. The MTFS supports the delivery of the Council plan which in turn supports the following aims of the Sustainability Strategy:

- Achieve Net Zero by 2030 for the council’s own operations.
- Achieve a Net Zero North Herts district by 2040.
- Ensure all operations and services are resilient to the impacts of climate change.
- Become a district that is resilient to unavoidable impacts of climate change.
- Increase biodiversity in North Herts.

14.2 Positive or negative environmental impacts have not been identified at the time of writing. As specific budget proposals are developed then, where relevant, an Environmental Impact Assessment will be completed.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 The MTFS makes assumptions in relation to pay inflation. As the actual rate of inflation will be subject to national pay bargaining, the actual costs will depend on the results of those negotiations. The budget also makes assumptions around funding for increments.

15.2 The delivery of projects to deliver council objectives depends on having adequate people resources with the requisite skills.

15.3 The development of budget proposals will take up staff time. As they are developed these budget proposals will identify the ongoing impact on staff.

16. APPENDICES

16.1. Appendix 1 - Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2027-30

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Ian Couper	**Director - Resources,**	**ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk, Tel: 01462 474 243**
Natasha Jindal	Governance Consultant	natasha.jindal@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1. None

North Herts Council

Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2027-30

Purpose of the Strategy

This strategy sits alongside the Council Plan. It sets out our financial forecasts over the medium-term and how we will manage the funding that we think we will have available, to deliver as much as we can, in line with our priorities.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Devolution

At the time of writing this strategy, the Hertfordshire LGR programme is subject to a review by Government. The indication is that LGR in Hertfordshire will happen (i.e. vesting day) in April 2029.

When/ if LGR takes place, it would see North Herts Council replaced by one or more Unitary Councils (combining District and County Council services) over a wider geographical area. The initial decision was that North Herts would be split across two Unitary Councils. That decision on geography may change as part of the review process.

Government have made various announcements about decentralisation of power/ devolution. The assumption was that some of this devolution would happen via a strategic authority that would sit above the Hertfordshire Unitary Councils. That strategic authority would also deliver some of the services currently provided by the existing Councils.

This MTFS is prepared on the following basis:

- A medium-term planning horizon of 3 years (up to the end of 2029/30) is used.
- It incorporates the current North Herts Council services and geographic footprint.

If LGR progresses then we have a plan that could cover the first year of the new Unitary Council(s), and provides baseline data to be incorporated with other the other Councils to set a year 1 budget. The new Unitary Council(s) can formulate their own assumptions on how to project that forward to later years.

If the LGR programme does not progress, then it provides time to plan to balance the Council's budget and consider the decisions that will need to be made.

The current Council Plan period is for 2024-28. For the period of overlap between the Council Plan and the MTFS, the intention is that the two documents are aligned.

Delivering Vision and Priorities

The Council's vision and priorities are set out in detail in the Council Plan. This results in a vision that is "working with you for a fairer, greener North Herts.

To support that that, the Council has the following priorities: Thriving Communities, Accessible Services, Responsible Growth and Sustainability.

Most of the money that the Council spends is on delivering statutory services (about two thirds of net spend). The focus will be on delivering those services in line with the priorities. Even as the Council's funding has reduced, the aim has been to maintain the ability to offer discretionary services that are linked to the priorities.

The forecasts include a likely need to reduce costs in the future. This would mean that difficult decisions will need to be taken. If faced with that choice, those decisions will be taken in line with our priorities. That would take into account what residents have said in the budget survey.

The Council Plan includes ambitions for North Herts. Some of the ideas may be dependent on identifying funding or developing a sustainable business case.

Future funding

The results of the new fair funding formula were incorporated into the financial settlement for 2026/27. That financial settlement also provided indicative funding levels for a further two years, up to 2028/29. Whilst these amounts are not guaranteed, they are the best basis on which to forecast future funding.

It is assumed that 2029/30 will see an inflationary uplift on the 2028/29 amounts. If the inputs into the fair funding formula change, then that could lead to a bigger shift, either positive or negative. As the formula is allocating an overall pot of funding, even if the North Herts data did not change significantly, data changes from other Councils could still impact North Herts funding.

The fair funding formula outcome, combined with a reduction in pension payments, meant that the Council was in a better position than expected when setting the 2026/27 budget.

Income raised from Council Tax is incorporated in to how fair funding has been calculated. However this is based on assumed Council Tax, and the Council gains if actual income is higher and loses out if it is lower. The cap on increases to the rate of Council Tax is expected to be retained at 3%. Council Tax income is also affected by growth in properties in the district, the impact of Council Tax reduction scheme (CTRS) and collection rate. The following assumptions are made in relation to Council Tax:

- The rate of Council Tax each year will be increased by just below the maximum allowed without the need for a local referendum, expected to be 3% per year. So the annual increase applied is expected to be 2.99%.
- The tax base for 2027/28 is currently based on the annual tax base calculation undertaken in October 2026, which was 52,425 band D equivalent properties (an increase of 0.72% on the 2026/27 budget).
- A tax base growth rate of 0.5% is assumed for subsequent years. This is intended to be a net growth rate, to reflect increases in costs from population/ household growth (e.g. waste collection).
- There will be no changes to the working age CTRS, except inflationary increases to the bands with the intention of maintain a similar level of eligibility.
- The assumed collection rate will be retained at 99%. There is some risk in this as new legislation means that Council Tax should be collected over 12 months by default. This could reduce the number of households paying over 10 months, which gives less scope to catch up if a payment is missed. That may then reduce the collection rate.

Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR) is where producers have to pay for the cost of collection and disposal of packaging material. The funding is then passed on to Councils. This means that the cost of packaging materials should be borne by the end customers of those goods (through slightly higher prices) rather than the general Council taxpayer. In 2025/26, Council's received a guaranteed amount, and North Herts received more than that guaranteed level. The amount that the Council has been told it can expect in 2026/27 is £1.43 million, but this no longer guaranteed. EPR funding is not within the scope of fair funding. The aim of EPR is to encourage reductions in packaging waste so over time the payments the Council receives should slowly decrease. Reductions in packaging waste that needs to be collected will not reduce our costs as collection costs are priced based on number of households, not volumes collected. It is possible that net costs could go up as some of the recyclable material that we collect generate an income, which is linked to volumes. It is assumed that the net impact will be equivalent to a 20% reduction in EPR funding per year.

Our previous funding forecasts

The current year (2026/27) budget includes the following funding forecasts for future years:

Funding by source by year, amounts in £m	**2027/28**	**2028/29**
Council Tax	14.71	15.23
Government Grant and retained Business Rates	6.68	6.61
Extended Producer Responsibility	1.43	1.14
Council Tax Support to Parishes	(0.04)	(0.04)
Total	**22.78**	**22.94**

Revising our funding forecasts

In addition to the assumptions in previous paragraphs, the following are also assumed:

- Continue to budget for Business Rates at the baseline level, i.e. do not assume any growth or decline. There is some risk in this. The baseline level was reset as part of fair funding which removed any previous growth. For 2026/27 there was a 0% safety net (i.e. Government would protect any losses) but this is changed to 97% in 2027/28 and then back to the previous 92.5% in 2028/29.
- Retained business rates to grow by inflation at 3% for 2029/30. This may be an over-estimate but is consistent with pay inflation forecasts (see later) and reflects the uncertainty over the ongoing impact of fuel and energy price inflation.
- Revenue Support Grant reflects an overall increase of 3% in funding for 2029/30. This (as in previous years) results in a decrease in this specific element due to the impact the tax base growth included in the Council Tax forecasts. This is because the funding formula assumes a baseline level of increase in tax base growth. Exceptional levels of tax base growth would result in net additional funding.
- For now, assume that Council Tax support to parishes continues, although a choice could be taken to provide notice that this will cease.

Funding by source by year, amounts in £m	**2027/28**	**2028/29**	**2029/30**
Council Tax	14.742	15.258	15.793
Retained business rates and general government grant	7.670	7.640	7.571
Extended Producer Responsibility	1.430	1.144	0.915
Council Support to Parishes	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.039)
Total	**23.803**	**24.003**	**24.240**

Our General Fund reserves

The latest forecast (Quarter 1 Revenue Monitoring report) is that the General Fund balance as at 31st March 2027 will be £17.30 million. That involves using £0.1 million of our General Fund during 2026/27 to support revenue spend, alongside £3.64 million of other reserves (that includes revenue funding for capital). The current expectation is that the use of the surplus business rates reserve will bring that down to the required level to manage future business rate funding payments and risks, so there would be no additional surplus available.

The Council must have a certain level of reserves when setting its budget. This is to provide protection against known and unknown risks. This includes us being able to react to changes in demand and any emergencies that may arise. The allowance for known risks is based on estimating the monetary impact of an event happening and applying a percentage to this, based on the likelihood of it happening (high, medium or low). Our allowance for unknown risks is based on 5% of net expenditure and 3% of budgeted

income (excluding Housing Benefit). For 2026/27 this gave a minimum balance of £3.5m. It is assumed that the required level for the period of this MTFS will be up to £4 million.

There is good headroom between the current and minimum level of reserves.

Revenue and Capital spend

Revenue is what is spent on day-to-day activities. It includes staffing and payments to suppliers to deliver services. It also includes income from fees and charges where the user pays for some or all of the cost of the service. This strategy is mainly focused on revenue spend.

Capital is what is spent on the buying, creating and maintaining our assets. Assets are things that can be used for more than one year, and include land, buildings and vehicles.

Most of the Council's funding is revenue and can be used for either revenue or capital spend.

Where the Council sells surplus assets then that results in a capital receipt which can only be used to fund new capital spend. In the Q1 capital monitoring report for 2026/27, the forecast for capital receipts was reduced to zero. This reflects the current priorities for the Estates team and current expectations over land prices for residential development. The Council also sometimes get capital grants, that can only be used for capital spend.

There are revenue costs that are linked to net capital spend (including netting off capital receipts and external capital funding). The Council has moved to a position where there is a need to borrow to fund the capital programme, as all the capital reserves have been used. This is a normal position for Councils to be in, and there are provisions that allow us to borrow to fund capital spend. The Council cannot borrow money to fund revenue spend. When the Treasury Strategy is set as part of the 2027/28 budget it will need to determine whether to use internal or external borrowing. It is likely that it will be possible (and desirable) to continue with the current approach of borrowing internally. This means that the Council uses the cash that it holds to fund capital spend. The costs of capital spend then come from the lost interest that otherwise would have been earned from investing that cash and the need to charge a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). In essence, the MRP spreads the cost of a capital asset over its expected useful life. For the purposes of this MTFS, it is assumed that the only change to treasury and MRP costs (compared to those when the 2026/27 budget was set) will be from the reduction in forecast capital receipts. This is based on there being no defined proposals for significant increases in capital spend. This will be reviewed as part of the detailed work in setting the 2027/28 budget. This adjustment is estimated at 5% of the £3 million reduction in capital receipts = £150k.

Revenue budget forecasts for 2027/28 onwards

The revenue budget that was set by Council in February 2026 included the forecasts below for net spend in 2027/28 onwards.

Amounts in £m	**2027/28**	**2028/29**
Forecast spend	27.44	23.73

As part of setting the 2027/28 budget, revenue forecasts will be fully reviewed and will be extended to cover 2029/30. But as part of updating this strategy the following assumptions are considered/ updated.

Budget monitoring updates

Since the budget was set in February 2026, there have been budget monitoring reports for Q3 2025/26, end of year 2025/26 and Q1 2026/27. These reports identified the following ongoing budget impacts:

Amounts in £m	**Estimated ongoing impact (excluding carry-forwards)**
Q3 2025/26 report	(0.267)*
End of year 2025/26 report	0.032*
Q1 2026/27 report	0.034
Total impact	**(0.201)**

** The values of these can be different to what was included in the relevant revenue monitoring report as they reflected the 2026/27 impact and this is the 2027/28 impact.*

The Q1 2026/27 report also identified £0.30 million of carry-forwards from 2026/27 to 2027/28, so the forecast General Fund position would be reduced by this amount to reflect the additional spend that will now be incurred in 2027/28. However overall this does not substantially affect medium term projections.

Inflation and cost of living impacts

In November, the Bank of England Monetary Policy Committee increased the UK interest rate to 4%. This increase reflected the pressure from fuel and energy prices on UK inflation. The decision noted that inflation had risen to 3.5% and an expectation that it could rise even further to about 5% by mid-2027. It is then expected that inflation will drop back down towards the 2% target.

Pay inflation and pay competitiveness

The pay claim for 2026/27 was agreed at 3.3%. The NJC Trade Unions have not yet submitted a pay claim for 2027/28. The current MTFS forecasts are based on 3% pay inflation for 2027/28 and then 2% per year thereafter. It is proposed that this assumption is changed to 3% for each of the 3 years: The reasons for this are:

- The peak in UK inflation in 2027 could be over 5%. Pay awards will need to balance inflation over time, but should also reflect overall cumulative inflation.
- Increases in the National Living Wage are likely to create pressure on the Council's pay levels. This will have the greatest impact on those at the bottom of the pay scales, but there is also a need to maintain pay differentials.
- There have been periods of below inflation pay rises in Local Government, which the Unions will seek to try and address.
- It is consistent with what other Hertfordshire Councils are assuming. The is relevant in the LGR context.

Contracted services inflation

Our contracts have a mix of inflation increases built into them. Some of our larger contracts use a basket of inflation indicators. Others will just be linked to general inflation. It is proposed that 3.7% inflation is assumed for 2027/28 (forecast for 2026 Q4), then 3% for 28/29 and then 2% thereafter. For those contracts that have more specific inflationary measures, it is assumed that over time these will be strongly aligned to general inflation. There is a short-term risk from those contracts that have exposure to fuel and energy prices.

Increases in fees and charges, and impact on demand/ ability to pay

It has previously been decided that parking charges should be modelled on assuming a 2% increase each year. That is not a target increase, and actual increases will need to consider managing demand, cost of provision, encouraging modal shift away from private car use and supporting the vitality of town centres. This assumption of a 2% increase will be retained. The work on annual uplifts has now been brought forward so that they will be applied from April each year.

Garden waste went back to being an annual charge from April 2025 onwards. This was set at £57 for 2026/27. For this purpose of this strategy, it is assumed that it will increase in line with contract inflation (i.e. 3.7% for 2027/28, 3% for 2028/29 and then 2% thereafter). The decision on the charge will be taken by Cabinet. It is assumed that there will continue to be a concessionary discount for those that are less able to pay. It is likely that actual charges would be rounded to the nearest pound, but this does not make much difference over the MTFS period (i.e. rounded to the nearest pound the modelled increases would be £59 in 2027/28, £61 in 2028/29 and then £62 in 2029/30, versus unrounded increases of £59.11, £60.88 and £62.09).

There has been a drop in the number of trade waste and recycling customers, but projected income is still just about in line with budget. Therefore, it is currently assumed that the overall market can bear an increase in costs in line with inflation. This may be from selling additional recycling services. This will be reviewed prior to April each year by reviewing market conditions, and actual increases may be higher or lower.

Where fees and charges are set by regulation (e.g. planning fees) then the Council will set charges in line with those regulations. The assumption is that any ancillary charges will be increased in line with increases in general fees and charges.

All other fees and charges provide a relatively low amount of income. The target is that these fees and charges should recover the full cost of provision. Costs of provision are generally likely to increase with pay inflation. Therefore, the assumption will be that prices should increase in line with pay inflation estimates.

The current assumption is that increases at these levels would not affect demand. For most of our services payment is made in advance of receiving the service, so this would not result in an increase in levels of overdue debt.

Planning income

There are expected to be large new developments in the District. The precise timing of these developments is not known, and may be affected by the impacts of continuing higher interest rates.

As these sites go through the planning process, they will generate significant planning income. Some of the capacity to deliver these has already been included in previous staffing growth bids. There will also be additional internal and external resource required. Where possible, the cost of short term external resources, and to a limited extent the internal resources, will be met through Planning Performance Agreements. However, these are voluntary agreements and cannot be required. The forecast cost of longer-term internal resources is forecast to be less than the additional income generated.

The 2027/28 detailed budget work (i.e. not part of this MTFS) will include a prudent estimate of additional planning income over the next 3 years. This will reflect that the income is only earned when the application is determined, and not when we initially receive the fee income. If there are over-achievements in early years, these will be put into a central reserve to enable the smoothing of any shortfalls in later years. When prudent, any balance in the reserve will be released back to the General Fund. The reserve will not be used to directly fund additional planning expenditure. There will be a need for additional resource in the medium-term, but this will be covered through the normal budget process.

Capacity to deliver our priorities

The Council Plan sets out the vision and priorities for 2024-28. The Council Plan will continue to be supported by the more detailed Council Delivery Plan.

The projects included in the Council Delivery Plan continue to be subject to prioritisation. However, there are still risks around delivery, particularly in relation to finances and Officer capacity. This is part of the reason why the Council Delivery Plan is reviewed on a quarterly basis.

The table below details those projects that are in the current Council Delivery Plan (as reported to Cabinet in September 2026). The table shows the financial implications of those projects in 2027/28 onwards:

Project	Resources
Churchgate area regeneration	The 2026/27 budget has been adjusted (via a Council decision) to provide resources to progress with the procurement of a delivery partner. The 2027/28 budget will identify the potential spend required to progress through to a deliverable scheme (e.g. design costs, planning costs, project management costs). Some of these costs may be able to be treated as capital but will be shown as revenue expenditure initially. These revenue costs will be one-off can be afforded from General Fund reserves. Where possible any surplus income from lettings will also be used. Ultimately it is expected that a significant capital budget will be required, but not yet at a stage where this can be quantified.
Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme- Leisure Centres	A capital budget has been agreed and is monitored regularly. The majority of the works have been completed (fully complete at Royston). The remaining works are subject to property agreements related to power supplies running across third party land. There is a risk that delays will lead to a further increased capital budget requirement.
Decarbonisation of Council Buildings Phase 2	Capital budget approved. The impact on ongoing running costs will be refined throughout the project. Project Management from Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager.
Local Plan Review	Assumed that this will be delivered from existing resources, including use of specific reserves. Project Management from the Strategic Planning Team.
Digital Transformation	Staffing resource is coming from Customer Services and IT. The projects may deliver some net savings, alongside process improvements for customers and staff. As the amount is uncertain these are not budgeted for at this stage.
Pay on exit parking	Expected to be completed in 2026/27.
Oughtonhead Weir	Expected to be completed in 2026/27.
/Residential/ Public EV charging	Expected to be completed in 2026/27.
Museum Collection Facility	There is a capital budget in place. The scope of the works is being reviewed to deliver it within the available budget. Project Management is provided by the Culture and Facilities Service Manager.
Royston Learner Pool	There is a capital budget in place. Project work so far is showing that the works are deliverable within the budget. Project Management is provided by the Leisure and Active Communities Team. The delivery route selected has reduced some of the project management pressure.
Achieving net zero Carbon emissions	Our leisure centres make up around 45% of our scope 1-3 emissions. The Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme therefore supports significant progress towards net zero. Within the new waste contract, all vehicles under 7.5 tonnes will be electric. There is some budget provision for using HVO fuel in the larger waste vehicles, although this is currently insufficient. The 2027/28 budget will consider whether to increase the budget, and therefore the proportion of HVO use that can be afforded. The phase 2 decarbonisation budget includes the Town Hall and Museum, North Herts Learner Pool and District Council Offices. There are not currently any other specific capital budgets allocated for carbon improvements. There is also no budget allocated for off-setting costs.

Local Government Reorganisation	This has been very resource intensive. The pause by Government means that there is uncertainty as to the future resources required. Funding has been approved (from General Fund reserves) for the County-wide programme, additional posts in IT and HR and additional training. If the LGR process recommences then it is expected that further resource will be required (above the £2 million allocated). This is because the refinement of expected costs (before the pause) was highlighting more resource being needed, and the lengthening of the overall programme (due to the pause). The lengthening of the programme could allow the Councils to be in a better position pre-vesting day, and therefore provide better outcomes for the new Unitary Councils. This will need to be kept under review, and can be met from General Fund reserves (as will be one-off rather than ongoing spend).

Projects are generally managed by relevant Officers, in addition to their core role. This creates the potential for delays.

There is not currently any resource allocated for any new projects that are not listed above.

Future spend forecasts and resultant budget gap

Bringing together the above assumptions gives the following spend forecasts over the next 3 years. This is then compared with the estimated funding for each year to give a forecast funding gap.

Amounts in £m	**2027/28**	**2028/29**	**2029/30**
Forecast spend from 2026/27 budget	27.444	23.732	24.687
Budget monitoring impacts	(0.201)	(0.220)	(0.220)
Changes in inflation and other assumptions	0.152	0.019	0.019
Increased revenue cost of capital	0.150	0.150	0.150
Revised forecast spend	**27.545**	**23.681**	**24.636**
Forecast funding	23.803	24.003	24.240
Forecast budget gap	**3.742**	**(0.322)**	**0.396**

Addressing our funding gap

The table above estimates that the Council will have a funding gap of around £0.4 million by 2029/30. If the Council was continuing in its current form, then it might be possible to use General Fund reserves to balance the budget over a longer period, but with the potential LGR timeline it is recommend that the Council should seek to identify how a balanced budget would be achieved by 2029/30. This would mean that the Council is acting as a good ancestor to the future Unitary Council(s). In the event of LGR happening on the currently assumed timescales this would mean that any savings would need to be identified as part of the 2027/28 or 2028/29 budget process. As this Council would not be setting a budget for 2029/30. It is likely that most of those savings will be identified for 2028/29 (i.e. the budget set in February 2028), as that gives greater certainty over what is happening with LGR and also the other forecasting assumptions. However it is important that the budget agreed for 2027/28 (i.e. the budget set in February 2027) does not make the ongoing budget position worse.

What do we mean by savings?

It is likely that there will be a need to identify savings to balance the budget. Savings could mean any of the following:

- Being able to deliver our existing services at a lower cost. The use of technology and automation may enable to do this in some areas. But generally, the savings that we have delivered across a number of years have been through efficiencies, meaning that there are fewer opportunities left.
- Being able to generate additional income from services that we are able to charge for, less any costs in providing that additional level of service.
- Being able to generate income from commercial activities. The opportunities to do this are limited by economic conditions and government policy. We also need to make sure that these activities are in line with our priorities.
- As capital expenditure comes with a revenue cost, reviewing our capital programme to ensure it reflects priorities and is deliverable.
- Reducing the level of services that we provide, or no longer providing services that we are not required to provide. Whilst we would always want to avoid this, we have to consider the overall sustainability of our Council.

During Summer 2026, residents were asked to help 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 and greenspaces; 3) Street cleaning; 4) Community safety and 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 results will be used when considering any future savings options.

This page is intentionally left blank

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Document is Restricted

This page is intentionally left blank