NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

3 July 2026

Our Ref Council 16 July 2026
Contact. Committee Services
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To: The Chair and Members of North Hertfordshire District Council

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE COUNCIL

to be held in the

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

on

THURSDAY, 16TH JULY, 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

To take as read and approve as a true record the minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 21 May 2026.

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.

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 19 - 20

To receive petitions, comments and questions from the public.

6. ITEMS REFERRED FROM OTHER COMMITTEES 21 - 38

To consider items referred from other Committees:

6A) Cabinet – Revenue Budget Outturn 2025/26 – **to be considered as a referral only.**

6B) Cabinet – Treasury Management End of Year Review 2025/26 – **to be considered as a referral only.**

6C) Cabinet – Year End Report of Risk Management Governance – **to be considered as a referral only.**

6D) Finance, Audit and Risk Committee – Finance, Audit and Risk Annual Report – **to be considered with Agenda Item 7.**

6E) Overview and Scrutiny Committee – Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025/26 – **to be considered with Agenda Item 8.**

6F) Cabinet – Churchgate Regeneration Project Update & Next Steps – Part 2 – **to be considered with Agenda Item 11.**

6G) Cabinet – Churchgate Regeneration Project Update & Next Steps – Part 1 – **to be considered with Agenda Item 12.**

7. FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 39 - 50

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – RESOURCES

The Annual Report (attached at Appendix A) details the work undertaken by the Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee over the last year (25/26) and describes the planned work for the coming year (26/27).

8.	**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2025/26** REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – GOVERNANCE To consider the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the 2025/2026 Civic Year.	51 - 64
9.	**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 Paragraphs 3 and 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).	
10.	**PART 2 MINUTES - 21 MAY 2026** To take as read and approve as a true record the Part 2 minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on the 21 May 2026.	65 - 68
11.	**CHURCHGATE REGENERATION PROJECT UPDATE & NEXT STEPS - PART 2** REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – ENTERPRISE Since the previous update to Members, further work has been undertaken to assess the viability, deliverability and regeneration potential of the Churchgate site. This report provides an update on that work and seeks approval for the additional funding required to support the next phase of the project.	69 - 72
12.	**CHURCHGATE REGENERATION PROJECT UPDATE & NEXT STEPS - PART 1** REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR – ENTERPRISE Since the previous update to Members, further work has been undertaken to assess the viability, deliverability and regeneration potential of the Churchgate site. This report provides an update on that work and seeks approval for the additional funding required to support the next phase of the project.	73 - 84
13.	**QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS** To consider any questions submitted by Members of the Council, in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.11 (b).	
14.	**NOTICE OF MOTIONS** To consider any motions, due notice of which have been given in accordance with Standing Order 4.8.12.	

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

MINUTES

Meeting of the Council held in the Council Chamber - District Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth, SG6 3JF on Thursday, 21st May, 2026 at 7.30 pm

PRESENT: *Councillors: Keith Hoskins MBE (Chair), Sean Prendergast (Vice-Chair), Sadie Billing, Tina Bhartwas, Ian Albert, Daniel Allen, Amy Allen, David Barnard, Matt Barnes, Ruth Brown, Cathy Brownjohn, Val Bryant, Rhona Cameron, David Chalmers, Jon Clayden, Sam Collins, Mick Debenham, Elizabeth Dennis, Emma Fernandes, Dominic Griffiths, Steve Jarvis, Tim Johnson, Chris Lucas, Sarah Lucas, Ian Mantle, Nigel Mason, Bryony May, Caroline McDonnell, Ralph Muncer, Michael Muir, Lisa Nash, Sean Nolan, Steven Patmore, Louise Peace, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Martin Prescott, Emma Rowe, Claire Strong, Tamsin Thomas, Tom Tyson, Paul Ward, Laura Williams, Alistair Willoughby, Stewart Willoughby, Claire Winchester, Dave Winstanley, Donna Wright and Daniel Wright-Mason.*

IN ATTENDANCE: *Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Jo Dufficy (Director - Customers), Robert Filby (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Jamie Graham (Democratic Services Apprentice), Susan Le Dain (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager), Anthony Roche (Chief Executive) and Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager).*

ALSO PRESENT: *At the commencement of the meeting there were 2 members of the public.*

1 ELECTION OF THE CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2026/27

Audio recording – 3 minutes 15 seconds

Councillor Keith Hoskins proposed Councillor Emma Rowe to be Chair for Agenda Item 1, and this was seconded by Councillor Sadie Billing and, it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Emma Rowe was elected as Chair for Agenda Item 1 of the Council meeting.

Councillor Ruth Brown nominated Councillor Keith Hoskins for Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2026-27, and this was seconded by Councillor David Chalmers.

Councillor Val Bryant nominated Councillor Sadie Billing for Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2026-27, and this was seconded by Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Laura Williams

The following points were made as part of the debate:

- There was little point in having a debate as Members were unlikely to change their minds based on the opinions expressed.
- The Chair of the Council was one of the primary civic roles allocated each year, and the convention of the 12-month term had not been broken since the COVID-19 pandemic.
- This debate was about trying to understand why they were having a contest based on who had been put forward.
- Councillor Sadie Billing had been a diligent Vice-Chair of the Council and had two years of experience being the Chair of Letchworth Community Forum.
- It was puzzling why the established convention was not being followed.
- While Councillor Keith Hoskins had been a fantastic and well-liked Chair, this was a political manoeuvre aimed at blocking the normal convention.
- There were undertones of sexism in the motion to re-elect the Chair for another year who had not served a probationary year like the Vice-Chair, and this act was cynical and shameful.

Having been proposed and seconded, the outcome of the recorded vote to elect Councillor Sadie Billing as Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2026-27 was:

VOTE TOTALS:

YES	:	22
ABSTAIN	:	0
NO	:	0
TOTAL	:	22

THE INDIVIDUAL RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Cllr Keith Hoskins	
Cllr Ian Albert	YES
Cllr Amy Allen	YES
Cllr Daniel Allen	YES
Cllr David Barnard	
Cllr Matt Barnes	
Cllr Tina Bhartwas	
Cllr Sadie Billing	YES
Cllr Ruth Brown	
Cllr Cathy Brownjohn	YES
Cllr Val Bryant	YES
Cllr Rhona Cameron	YES
Cllr David Chalmers	
Cllr Jon Clayden	
Cllr Sam Collins	
Cllr Mick Debenham	YES
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis	YES
Cllr Emma Fernandes	YES
Cllr Dominic Griffiths	
Cllr Sarah Lucas	YES
Cllr Steve Jarvis	
Cllr Tim Johnson	
Cllr Chris Lucas	
Cllr Ian Mantle	YES
Cllr Nigel Mason	YES
Cllr Bryony May	
Cllr Caroline McDonnell	
Cllr Michael Muir	

Cllr Ralph Muncer	
Cllr Lisa Nash	
Cllr Sean Nolan	YES
Cllr Steven Patmore	
Cllr Louise Peace	
Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham	YES
Cllr Sean Prendergast	
Cllr Martin Prescott	
Cllr Emma Rowe	
Cllr Claire Strong	
Cllr Tamsin Thomas	YES
Cllr Tom Tyson	
Cllr Paul Ward	
Cllr Laura Williams	YES
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	YES
Cllr Stewart Willoughby	YES
Cllr Claire Winchester	
Cllr Dave Winstanley	YES
Cllr Donna Wright	YES
Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason	YES

Having been proposed and seconded, the outcome of the recorded vote to elect Councillor Keith Hoskins as Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2026-27 was:

VOTE TOTALS:

YES	:	24
ABSTAIN	:	0
NO	:	0
TOTAL	:	24

THE INDIVIDUAL RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Cllr Keith Hoskins	YES
Cllr Ian Albert	
Cllr Amy Allen	
Cllr Daniel Allen	
Cllr David Barnard	YES
Cllr Matt Barnes	YES
Cllr Tina Bhartwas	YES
Cllr Sadie Billing	
Cllr Ruth Brown	YES
Cllr Cathy Brownjohn	
Cllr Val Bryant	
Cllr Rhona Cameron	
Cllr David Chalmers	YES
Cllr Jon Clayden	YES
Cllr Sam Collins	YES
Cllr Mick Debenham	
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis	
Cllr Emma Fernandes	
Cllr Dominic Griffiths	YES
Cllr Sarah Lucas	
Cllr Steve Jarvis	YES
Cllr Tim Johnson	YES
Cllr Chris Lucas	YES
Cllr Ian Mantle	
Cllr Nigel Mason	

Cllr Bryony May	YES
Cllr Caroline McDonnell	YES
Cllr Michael Muir	YES
Cllr Ralph Muncer	YES
Cllr Lisa Nash	YES
Cllr Sean Nolan	
Cllr Steven Patmore	YES
Cllr Louise Peace	YES
Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham	
Cllr Sean Prendergast	YES
Cllr Martin Prescott	YES
Cllr Emma Rowe	
Cllr Claire Strong	
Cllr Tamsin Thomas	
Cllr Tom Tyson	YES
Cllr Paul Ward	YES
Cllr Laura Williams	
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	
Cllr Stewart Willoughby	
Cllr Claire Winchester	YES
Cllr Dave Winstanley	
Cllr Donna Wright	
Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason	

RESOLVED: That Councillor Keith Hoskins was elected as Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2026-27.

Councillor Hoskins took the Chair then read and signed the Statutory Declaration of Acceptance of Office and took possession of the Chain of Office. Councillor Hoskins thanked the Council for his election as Chair and advised that his Consort for the year would be Cherry Lincoln.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 17 minutes 20 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Clare Billing, Ruth Clifton and Joe Graziano.

3 ELECTION OF THE VICE-CHAIR OF THE COUNCIL FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2026/27

Audio recording – 17 minutes 33 seconds

Councillor Ruth Brown nominated Councillor Sean Prendergast for Vice-Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2026-27, and this was seconded by Councillor David Chalmers.

Councillor Val Bryant nominated Councillor Sadie Billing for Vice-Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2026-27, and this was seconded by Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham.

Having been proposed and seconded, the outcome of the recorded vote to elect Councillor Sadie Billing as Vice-Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2026-27 was:

VOTE TOTALS:

YES	:	22
ABSTAIN	:	0
NO	:	0
TOTAL	:	22

THE INDIVIDUAL RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Cllr Keith Hoskins	
Cllr Ian Albert	YES
Cllr Amy Allen	YES
Cllr Daniel Allen	YES
Cllr David Barnard	
Cllr Matt Barnes	
Cllr Tina Bhartwas	
Cllr Sadie Billing	YES
Cllr Ruth Brown	
Cllr Cathy Brownjohn	YES
Cllr Val Bryant	YES
Cllr Rhona Cameron	YES
Cllr David Chalmers	
Cllr Jon Clayden	
Cllr Sam Collins	
Cllr Mick Debenham	YES
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis	YES
Cllr Emma Fernandes	YES
Cllr Dominic Griffiths	
Cllr Sarah Lucas	YES
Cllr Steve Jarvis	
Cllr Tim Johnson	
Cllr Chris Lucas	
Cllr Ian Mantle	YES
Cllr Nigel Mason	YES
Cllr Bryony May	
Cllr Caroline McDonnell	
Cllr Michael Muir	
Cllr Ralph Muncer	
Cllr Lisa Nash	
Cllr Sean Nolan	YES
Cllr Steven Patmore	
Cllr Louise Peace	
Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham	YES
Cllr Sean Prendergast	
Cllr Martin Prescott	
Cllr Emma Rowe	
Cllr Claire Strong	
Cllr Tamsin Thomas	YES
Cllr Tom Tyson	
Cllr Paul Ward	
Cllr Laura Williams	YES
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	YES
Cllr Stewart Willoughby	YES
Cllr Claire Winchester	
Cllr Dave Winstanley	YES
Cllr Donna Wright	YES
Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason	YES

Having been proposed and seconded, the outcome of the recorded vote to elect Councillor Sean Prendergast as Vice-Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2026-27 was:

VOTE TOTALS:

YES	:	24
ABSTAIN	:	0
NO	:	0
TOTAL	:	24

THE INDIVIDUAL RESULTS WERE AS FOLLOWS:

Cllr Keith Hoskins	YES
Cllr Ian Albert	
Cllr Amy Allen	
Cllr Daniel Allen	
Cllr David Barnard	YES
Cllr Matt Barnes	YES
Cllr Tina Bhartwas	YES
Cllr Sadie Billing	
Cllr Ruth Brown	YES
Cllr Cathy Brownjohn	
Cllr Val Bryant	
Cllr Rhona Cameron	
Cllr David Chalmers	YES
Cllr Jon Clayden	YES
Cllr Sam Collins	YES
Cllr Mick Debenham	
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis	
Cllr Emma Fernandes	
Cllr Dominic Griffiths	YES
Cllr Sarah Lucas	
Cllr Steve Jarvis	YES
Cllr Tim Johnson	YES
Cllr Chris Lucas	YES
Cllr Ian Mantle	
Cllr Nigel Mason	
Cllr Bryony May	YES
Cllr Caroline McDonnell	YES
Cllr Michael Muir	YES
Cllr Ralph Muncer	YES
Cllr Lisa Nash	YES
Cllr Sean Nolan	
Cllr Steven Patmore	YES
Cllr Louise Peace	YES
Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham	
Cllr Sean Prendergast	YES
Cllr Martin Prescott	YES
Cllr Emma Rowe	
Cllr Claire Strong	
Cllr Tamsin Thomas	
Cllr Tom Tyson	YES
Cllr Paul Ward	YES
Cllr Laura Williams	
Cllr Alistair Willoughby	
Cllr Stewart Willoughby	
Cllr Claire Winchester	YES
Cllr Dave Winstanley	
Cllr Donna Wright	
Cllr Daniel Wright-Mason	

RESOLVED: That Councillor Sean Prendergast was elected as Vice-Chair of the Council for the Civic Year 2026/27.

Councillor Prendergast then read and signed the Statutory Declaration of Acceptance of Office and took possession of the Chain of Office. Councillor Prendergast thanked the Council for his election as Vice-Chair and advised that his Consort for the year would be Joanne Collins.

4 MINUTES - 23 APRIL 2026

Audio Recording – 24 minutes 1 second

Councillor Keith Hoskins, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ruth Brown seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 23 April 2026 were approved as a true record of the proceedings and signed by the Chair.

5 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 24 minutes 50 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 that the normal procedure rules in respect of debate and times to speak will apply.

(5) The Chair advised that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting. A comfort break would be held at an appropriate time, should proceedings continue at length.

(6) The Chair reminded Members about the requirements to update their Register of Interests if a change in personal circumstances had occurred.

(7) The Chair thanked Faith Churchill, the Chair’s Secretary, and announced that a bouquet would be sent in recognition of her hard work and support over the past year.

(8) The Chair reminded Members to respond to the survey circulated to all Members following Member Development Week and advised that Committee Services would contact Members who been unable to attend compulsory or required training.

(9) The Chair encouraged Members to add their favourite places in North Herts to the map outside the Council Chamber as part of the ‘Love North Herts’ campaign.

6 NOTING THE APPOINTMENT OF THE DEPUTY LEADER OF THE COUNCIL AND MEMBERS OF THE CABINET FOR 2026/27 (INCLUDING SPECIAL INTEREST MEMBER CHAMPIONS)

Audio recording – 28 minutes 18 seconds

The Chair advised that the final version of Appendix 1 to the report had been provided in the supplementary document pack entitled ‘Supplementary Documents – Final’.

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council, Councillor Val Bryant, to move the report entitled ‘Noting the Appointment of the Deputy Leader of the Council and Members of the Cabinet for 2026/27 (Including Special Interest Member Champions)’.

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

RESOLVED:

(1) That the appointment of the Deputy Leader of the Council for the Civic Year 2026/27 was noted as Councillor Sean Nolan.

(2) That the Members appointed as Executive Members of the Cabinet for 2026/27 and the areas for which they will be responsible, as detailed in Appendix 1, published as a supplement, was noted.

(3) That the Special Interest Member Champions for 2026/27, their purpose and role, as detailed in Appendix 1, published as a supplement, was noted.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To comply with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000 and Sections 4.8.1 (a) (vii), 5.2 and 5.3.4 of the Council’s Constitution and 2.3 for information purposes.

7 APPOINTMENT OF MEMBERS OF COMMITTEES, JOINT COMMITTEES AND PANELS FOR 2026/27

Audio recording – 30 minutes 9 seconds

The Chair advised that recommendation 2.1 and 2.2 would be considered individually, followed by consideration of recommendations 2.3 and 2.4 together.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed recommendation 2.1 in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Sean Nolan and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That for 2026/27, the seats allocated to each political group on those Committees to which Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 applies, and those to which it does not apply, as set out in Appendix 1, published as a supplement, as amended, were noted.

Councillor Nigel Mason proposed recommendation 2.2 in the report with an amendment to increase the number of substitute Members for each Political Group by 1 on the Planning Control Committee only, and this was seconded by Councillor Ruth Brown and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: For the Planning Control Committee only, that the number of Substitute Members for each Political Group be increased by 1.

The Group Leaders were invited by the Chair to appoint Members to the remaining vacancies.

Councillor Val Bryant confirmed Councillor Daniel Allen as Substitute on Planning Control Committee.

Councillor Ruth Brown confirmed that they would advise the Proper Officer of the remaining appointments at a later date.

Councillor Ralph Muncer confirmed:

- Councillor Steven Patmore as Substitute on Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Councillor Michael Muir as Substitute on Planning Control Committee.
- Councillor Steven Patmore as Substitute on Employment Committee.
- That they would advise the Proper Officer of the remaining appointments at a later date.

The Chair invited Councillor Val Bryant, Leader of the Council to move the report entitled ‘Appointment of Members of Committees, Joint Committees and Panels for 2026/27’.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed recommendations 2.3 and 2.4 in the report and this was seconded by Councillor Sean Nolan and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

(1) That for 2026/27, Members were appointed to the various Committees and other bodies in accordance with the wishes of the political groups, as detailed in Appendix 2, published as a supplement, as amended, with the addition of:

- Councillor Daniel Allen as Substitute on Planning Control Committee.
- Councillor Steven Patmore as Substitute on Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Councillor Michael Muir as Substitute on Planning Control Committee.
- Councillor Steven Patmore as Substitute on Employment Committee.

(2) That for 2026/2027, each political Group Leader was appointed to the Constitutional and Governance Working Group, as detailed in paragraph 8.6 of the report.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To comply with the provisions of Section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989.

8 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRS AND VICE-CHAIRS OF COMMITTEES FOR 2026/27

Audio recording – 36 minutes 14 seconds

The Chair noted that the Labour Group Leader had advised of the following appointments, subsequent to those published:

- Councillor Val Bryant as Chair of Employment Committee.
- Councillor Ian Albert as Vice-Chair of Employment Committee.

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council, Councillor Val Bryant, to move the report entitled ‘Appointment of Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Committees for 2026/27’.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Sean Nolan seconded the recommendations in the report.

Councillor Claire Strong advised that Councillor Sean Nolan had been proposed as Vice-Chair of the Joint Staff Consultative Committee but was not a Member of the Committee itself.

The Chair advised that there was a vacancy for the Vice-Chair of Joint Staff Consultative Committee.

Councillor Keith Hoskins proposed Councillor Claire Strong for Vice-Chair of Joint Staff Consultative Committee for the Civic Year 2026-27, and this was seconded by Councillor Val Bryant and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Committees (except Community Forums) for 2026/27 be appointed in accordance with the details set out in Appendix 1 to the report, published as a supplement, with the addition of:

- Councillor Val Bryant as Chair of Employment Committee.
- Councillor Ian Albert as Vice-Chair of Employment Committee.
- Councillor Claire Strong as Vice-Chair of Joint Staff Consultative Committee.

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with the provisions of Standing Order 4.8.1(a)(ix) of the Council's Constitution.

9 EXTENSION OF APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT MEMBER OF FINANCE, AUDIT AND RISK COMMITTEE

Audio recording – 39 minutes 56 seconds

The Director – Resources presented the report entitled 'Extension of Appointment of Independent Member of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee' and advised that:

- John Cannon had been the Independent Member of Finance, Audit and Risk Committee for almost 4 years.
- With Local Government Reorganisation taking place in less than 2 years, they should extend his appointment for this time as he had made a positive contribution to the committee and the effort involved with recruiting and training a new independent member would not be a good use of time.

Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham proposed and Councillor Ralph Muncer seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That John Cannon's appointment as the Independent Member for the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee was extended until 31st March 2028.

REASON FOR DECISION: John Cannon was appointed as the Independent Member for Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee in July 2022, for a period of 4 years. The request to extend his appointment reflects the positive contribution that he has made and is the practical option with the Local Government Reorganisation timeline of April 2028. It is also in line with CIPFA (Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy) best practice.

10 ADJOURNMENT

Audio recording – 41 minutes 29 seconds

The meeting of the Annual Council was adjourned at 20:13 to allow meetings of each Community Forum to convene to elect Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Community Forums for the Civic Year, following which, there was a comfort break.

The meeting reconvened at 20:31.

N.B. During the break, Councillor Lisa Nash left the Council Chamber and did not return.

11 KEY DECISIONS - ANNUAL REPORT ON CASES OF SPECIAL URGENCY

Audio recording – 59 minutes 28 seconds

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council, Councillor Val Bryant to move the report entitled ‘Key Decisions – Annual Report on Cases of Special Urgency’.

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

RESOLVED: That the report was noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To comply with Regulation 19 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 (“the Regulations”).

12 APPROVE A PROGRAMME OF ORDINARY MEETINGS FOR THE COUNCIL FOR THE CIVIC YEAR 2026/27

Audio recording – 1 hour 0 minutes 45 seconds

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council to move the report entitled ‘Approve a Programme of Ordinary Meetings for the Council for the Civic Year 2026/27’.

In response to a question from Councillor Ruth Brown, the Committee, Member & Scrutiny Manager advised that:

- Six meetings of the Cabinet Panel on the Environment were required to be scheduled to meet constitutional requirements and to line up with the cycle of Cabinet meetings.
- However, as Members were aware, six meetings had rarely been required in previous years, therefore, the meeting scheduled for 17 March 2027 would be cancelled to avoid clashing with the Standards Committee meeting on the same day.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed and Councillor Ralph Muncer seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Calendar of Meetings for 2026/27, as attached as Appendix 1, was approved.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

(1) To enable Members to agree a programme of ordinary meeting of the Council for 2026/27.

(2) To enable Members to agree the Calendar of Meetings for 2026/27.

13 NOMINATION OF REPRESENTATIVES ON OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS AND OTHER BODIES FOR 2026/27

Audio recording – 1 hour 2 minutes 53 seconds

The Chair advised that the final version of Appendix 1 to the report had been published in the supplementary document pack entitled ‘Supplementary Documents – Final’.

The Chair advised of the following nominations to those published in Appendix 1:

- Councillor Val Bryant to the King George V Playing Fields User Group.

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis to the substitute position on the Hertfordshire Health Scrutiny Committee.

The Group Leaders were invited by the Chair to nominate Members to the remaining vacancies.

Councillor Ruth Brown confirmed the withdrawal of Councillor Tina Bhartwas as nominee to the Letchworth Civic Trust, and that this vacancy would be advised to the Proper Officer at a later date.

Councillor Ralph Muncer confirmed the nomination of Councillor Michael Muir as a representative for the Baldock Youth and Community Association.

In response to points raised by Councillor Emma Rowe and Councillor Alistair Willougby, the Chair requested the withdrawal of this nomination until clarification could be provided on the membership of Councillor Muir on the previous trust, and the nomination was withdrawn by Councillor Muncer.

Councillor Val Bryant confirmed Councillor Rhona Cameron would replace Councillor Alistair Willoughby as the Council's representative on the Baldock Town Twinning Association.

The Chair invited the Leader of the Council, Councillor Val Bryant to move the report entitled 'Nomination of Representatives on Outside Organisations and Other Bodies for 2026/27', as amended.

Councillor Val Bryant proposed, as amended, the uncontested nominations in Appendix 1 be approved and, this was seconded by Councillor Sean Nolan.

Votes were subsequently conducted on each contested nomination, as highlighted in Appendix 1 of the report and the results recorded for these contested positions are included as below:

RESOLVED:

(1) That the list of nominations of representatives on Outside Organisations and Other Bodies for 2026/2027, as set out in Appendix 1 to the report, published as a supplement, was approved, as amended, with confirmation that:

- The Council's representatives to the Baldock Town Twinning Association be Councillors Rhona Cameron and Stewart Willoughby.
- The Council's substitute representative to the Hertfordshire Health Scrutiny Committee be Councillor Elizabeth Dennis.
- The Council's remaining vacant representative on the King George V Playing Fields User Group be Councillor Val Bryant.
- The Council's representative to the London Luton Airport Consultative Committee be Councillor Emma Fernandes.
- The Council's representative to Survivors Against Domestic Abuse (SADA) be Councillor Elizabeth Dennis.
- Councillor Tina Bhartwas be removed as the Council's representative on the Letchworth Civic Trust.

(2) That Political Group Leaders notify the Democratic Services Manager of nominations to the remaining vacancies or any changes to the existing representatives on outside organisations. Note the one remaining vacancy being on the Baldock Youth and Community Association.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To comply with the provisions of Standing Order 4.8.1(b)(iv) and (v) of the Council's Constitution.

14 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Audio recording – 1 hour 13 minutes 8 seconds

Councillor Keith Hoskins proposed and Councillor Sean Prendergast 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 Paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the said Act (as amended).

15 APPROVAL OF POTENTIAL EXIT PAYMENT - PART 2

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

N.B. Councillor Dominic Griffiths left the Chamber at 21.01 and did not return.

Councillor Sean Nolan, as Executive Member for Customers, presented the report entitled 'Approval of Potential Exit Payment – Part 2'.

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

RESOLVED: That the information in the Part 2 report was considered when reaching the Part 1 decision.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that, if required, following the completion of consultation and redeployment processes, the Council has complied with the approval process as set out in the Constitution and the Pay Policy Statement for any exit payment that exceeds the limit applied (£100,000).

16 APPROVAL OF POTENTIAL EXIT PAYMENT - PART 1

Audio recording – 1 hour 43 minutes 17 seconds

Councillor Sean Nolan, as Executive Member for Customers, presented the report and proposed the recommendations as set out in the report. This was seconded by Councillor Val Bryant and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

(1) That Council approved the payment of the exit payment, if required, the details of which were set out in the Part 2 report.

(2) That Council used the General Fund reserve to fund the cost.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that, if required, following the completion of consultation and redeployment processes, the Council has complied with the approval process as set out in the Constitution and the Pay Policy Statement for any exit payment that exceeds the limit applied (£100,000).

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

Chair

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COUNCIL
16 JULY 2026

PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

In accordance with Standing Order 4.8.10(c), one question was submitted by a member of the public by the deadline date for questions set out in the Council's Constitution.

(A) <u>LETCHWORTH LIDO TOILETS FOR NORTON COMMON USERS</u>

Jessica Crighton to Councillor Amy Allen (Executive Member for Environment):

"Given the importance of accessible toilet facilities for disabled people, older residents, and families, how does the Council justify the absence of publicly available toilets in the green spaces it manages? Will the Council consider opening up the toilets at Letchworth Lido free for use by Norton Common visitors?"

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Item No	Referred from:	Cabinet
6A	Date:	16 June 2026
	Title of item:	Revenue Budget Outturn 2025/26 (Final)
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Referral Only

The report considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on 16 June 2026 can be found here: [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 16th June, 2026, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council]()

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it approves the net transfer from earmarked reserves, as identified in table 9, of £4.925million.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

(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) Changes to the Council's balances are monitored and approved.

Audio recording – 1 hour 56 minutes 24 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Poopalasingham advised that:

- The report had been updated for Cabinet to reflect a reduction in the underspend on waste vehicles and the mobilisation of the waste contract, and although this had been funded from waste reserves, this shortfall had impacted the outturn position.
- Appendix A to the report had been considered, which gave a breakdown of variance in the year and the report gave the final outturn position.
- Previous carry forward amounts at paragraph 8.5 demonstrated that delivery was constrained by capacity, and there had been concern over significant variances resulting in a big carry forward to this financial year, as this might constrain capacity further.
- There had been a focus on overspends such as the £169K in relation to Churchgate as indicated on page 489 of the Agenda Reports Pack.
- Loss of commercial waste revenue was noted and mitigations measures for this were considered.
- Apart from variances, the Committee were happy with the outturn.

N.B. Councillor Amy Allen entered the Chamber at 21:29.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Revenue Budget Outturn 2025-26 (Final)' and advised that:

- The number of car parking tickets sold went up by 4.6%, and penalty charge notices had also increased in this period.
- They were happy to take on board comments from the FAR Committee.
- Table 4 in the report looked at budgets, variances and carry forwards and these were carefully reviewed with Directors and Executive Members, but there was an acknowledgment for more transparency on this.

- External expertise would be important for the Churchgate project, but there was recognition that they could be more transparent about the nature of the spend on this.
- There had been further underspend against the budget, but half of this would be carried forward to next year as detailed in Table 4.
- £1.884M would be carried forward as shown at paragraph 8.3 of the report.
- Carry forwards from previous years were displayed in paragraph 8.5 to show that there were multiple planned areas of spend.
- The target level of efficiencies had been met as detailed at paragraph 8.4.
- Performance against corporate financial health income measures was shown at paragraphs 8.6-8.8.
- The General Fund was £17.9M by year end with £1.9M proposed carry forward, which was healthier than the £14.4M net position forecast back in February 2025
- Appendix 1 summarised all the variances across the year.

In response to a question by Councillor Daniel Allen, the Director – Resources advised that the costs incurred from the Public Inquiry for the appeal for the application on Barkway Road, Royston would likely be included if they were incurred before the end of March, but this would be checked.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

As part of the debate, Councillor Sean Nolan highlighted that:

- Combining outputs from risk management around capacity with staffing from Local Government Reorganisation would always be challenging.
- They would need to keep monitoring the above as this was not the first time there had been carry forwards, but they were fortunate to have good staffing levels.
- Everything needed to be done to support staff while the Council existed.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

(1) Noted this report.

(2) Approved a decrease of £1.385million in the 2025/26 net General Fund expenditure, as identified in section 8, to a total of £21.400million.

(3) Approved the changes to the 2026/27 General Fund budget, as identified in table 4 and paragraph 8.3, a total £651k increase in net expenditure

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it approves the net transfer from earmarked reserves, as identified in table 9, of £4.925million.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

(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) Changes to the Council’s balances are monitored and approved.

Item No	Referred from:	Cabinet
6B	Date:	16 June 2026
	Title of item:	Treasury Management End of Year Review 2025/26
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Referral Only

The report considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on 16 June 2026 can be found here: [Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 16th June, 2026, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council]

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

(1) Approves the actual 2025/26 prudential and treasury indicators as detailed in Appendix B.

(2) Notes the annual Treasury Management Review for 2025/26 (Appendix B).

REASON 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.

Audio recording – 2 hours 9 minutes 50 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Poopalasingham advised that:

- Balances were declining due to more capital spend, which meant less funding was available to invest. However, interest rates had stayed higher than expected.
- Interest returned from investments had been lower than the previous year but higher than expected at the beginning of the financial year.
- Inflation had not come down quickly, meaning that the higher than anticipated interest returns would be balanced out by higher spending in other areas.
- The current allocation of investments was shown on page 508 of the Agenda Reports Pack.
- Outstanding investments as of 31 March 2026 were shown at paragraph 8.9 of the report.
- There had been a good return on investments, but this could not always be guaranteed in the long-term.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled 'Treasury Management End of Year Review 2025-26' and advised that:

- £2.08M had been returned from interest on investments, and while higher inflation benefitted their investments, it also impacted North Herts residents, and they sought to balance Council funding wisely.
- The position at the end of year was similar to the position at the end of Q3.
- They were required to note the breach of the strategy earlier in the year as described at paragraph 8.1 of the report, and actions would ensure this would not happen again.
- Investments continued to focus on security and liquidity first.
- Investments at the year end were shown at page 508 of the Agenda Reports Pack, and the one bank investment had now matured.

In response to a question by Councillor Mick Debenham, the Director – Resources advised that Surrey County Council had not gone through Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) yet, but there was no risk associated with this as any outstanding investments in authorities that went through LGR would be transferred to one of the new authorities.

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 March 2026.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

(1) Approves the actual 2025/26 prudential and treasury indicators as detailed in Appendix B.

(2) Notes the annual Treasury Management Review for 2025/26 (Appendix B).

REASON 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.

<table>
<tr><td>Item No</td><td>Referred from:</td><td>Cabinet</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">6C</td><td>Date:</td><td>16 June 2026</td></tr>
<tr><td>Title of item:</td><td>2025-26 Year End Report of Risk Management Governance</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">To be considered alongside agenda item:</td><td>Referral Only</td></tr>
</table>

The report considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on 16 June 2026 can be found here: Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 16th June, 2026, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it note the report. ***REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION:*** To provide assurance that the Council is effectively managing risk. The Council's Risk Management Strategy details that this annual review should be presented to Council. Cabinet have responsibility for the management of risk.

Audio recording – 1 hour 35 minutes 7 seconds

The Chair invited Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, to present the referral on this item. Councillor Poopalasingham advised that:

- There had been no overall changes to the framework since last year.
- Paragraph 7 of the report showed the risk grid, which contained seven red corporate risks for the Council.
- The two highest scoring risks were related to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and resourcing.
- The Renters Right Act was a new addition to the risk register, although this was not yet a concern and they would continue to monitor this.
- Risk related to financial sustainability should reduce due to the financial position of the Council but there was a potential risk to this from global factors and inflation.
- There were a few risks to monitor but the Committee was broadly happy with the processes in place.

In response to a question from Councillor Sean Nolan, Councillor Poopalasingham advised that the Committee had a brief discussion on the Renters Right Act, but the Committee could not comment much on this at this stage and would continue to monitor it.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, Councillor Ian Albert advised that the Council Delivery Plan (CDP) set out what actions would be taken on Oughtonhead Common Weir such as appointing a contractor to progress with the work on this.

In response to a question from Councillor Daniel Allen, the Director – Resources advised that there was not a high level of risk in not delivering work on Oughtonhead Common Weir, but they would pick this up with the relevant service manager.

Councillor Ian Albert, as the Executive Member for Resources, presented the report entitled '2025-26 Year End Report on Risk Management Governance' and advised that:

- All areas raised by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee would be kept under review, particularly cyber risks.

- Much of the detail in the report was contained within the Appendix to the report and showed that the Council had effective procedures in place to manage and monitor risks.
- Paragraph 7.1 of the report described corporate and overarching risks.
- The table at paragraph 7.2 detailed actions that would be taken to address red risks, including the actions already completed.
- Sections 9 and 12 of the report monitored performance and training.
- Service risks and activities were outlined at various sections in the report.
- The report concluded with progress against actions and set new actions for 2026/27.

In response to a question from Councillor Donna Wright, the Director – Resources advised that it was up to Cabinet Members to determine which risks should be corporate risks, and that planning would be considered at the next Risk and Performance Management Group.

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

RESOLVED: That Cabinet noted the report.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it note the report.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: To provide assurance that the Council is effectively managing risk. The Council's Risk Management Strategy details that this annual review should be presented to Council. Cabinet have responsibility for the management of risk.

N.B. There was a break at the end of this item and the meeting reconvened at 21:28.

Item No	Referred from:	Finance, Audit and Risk Committee
6D	**Date:**	**10 June 2026**
	Title of item:	**Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report**
To be considered alongside agenda item:		**Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report 2025/26**

The report considered by the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee at the meeting held on 10 June 2026 can be found here: [Agenda for Finance, Audit and Risk Committee on Wednesday, 10th June, 2026, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council]

RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL: That the Committee recommend to Council that the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report, be noted.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION: To enable the Committee to consider the report before it is presented to Full Council. To provide Full Council with assurance as to the effectiveness of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

Audio recording – 2 hours 25 minutes 59 seconds

The Director – Resources presented the report entitled 'Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report' and highlighted that:

- The Annual Report provided detail on the work undertaken by this Committee in the previous year and looked ahead at planned work for the upcoming civic year.
- An introduction from Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham, as Chair since January 2026, had been included.
- The purpose of the report was to look at the overall at the Committee and its effectiveness.
- There were points for Members to consider highlighted in yellow in the draft version of the Annual Report and comments could be added before presenting at Full Council.
- There was a table showing the reports considered by the Committee in 2025/26 on page 198 of the reports pack, and this would be similar for 2026/27. However, there were likely to be additional items including updates to the Anti-Fraud Strategy and a potential review of Procurement Rules.

The following Members provided comments on the Annual Report:

- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis

The following comments were made on the Annual Report:

- That training on the following topics would be beneficial: Business Rates Retention, an overview of internal and external audit processes, funding settlements and what these mean for the Council and Treasury and Investment Strategies.
- Bitesize sessions on topics within local government finance would be useful and already existed within the resources provided by the Local Government Association.
- Whilst training should be primarily for Finance, Audit and Risk Committee members, it would be useful to offer more widely to all Members to empower others to make more meaningful contributions to discussions on financial matters.

- Session offered before the committee meeting were useful and these could be recorded and uploaded to GrowZone for Members unable to attend.

Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham proposed, as Chair, and Councillor Elizabeth Dennis seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

(1) That the Committee commented on the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report, attached at Appendix A.

(2) That the Committee delegated to the Director – Resources to make changes to the Annual Report from discussion of this item, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee.

RECOMMENDED TO FULL COUNCIL: That the Committee recommend to Council that the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report, be noted.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION: To enable the Committee to consider the report before it is presented to Full Council. To provide Full Council with assurance as to the effectiveness of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

Item No	Referred from:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
6E	Date:	9 June 2026
	Title of item:	Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025/26
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2025/26

The report considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting held on 9 June 2026 can be found here: Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 9th June, 2026, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025/26, as attached at Appendix 1, be noted.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider and comment on the report of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the work of the Committee in the 2025/26 Civic Year prior to consideration by Full Council.

Audio recording – 02 hours 18 minutes 47 seconds

Councillor Claire Winchster, as the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025/26, presented the report entitled ‘Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025/26’ and advised that:

- The Committee had examined 30 items and made 26 recommendations to Cabinet.
- It was recognised that the Committee had worked to improve and refine decisions rather than rehash them.
- They were grateful for the diligent work of Members, including the additional commitment given by Members of the S106 Task and Finish Group.
- Time had been taken to reflect on the work they had been undertaken to ensure an appreciation for cooperative and transparent working that had focused on building mutually respectful relationships with Members, officers and portfolio holders.
- There would be a lot for the Committee to consider with the coming of unitary authorities, and luck was wished to the new Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- Members and officers were thanked for the support they had given over the last year and for the opportunity given.

Councillor Jon Clayden proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Ralph Muncer.

Councillor Ralph Muncer put on record his thanks to Councillor Winchester for her time as the Chair of the Committee and for the support she had provided to the S106 Task and Finish Group. He additionally thanked Members, officers and Executive Members for their support over the past year.

Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason put on record his thanks Councillor Winchester and highlighted the effectiveness of cross-party scrutiny within the S106 Task and Finish Group.

The Chair put on record his thanks to Councillor Winchester for her work as the Chair of the Committee last year and for the collaborative relationship they had built. He also put on record his thanks to the Scrutiny Officer and Councillor Ralph Muncer as the Chair of the S106 Task and Finish Group.

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

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and provided comments on the draft Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025/26, attached as Appendix 1, prior to consideration by Full Council.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025/26, as attached at Appendix 1, be noted.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider and comment on the report of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the work of the Committee in the 2025/26 Civic Year prior to consideration by Full Council.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3, 4 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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Item No	Referred from:	Cabinet
6G	Date:	16 June 2026
	Title of item:	Churchgate Regeneration Project Update & Next Steps – Part 1
To be considered alongside agenda item:		Churchgate Regeneration Project Update & Next Steps – Part 1

The report considered by Cabinet at the meeting held on 16 June 2026 can be found here: Agenda for Cabinet on Tuesday, 16th June, 2026, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

(1) Approves the additional capital / revenue funding set out in the Part 2 report to support the next phase of the Churchgate Regeneration Project.

(2) Instructs officers to undertake a review of the Council's external communications approach, with a specific focus on improving transparency, accessibility, and the visibility of key decision-making information.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

(1) Since the last Full Council update in July 2025, and subsequent Overview & Scrutiny Committee discussions in February 2026, the Churchgate Regeneration Project has progressed significantly and moved into a substantially more mature and evidence-led phase.

(2) Over the past year, the Council has undertaken an extensive programme of work to respond directly to key matters raised by Members and stakeholders, including viability, parking, public realm, market provision, delivery options, governance and long-term town centre sustainability. This has included financial analysis, specialist technical work, Project Board workshops and Member briefings.

(3) This work has enabled the Council to move from high-level vision setting into a more informed, evidence-led and delivery-focused phase.

(4) Alongside this, the Council has also undertaken early engagement with the development and investment sector to inform future procurement, delivery and partnership decisions. Feedback from this work has demonstrated strong market interest in Hitchin and increased confidence in both the credibility of the opportunity and the Council's commitment to delivering a high-quality regeneration programme for the town centre.

(5) The recommendations within this report therefore represent a logical progression from the work completed to date and are intended to ensure that future decisions regarding the regeneration of the site are informed, evidence-led and commercially robust.

(6) The proposed next stage of work is materially different from earlier strategic and visioning exercises. The Council is now seeking to appoint specialist regeneration and development expertise to work alongside the project team in refining a deliverable scheme, testing assumptions in greater detail, reducing uncertainty and supporting the transition from strategic visioning into delivery planning and implementation.

(7) This phased approach enables the Council to retain control of the project as it develops, whilst ensuring that investment and risk remain proportionate to the level of certainty and information available at each stage.

(8) The proposed next phase reflects the consistent feedback received through market engagement and specialist advice: that the appropriate next step is a structured feasibility and delivery-planning phase focused on shaping a viable, deliverable and investment ready regeneration scheme for Hitchin town centre.

Audio recording – 3 hours 23 minutes 10 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:

- The Committee appreciated the opportunity to consider the report.
- They were keen to ensure that there was no softening of quality or affordable housing allocation resulting due to the updated process.
- There was concern over the sign off process for this project once the shadow authorities were formed.
- It had also been questioned why the work could not be completed inhouse, but that query had been answered.
- The balance of risk for the Council versus the risk for a developer as the project progressed was also considered.
- Recognition should be given to any increasing costs as these would be borne by the taxpayer.
- Some costs were distorting, but the Committee did not believe that the project had reached a point where there should be a cap on spending.

In response to a question from Councillor Ian Albert, Councillor Clayden advised that the point raised during the debate at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting that the project had reached a tipping point was not a formal position that the Committee had taken.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled ‘Churchgate Regeneration Project Update and Next Steps – Part 1’ and advised that:

- Since the Full Council meeting in July 2025, the project team had worked to test and progress issues associated with the site including viability, parking, the market and public realm.
- It was important to recognise that the Council was in a stronger position than it was in July last year as there was a clearer understanding of the site and the viability and delivery channels, a stronger technical and financial evidence base and a greater insight into market appetite and delivery expectations.
- Soft market engagement indicated that Hitchin was viewed as an attractive and credible regeneration opportunity with long-term potential whilst acknowledging that it was a complex scheme that would require careful feasibility work and detailed delivery planning.
- The Council was seeking to appoint regeneration specialists to work alongside the project team to refine a deliverable scheme and help to transition ambition into implementation.
- The phased approach would ensure that the investment, funding and risk would remain proportionate to certainty at each stage of the project while progressing the project in a controlled way with strategic oversight and decision-making control.
- Further testing of deliverability and viability would reduce uncertainty before any future long-term delivery decisions were made.

- A confirmation of viability would not compromise the delivery of affordable housing or value for money, and this stage would allow the precise testing of design, quality, viability and delivery considerations together rather than separately.
- The ambition to deliver a high-quality, viable regeneration scheme capable of supporting the long-term vitality and success of Hitchin Town Centre remained.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed the recommendations in the report, and this was seconded by Councillor Daniel Allen.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Sean Nolan

Points raised during the debate included:

- This was the right approach on a hugely important project.
- They would need to ensure clear communication with residents through the Churchgate website and other forms.
- The Project Board needed to urgently look at how they published the documents that were in the Agenda Reports Pack and communicated decisions on the project going forward.
- The documents were specialised and designed for the purpose of developers.
- Stakeholder communication had been considered by the project board, but there was also recognition that the public wanted to see progress, and they should communicate with an aim to demonstrate this.
- Communications Officers could attend project board meetings to ensure more communication.
- Additional layers of communication could be put in place to support the reading of more complex documents.
- The documents on this project were already in the public domain regardless of their appropriateness. Therefore, they should ensure that the information was shown in appropriate way.
- This project was one of the biggest projects the Council had undertaken, and it would be great for Hitchin.

In response to points raised during the debate, the Churchgate Project Manager advised that:

- The background documents were technical working documents on specialised topics prepared for internal decision-making purposes rather than public audiences, and it would be difficult for residents to interpret them without wider context.
- The project board would need to work on how to produce accessible updates for residents that would communicate progress going forward.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed an amendment to include that Cabinet instructs officers to undertake a review of the external communications approach of the Council, with a specific focus on improving transparency, accessibility, and the visibility of key decision-making information.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas accepted the amendment into the substantive motion, and this was also accepted by Councillor Daniel Allen as seconder.

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

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That it:

(1) Approves the additional capital / revenue funding set out in the Part 2 report to support the next phase of the Churchgate Regeneration Project.

(2) Instructs officers to undertake a review of the Council's external communications approach, with a specific focus on improving transparency, accessibility, and the visibility of key decision-making information.

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

(1) Since the last Full Council update in July 2025, and subsequent Overview & Scrutiny Committee discussions in February 2026, the Churchgate Regeneration Project has progressed significantly and moved into a substantially more mature and evidence-led phase.

(2) Over the past year, the Council has undertaken an extensive programme of work to respond directly to key matters raised by Members and stakeholders, including viability, parking, public realm, market provision, delivery options, governance and long-term town centre sustainability. This has included financial analysis, specialist technical work, Project Board workshops and Member briefings.

(3) This work has enabled the Council to move from high-level vision setting into a more informed, evidence-led and delivery-focused phase.

(4) Alongside this, the Council has also undertaken early engagement with the development and investment sector to inform future procurement, delivery and partnership decisions. Feedback from this work has demonstrated strong market interest in Hitchin and increased confidence in both the credibility of the opportunity and the Council's commitment to delivering a high-quality regeneration programme for the town centre.

(5) The recommendations within this report therefore represent a logical progression from the work completed to date and are intended to ensure that future decisions regarding the regeneration of the site are informed, evidence-led and commercially robust.

(6) The proposed next stage of work is materially different from earlier strategic and visioning exercises. The Council is now seeking to appoint specialist regeneration and development expertise to work alongside the project team in refining a deliverable scheme, testing assumptions in greater detail, reducing uncertainty and supporting the transition from strategic visioning into delivery planning and implementation.

(7) This phased approach enables the Council to retain control of the project as it develops, whilst ensuring that investment and risk remain proportionate to the level of certainty and information available at each stage.

(8) The proposed next phase reflects the consistent feedback received through market engagement and specialist advice: that the appropriate next step is a structured feasibility and delivery-planning phase focused on shaping a viable, deliverable and investment ready regeneration scheme for Hitchin town centre.

COUNCIL
THURSDAY, 16 JULY 2026

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report

REPORT OF: Director - Resources

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Non-Executive

COUNCIL PRIORITY: All Priorities;

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annual Report (attached at Appendix A) details the work undertaken by the Finance, Audit and Risk (FAR) Committee over the last year (25/26) and describes the planned work for the coming year (26/27).

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Council note the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee Annual Report.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To provide Full Council with assurance as to the effectiveness of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. None, the Constitution requires that an Annual Report is provided to Full Council.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. Members of the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee are consulted on the content of the report, prior to it being presented to Council.

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 Chair of the FAR Committee presents this report to Council each year, which describes the work of the FAR Committee from the previous civic year (2025/26) and what is planned for the forthcoming civic year (2026/27).

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. The Annual Report is attached at Appendix A. The Annual Report is intended to provide Full Council with assurance as to the effectiveness of the FAR Committee. The role of the FAR Committee is to support and promote good governance.

8.2. It is best practice for the FAR Committee to consider its effectiveness, and this is reflected in the Annual Report. Commenting on the report provides a further opportunity for that self-review of effectiveness.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. The Constitution (paragraph 4.4.1 ee) states that Full Council will receive an Annual Report from FAR.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. Providing Full Council with assurance over the effectiveness of the FAR Committee gives confidence that the areas of its work (including commenting on processes and assumptions on financial management) are being managed effectively.

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. Providing Full Council with assurance over the effectiveness of the FAR Committee gives confidence that the areas of its work (including oversight of risk) are being managed effectively.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no HR impacts arising from this report.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 *Appendix A, FAR Annual Report 2025/26*

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Ian Couper	Director - Resources,	ian.couper@north-herts.gov.uk,
Natasha Jindal	Legal Team Manager	Natasha.jindal@north-herts.gov.uk
Tim Everitt	Performance and Risk Officer	Tim.everitt@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 *None*

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Finance, Audit and Risk Committee

Annual Report 2025-26

Contents

Introduction from the Chair of the Committee

I am pleased to present the Annual Report of the Finance, Audit & Risk (FAR) Committee which describes the Committee's work and achievements over a 12 month period to March 2026.

After a lot of change to the membership of the Committee in May 2024, it was nice to have a fairly consistent membership as we moved from 2024/25 to 2025/26. We just saw Cllr Sarah Lucas replacing Cllr Bhartwas. Then in January, Cllr Nolan becoming Executive Member for Customers, resulted in me moving from Vice-Chair to Chair, and Cllr Wright-Mason joining the Committee. Councillor Lucas also moved in to the Vice-Chair role.

I would like to thank Cllr Nolan for his time chairing the Committee. He had been Chair of the Committee since May 2023 (and a member of the Committee since May 2022). My experience of him as Chair is that he has encouraged the development of the Committee and promoted good discussions on how we support good governance.

We have had less need for training this year. We have still had one specific training session on treasury management. We also continue to use our discussion of the reports presented to us to ask questions and expand our knowledge. I will continue to promote the value of training during 2026/27.

The Committee is a key part of supporting good governance. Good governance supports effective decision making, improved performance, and our response to risks and opportunities. I hope that this Annual Report helps to demonstrate this, and the importance of the role of the Finance Audit & Risk Committee

All of our meetings are open to the public and I would encourage residents to come along and see the Committee in action- either in person or via the Council's YouTube channel.

As well as elected members and our independent member, the Committee is supported by the Director: Resources. The Policy and Strategy Team Leader provides reports and information in relation to approving and reviewing the Annual Governance Statement. Similarly, representatives from the Shared Internal Audit Service (SIAS), the Shared Anti-Fraud Service (SAFS) and our External Auditors regularly attend the meetings of the Committee.

Both our External and Internal Auditors have further promoted the opportunity for members of the Committee to meet with them outside of formal committee meetings. I am hoping we will be able to take up more of that opportunity during the coming year.

The Committee have received great support from the Committee Services team throughout the year, particularly Amy Cantrill and Susan Le Dain.

I would like to thank those Members of the Committee from last year and look forward to seeing those that are able to continue with us in 2026/27.

Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham

May 2026

Role of the Committee

The purpose of the FAR Committee is to provide independent oversight and assurance of processes in relation to risk management, internal audit, anti-fraud, governance and internal control matters. It also reviews financial monitoring and budget reports to ensure that they are based on sound assumptions and consider relevant risks. This includes providing comments to Cabinet.

The Committee is also the Council's Audit Committee. This means that it reviews reports from our External Auditors and approves our Annual Governance Statement and Statements of Accounts.

The full Terms of Reference for this Committee are provided in the Council's Constitution.
https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/sites/default/files/2025-05/Section%2010%20-%20Other%20Committees.pdf

Effectiveness

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) produced a publication on "Audit Committees: Practical Guidance for Local Authorities and Police". This recommends that Audit Committees should consider their effectiveness.

The last SIAS review of effectiveness was in 2024-25, with the report published in December 2024. The progress against the recommendations made was covered in last year's annual report. The outstanding actions that will be further addressed this year relate to:

- Highlighting the need for self-assessment. See below.
- Encouraging members to shape training and attend the opportunities provided. This was also picked up in last year's self-assessment. Members will continue to be asked for topics that they would like training on. There was an attempt last year to move the training to after the meeting, but that did not work. Discussion will continue on topics and the best timing for any training.
- Members being able to meet with Internal and External Audit outside of the committee meetings. Meeting times are being arranged for these meetings.

Last year, when this report was presented to the FAR Committee in advance of Council, it was used as an opportunity for self-reflection. The points raised mainly duplicated the above but did also pick up having a more strategic outlook and training to support that.

The points raised during this year's discussion were:

- Make use of existing training resources, e.g. from Local Government Association
- Make use of GrowZone to access existing resources and add recordings of training sessions.
- Focus on training to meet the needs of Committee members but also make available more widely.
- Deliver training on Business Rates, Internal and External Audit, funding settlements and treasury strategy.

Members of the Committee

The following Members were appointed to the Committee for 2025/26:

Councillor Sean Nolan (to January 2026)	Labour and Co-operative	Chair
Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham	Labour and Co-operative	Vice-Chair/ Chair from January 2026
Councillor Ruth Brown	Liberal Democrats	
Councillor Dominic Griffiths	Liberal Democrats	
Councillor Sarah Lucas	Labour and Co-operative	Vice- Chair from January 2026
Councillor Steven Patmore	Conservative	
Councillor Paul Ward	Liberal Democrats	
Councillor Stewart Willoughby	Labour and Co-operative	
Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason (from January 2026)	Labour and Co-operative	
John Cannon	Independent (non-voting)	

Substitutes:

Councillor David Barnard (from January 2026)	Conservative
Councillor Matt Barnes	Liberal Democrats
Councillor Cathy Brownjohn	Labour and Co-operative
Councillor Sam Collins	Liberal Democrats
Councillor Ralph Muncer	Conservative
Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason (to January 2026)	Labour and Co-operative

Meetings

A work plan was set out at the start of the year, which included review of the following:

- Governance reports, including the Annual Governance Statement
- Reports of the External Auditor (KPMG)
- Internal Audit Reports (Shared Internal Audit Service – SIAS) to enable monitoring of the delivery of the internal audit service
- Anti-fraud reports (Shared Anti-Fraud Service- SAFS) to enable monitoring of the effectiveness of anti-fraud activity
- Risk Management Updates
- Financial budget-setting and monitoring
- Treasury Management

As and when required, the planned Agenda is supplemented by reports where the Committee has requested additional information or assurance.

The Committee met six times in the year and the following reports were presented and discussed:

	Jun 2025	**Sep 2025**	**Nov 2025**	**Jan 2026**	**Feb 2026**	**Mar 2026**
Annual Governance Statement	Draft AGS 24/25 and Action Plan 25/26				AGS 24/25 and Action Plan 25/26	Local Code of Governance
Reports from External Auditors (KPMG)	External Audit Plan and Strategy 24/25 (draft)		External Audit Plan and Strategy 24/25 Annual Report 24/25		Reports on the 24/25 Accounts	
Statement of Accounts					Statement of Accounts 24/25	
Internal Audit (SIAS) progress reports	Assurance Statement 24/25	Progress Report 25/26		Progress Report 25/26		26/27 Plan and 25/26 Progress
Anti-Fraud (SAFS) reports		Annual Report 24/25 and progress 25/26	Progress update 25/26			26/27 Plan and 25/26 Progress
Budget monitoring reports	Outturn for 24/25	Q1 25/26		Q2 25/26		Q3 24/25
Risk Management	Annual Report on Risk Governance			Mid-year update		
Budget setting reports			Medium Term Financial Strategy	Draft Budget 26/27	Budget 26/27	
Other reports	FAR Annual Report 24/25		Procurement Strategy 2025-28	Financial Regulations		

Main Achievements

The audit back-stop dates have helped with making sure that the Committee is only looking at one year's accounts at a time. This has helped with developing an understanding of the external audit cycle, from the development of the audit plan through to the audit report on the accounts. Due to limitations of the work that could be carried out on prior year's audits, the Council still has a disclaimed opinion. However KPMG are working through a programme of building back assurance to get back to providing a full opinion. A full Value for Money assessment was carried out (as this is prioritised by legislation) and this did not find any significant risks.

With a focus on governance, the Committee received reports on updates to the Council's Financial Regulations and a new Procurement Strategy.

That was on top of the regular reports that the Committee receive. The reports from SIAS and SAFS have allowed a strong oversight on Internal Audit and Fraud prevention. The Committee agree plans for each year and then monitor performance against those plans.

The regular reports on finance and risk allow the Committee to provide assurance and make recommendations to Cabinet.

Planned work for 2026-27

The cycle of meetings and regular reports will be very similar to 2025/26. The back-stop date for audit completion is the end of January 2027, so the Committee will approve the 2025/26 accounts at the January 2027 meeting.

The current procurement rules were approved in September 2024 and have been in operation since January 2025. They are being reviewed considering how they are working in practice. Most changes are minor, but any more significant changes will be brought to the Committee before a decision by Council.

Members of the Committee can also make recommendations of other topic areas that they would like to discuss/ be reported on. However, there should be a focus on the terms of reference of the Committee.

Training will continue to be provided. Training topics will be based on discussions with the Committee throughout the year. The format and timing of the training will continue to be reviewed to try and maximise uptake, as well as reflecting learning preferences.

All Members of the Committee are encouraged to take advantage of the various offers of training and development that will be made by Officers, as well as any relevant external courses that are available. All Members are also able to contact the Director: Resources or Committee Services for any support that they require.

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COUNCIL
THURSDAY, 16 JULY 2026

PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT

TITLE OF REPORT: ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2025/26

REPORT OF: Director - Governance

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Chair of Overview & Scrutiny Committee

COUNCIL PRIORITY: All Priorities;

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 To consider the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the 2025/2026 Civic Year.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. That Full Council note the Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025/2026, attached as Appendix 1.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To enable Council to consider and comment on the report of the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee regarding the work of the Committee in the 2025/2026 Civic Year.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. None

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1. The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have had the opportunity to consider and comment on the report prior to this meeting.

5.2. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered and commented on the report prior to consideration by Council, at the meeting of the Committee on Tuesday 9 June 2026.

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 Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reports each year to Annual Council giving a brief overview of the work undertaken by that Committee in the previous Civic Year.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

8.1. The report at Appendix 1 sets out the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the Civic Year 2025/2026.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. The Local Government Act 2000 establishes that a Council should have an Overview and Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise the decisions and policies of the executive. This obligation is reflected in Section 6 of the Council's Constitution.

9.2. Section 6.2.6 of the Constitution states that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must report annually to the Full Council on their workings with recommendations for its future work programme and amended working methods if appropriate.

9.3. Section 4.4.1 (ee) of the Constitution states that Full Council will receive Annual reports from the Overview & Scrutiny, Finance, Audit and Risk and Standards Committees.

9.4. Full Council has therefore routinely received an Annual Report from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for review. This Annual Report is in accordance with precedent, the Council's Constitution and the Council's statutory requirement.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. There are no capital or revenue implications arising from the content of this report.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

11.1. Good Risk Management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

11.2. There are no direct risk implications arising from this report.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. There are no direct equalities implications arising from this report.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

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

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no direct Human Resource Implications arising from this report.

15.2 The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager, Scrutiny Officer and Committee Member and Scrutiny Officers support the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix 1 – Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025/2026.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

Jeevan Mann	Scrutiny Officer	jeevan.mann@north-herts.gov.uk Tel: 01462 474 295
James Lovegrove	Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager	James.lovegrove@north-herts.gov.uk
Melanie Stimpson	Democratic Services Manager	Melanie.stimpson@north-herts.gov.uk
Tim Everitt	Performance & Risk Officer	Tim.everitt@north-herts.gov.uk

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Reports to and Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the Civic Year 2025/2026.

Browse meetings - Overview and Scrutiny Committee | North Herts Council

18.2 Item 14 ‘Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2025/26’ presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee for comment on 9 June 2026 – Agenda Pack, Minutes and Recording.

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North Herts Council

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT
2025/2026

Contents

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair's Foreword

Reflecting on a year as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it's clear that we have done much of what we set out to achieve, although there is always scope to improve.

We have continued to work within the framework of our Scrutiny Charter, creating a space for open and apolitical discussions with meaningful and consequential results. I have been proud to be part of a truly cross-party body, and thankful for the astute and thoughtful participation from committee members and the constant support of my Vice Chair, Cllr Clayden.

At a time when this Council has a number of complex major projects underway, scrutiny is an essential process that makes decisions better, fairer and more robust. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee have provided significant insight across portfolios including Enterprise, Customers, Resources, Regulatory, Environment and Place.

This year, we took steps to ensure that Executive Members and Officers present reports as a united team, so that questions could be successfully fielded by the most appropriate person.

We presented a measured and evidence-based report and recommendations to Cabinet from the Task and Finish Group on Section 106 contributions. I am grateful to members of this group for their commitment and focus on this important work, led by Cllr Muncer.

Although this Authority may not have the time to generate another Task and Finish project, we look to take our learnings into new authorities. As we move forwards, we aim to sharpen our focus and maximise our impact, whilst adapting to the changing situation in local government reorganisation.

In fulfilling our scrutiny function, we have benefited from co-operative working relationships with Directors and Officers. I greatly appreciate this engagement and clear commitment to working productively together. I hope we can continue to build mutually respectful relationships that support service improvement and champion good practice.

My deepest thanks go to the dedicated Officer team who facilitate this committee. Jeevan Mann, James Lovegrove and Robert Fillby have provided warm, unstinting and professional support that has made us a more effective team.

I look forward to continuing to contribute to the important work of Overview and Scrutiny, with full confidence in Cllr Clayden who takes on the Chair and the gavel for the next civic year.

Councillor Claire Winchester

Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 2025-26

1) Overview and Scrutiny at North Hertfordshire Council

a) The depth and breadth of the Council's work means that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must use its resources efficiently and effectively to scrutinise topics in the time available. It does so by:

- Considering a number of issues during its Committee meetings and making recommendations to Cabinet.
- Appointing dedicated task and finish groups which can examine issues in depth and make recommendations to improve services.
- Through briefings, verbal and written, provided to Members by Officers and Executive Members.

2) Methods of Scrutiny

a) The Committee can scrutinise issues in a number of ways:

- By considering reports from, and questioning officers and Executive Members about different aspects of the Council's business.
- By submitting written questions which require a written answer, and which members can follow up by asking supplementary questions in Committee.
- By interviewing and questioning Executive Members about their respective portfolios.
- By calling in decisions which are of great concern to members or to the public.
- By inviting representatives from outside bodies to talk about topics of interest to the public in North Hertfordshire.

3) Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

a) There were six scheduled meetings this year and all proceeded as planned, in person in the Council Chamber, making effective use of the facility for officer presentations to be delivered remotely.

b) There were no extraordinary meetings of the Committee this year.

c) The Committee has considered a range of topics including scrutinising key decisions going to Cabinet, checking whether the Council has met its performance indicators and reviewing other issues which the Committee has decided would benefit from closer scrutiny.

4) Scrutiny Charter

a) Following the Local Government Association Peer Review, a recommendation was made to develop and adopt a definition of what Scrutiny is at the Council.

b) The Charter has been developed alongside publications from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny which provides best practice for scrutiny committees.

c) The Scrutiny Charter was adopted unanimously at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 3 September 2024.

d) Members are reminded of the Scrutiny Charter at each meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny to ensure that the meeting is conducted with independence, initiative and integrity, and the Charter is made available in full on the Council's intranet pages for Members.

e) Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed here.

5) Call-In

a) The call-in process allows the Chair of the Committee, or five members of the Council, to call in a decision which is the responsibility of the Executive, which has been made but not implemented. The Committee can ask the Executive to reconsider the decision or can refer it to Council.

b) No items were Called In for civic year 2025-26.

6) Presentations by Executive Members

a) The Committee invites Executive Members to speak on their portfolios and to present reports from their relevant portfolio that were of interest to the Committee or to address specific issues.

b) Executive Members have taken leadership on presenting relevant reports to the Committee during this Civic Year, with Officer support being limited to answering specific or detailed questions.

c) Executive Members are also welcomed when attending meetings and encouraged to take part in the meeting when appropriate.

d) The Committee are grateful to the Executive Members for making presentations and attending meetings this year.

7) Crime & Disorder Scrutiny

a) The Committee is also the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee for North Hertfordshire which is required to meet at least once a year.

b) The Committee chose this year to invite Hertfordshire Constabulary to discuss Crime against the LGBTQ+ community and Cybercrime against elderly residents.

c) Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed here.

8) Safeguarding

a) The Committee continued to take a close interest in safeguarding matters and requested to receive its annual update on the Council's safeguarding performance in September 2025.

b) The report was postponed in order to carry out work to update the format of the report, revisions of the training offer for both staff and councillors and the monitoring of completion of both the in person training and e-learning module, and develop a safeguarding handbook and one page reference sheet for the making of referrals.

c) The updated report will be presented at Overview and Scrutiny in September 2026.

9) Statistics

a) In total, the Committee has considered 30 items at its meetings this year.

b) It has made 26 recommendations on 9 topics to Cabinet. At every meeting the Committee also considered the resolutions previously made, referrals onto Cabinet and their outcome and the work programme.

c) No written questions were submitted this year.

10) Task and Finish Groups

a) At its meeting on Tuesday 3 September 2024, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved that a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group should be established to investigate and ensure the Section 106 mechanism provides the best outcomes for communities in North Hertfordshire, prior to the adoption of the Local Plan.

b) Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed here.

c) The draft Section 106 scoping document was discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on Tuesday 12 November 2024.

d) Details of the meeting at which this items was presented can be viewed here.

e) Background training in Section 106 Obligations and Planning Enforcement was provided to all Councillors on Monday 13 January, which was followed by a background paper on Section 106 Obligations was provided to Councillors on Thursday 20 January 2025.

f) Group Leaders were asked to nominate members for the Task and Finish Group and 5 politically proportionate panel members were confirmed to undertake the investigation. These Members were Councillor Ruth Brown, Councillor Ian Mantle, Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason, Councillor Paul Ward, with Councillor Ralph Muncer elected as Chair of the Group.

g) The Panels first meeting was an informal meeting on Wednesday 30 April 2025, followed by its first formal meeting which took place on Wednesday 16 July 2025.

h) The Panel concluded its business at its final meeting on Thursday 29 January 2026.

i) Eight recommendations were identified as part of the Task and Finish group Consultation and presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on Tuesday 24th March 2026.

j) Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed here.

k) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended to cabinet to consider recommendations 1-8.

l) Cabinet considered recommendations 1-8 at their meeting on Tuesday 14th April 2026.

m) Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed here.

n) Cabinet tasked the Executive Member for Place and the Executive Member for Governance, together with relevant Officers, to further consider the recommendations and develop proposals for report to a future meeting of Cabinet.

o) The Scrutiny Officer is developing a form to receive feedback regarding the Task and Finish Process. This will be circulated to Panel members and Officers who took part or contributed to the Task and Finish Group. Output from the form will be utilised to develop the Task and Finish Group process.

11) Public Participation

a) The scrutiny process is open to involvement by local people and the Committee encourages public participation.

b) No members of the public attended the Committee's meetings to make presentations this year.

c) Although physical attendance at the actual meetings was extremely low, recordings of the meetings on YouTube have received a total of 750 views. The average view duration of a recording was 17 minutes 21 seconds.

Meeting	Views	Duration
10/06/25	111	08:25
09/09/25	140	31:18
11/11/25	114	15:44
06/01/26	135	13:07
03/02/26	107	16:43
24/03/26	143	18:54

d) Some of the ways for the public to get involved include suggesting a topic for investigation as a task and finish group; providing evidence to or at a meeting; and being co-opted on to a topic group. The Committee is keen to see more public participation both in its task and finish groups and in its committee meetings.

12) Call to Account

a) The Call to Account process allows Members to scrutinise and review decisions made or actions taken in connection with any Councils functions. Members may request for Cabinet, Head of Paid Service and/or any appropriate Officer to provide an explanation of any matters within their remit, including but not limited to, explanation of:

- any particular decision or series of decisions
- the extent to which the actions taken implement Council policy; and/or
- their performance

b) No Call to Accounts took place in Civic Year 25/26.

13) Further Information and Membership

a) Further information about the work of scrutiny and contact details can be found here

b) Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2025/2026:

Members of the Committee:	**Substitutes:**
Councillor Claire Winchester (Chair)	Councillor Caroline McDonnell
Councillor Jon Clayden (Vice-Chair)	Councillor Clare Strong
Councillor Cathy Brownjohn	Councillor Matt Barnes
Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason	Councillor Sam Collins
Councillor David Chalmers	Councillor Sarah Lucas
Councillor Dominic Griffiths	Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
Councillor Elizabeth Dennis	
Councillor Martin Prescott	
Councillor Paul Ward	
Councillor Ralph Muncer	
Councillor Sadie Billing	
Councillor Tina Bhartwas	

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COUNCIL
THURSDAY, 16 JULY 2026

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

TITLE OF REPORT: Churchgate Regeneration Project Update & Next Steps

REPORT OF: Director - Enterprise

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Executive Member - Enterprise

COUNCIL PRIORITY: Thriving Communities; Responsible Growth; Sustainability;

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the previous update to Members, further work has been undertaken to assess the viability, deliverability and regeneration potential of the Churchgate site. This report provides an update on that work and seeks approval for the additional funding required to support the next phase of the project.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 Council approves the additional capital/ revenue funding set out in the Part 2 report to support the single competitive procurement, comprising of two phases of a partner to assist the Council with the next stage of the Churchgate Regeneration Project.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 The Council has undertaken significant technical work, specialist studies and preliminary market engagement to inform the next stage of the Churchgate Regeneration Project.

3.2 The findings indicate that further feasibility, viability and delivery planning work is required before future decisions can be taken regarding the preferred delivery model and implementation of the regeneration proposals.

3.3 Approval is therefore sought for the additional funding required to undertake this next phase of work, enabling future decisions to be informed by robust technical, commercial and financial evidence.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1. The following alternative options were considered:

• Not progressing with further feasibility and delivery planning work. This option was discounted as the Council would not obtain the evidence required to inform future decisions regarding the regeneration of the site.

• Undertaking separate procurements for the feasibility phase and any subsequent delivery support. This option was considered but is not recommended as preliminary market engagement indicated that a single competitive procurement structured around phased gateway approvals are likely to provide greater continuity, reduce procurement duplication and maintain project momentum whilst preserving the Council's decision-making control.

• Delaying the project pending Local Government Reorganisation. This option was discounted as it would delay the development of the evidence base required to inform future decisions and may reduce the Council's ability to progress the regeneration project prior to local government transition.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

5.1 The Executive Member and Shadow Executive Member(s) have been kept regularly informed throughout the development of this proposal through Project Board meetings and scheduled Executive Member briefings. The project team also hosted three All Member Briefings during April and May 2026 to provide updates on project progress, emerging findings and next steps.

6. FORWARD PLAN

6.1 This report was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on the 15th May 2026.

7. BACKGROUND

7.1. The Churchgate Regeneration Zone (CRZ) represents one of the most significant long-term regeneration opportunities within Hitchin town centre. The site occupies a prominent and strategically important location adjoining the historic core, the River Hiz corridor and the existing market area.

7.2. The Churchgate area performs an important role within the town centre but also faces several long-standing challenges relating to asset condition, public realm quality, accessibility, connectivity, parking, market provision and the overall visitor experience.

7.3. Alongside these challenges, the site presents a significant opportunity to support the long-term vitality and sustainability of Hitchin town centre through investment in key assets, improved public realm, enhanced connectivity and better integration with the River Hiz corridor. The project also provides an opportunity to strengthen Hitchin's role as a destination, support a vibrant and modern market offer, introduce new homes and mixed-use activity within the town centre, and create a high-quality environment appropriate to a thriving 21st century market town. In doing so, the project also has the potential to deliver wider social and economic benefits through increased town centre activity, improved accessibility, new public spaces and a stronger sense of place for residents, businesses and visitors.

7.4. The Council acquired the Churchgate Shopping Centre leasehold in 2022 to support the long-term regeneration of this important town centre area, recognising that the current condition and configuration of the shopping centre are unlikely to provide a commercially sustainable long-term future.

7.5. The redevelopment of the site also presents an opportunity to deliver wider town centre benefits, including the revitalisation of the existing market area, improved public realm and green space, enhanced accessibility, new housing and flexible community uses.

7.6. In July 2025, the Council considered a range of potential development options in the context of challenging economic, commercial and political conditions affecting town centre regeneration and development viability nationally. A preferred mixed-use option incorporating commercial, residential and environmental benefits was identified as the most credible basis for further feasibility and viability testing. The preferred option included retention of St Mary's car park, consideration of a food store to support viability, provision of affordable housing where feasible, and wider public realm and community benefits.

7.7. Whilst the preferred option was considered to provide the strongest alignment with community aspirations and wider regeneration objectives, further work was identified as necessary to better understand viability, deliverability, development risk and delivery options before progressing to the next phase of the project.

7.8. Over the past year, the Council has undertaken an extensive programme of work to respond directly to key matters raised by Members and stakeholders, including viability, parking, public realm, market provision, delivery options, governance and long-term town centre sustainability. This has included financial analysis, specialist technical work, Project Board workshops and Member briefings.

7.9. This work has enabled the Council to move from high-level vision setting into a more informed, evidence-led and delivery-focused phase.

7.10. Alongside this, the Council has also undertaken early engagement with the development and investment sector to inform future procurement, delivery and partnership decisions. Feedback from this work has demonstrated strong market interest in Hitchin and increased confidence in both the credibility of the opportunity and the Council's commitment to delivering a high-quality regeneration programme for the town centre.

7.11. The recommendations within this report therefore represent a logical progression from the work completed to date and are intended to ensure that future decisions regarding the regeneration of the site are informed, evidence-led and commercially robust.

7.12. The proposed next stage of work is materially different from earlier strategic and visioning exercises. The Council is now seeking to appoint specialist regeneration and development expertise to work alongside the project team in refining a deliverable scheme, testing assumptions in greater detail, reducing uncertainty and supporting the transition from strategic visioning into delivery planning and implementation.

7.13. **Phased Single-stage Procurement Approach**

7.14. This phased approach enables the Council to retain control of the project as it develops, whilst ensuring that investment and risk remain proportionate to the level of certainty and information available at each stage.

7.15. The proposed next stage reflects the consistent feedback received through market engagement and specialist advice: that the appropriate next step is a structured feasibility and delivery-planning phase focused on shaping a viable, deliverable and investment-ready regeneration scheme for Hitchin town centre.

7.16. The Council is therefore developing a single competitive procurement, comprising of a two phased approach which provides continuity between feasibility and subsequent delivery support activities, whilst retaining clear decision gateways and strategic control.

7.17. **What the next Phase will deliver:**

7.18. The purpose of the next phase is to move the project from strategy and option testing into a more detailed delivery-planning stage. This work will build on the evidence gathered to date and provide the Council with a clearer understanding of what can realistically be delivered, how it can be delivered and what level of investment, risk and intervention may be required.

7.19. By the end of this phase, the Council will have:

- a more robust and tested development proposition;
- greater certainty regarding viability and deliverability;
- a clearer understanding of the preferred delivery and partnership approach;
- an evidence-based assessment of development risk and investment requirements;
- a refined programme and route to delivery; and
- a stronger basis for future decisions relating to procurement, investment and implementation.

7.20 This will enable future decisions to be taken based on detailed technical, commercial and financial evidence, reducing uncertainty and placing the Council in a stronger position as the project progresses.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

Following consideration of the July 2025 report, Cabinet concluded that further work should be undertaken to examine a number of key aspects of the preferred development option:

- Car parking strategy and capacity
- Market requirements and viability
- Community Space requirements
- Public Realm expectations and scope
- Planning and design parameters
- Development risk, return and delivery considerations
- Governance and preferred partnership approach

8.1. The following section provides an update on the work undertaken in response to these key matters and demonstrates how the project has progressed from high-level option testing into a more informed and evidence-led phase focused on deliverability, viability and implementation planning.

8.2. The Churchgate Project Board has been regularly consulted throughout the development of these workstreams.

8.3. **Car Parking Strategy:**
The Council appointed transport planning and infrastructure consultants (Markides) to review current parking provision, usage, demand and the scope to redevelop part of the Churchgate Regeneration Zone car parking, principally at Portmill Lane, without detrimental impact on wider town centre vitality and viability. The assessment concluded that Hitchin town centre generally has sufficient parking capacity to meet current and foreseeable demand, with pressure primarily limited to peak Saturday lunchtime periods. The work also identified a range of mitigation measures, including improved signage, parking management, pricing and operational changes, which could support more effective use of existing parking assets. This may also need to be considered alongside changing travel patterns and wider multi-modal transport objectives.

8.4. See Background Paper, ‘Churchgate Car Parking Assessment Findings, Markides, November 2025’.

8.5. **Market Requirements:**
The Council appointed Market Curators to advise on options for delivering a modern market offer capable of supporting both commercial viability and wider town centre activity.

8.6. A range of options were assessed, including open-air, covered and indoor market formats. Each was appraised using an assessment of initial capital costs, potential revenues and likely return periods. The work identified a modern indoor market and food hall-style concept as the strongest ongoing commercial option, offering opportunities for flexible day-to-evening use, enhanced activation of the market square and wider community use. Further due diligence will, however, be required in relation to operational arrangements and financial assumptions. This includes an assessment of the capital development cost with the income generated, and whether that provides a viable return on investment.

8.7. **Community Space Requirements:**
An assessment of existing community space provision within Hitchin has been undertaken. This work identified a broad range of existing spaces currently available across the town and did not identify a clear requirement for a standalone purpose-built community facility within the town centre. However, opportunities remain to incorporate flexible community uses within wider mixed-use or multifunctional spaces as part of any future regeneration proposals.

8.8. See Background Paper: ‘Community Provision Study, Leonard Design, November 2025’.

8.9. **Public Realm:**
The Council commissioned Leonard Design to explore options for delivering high-quality public realm improvements within the Churchgate area, including better integration with the River Hiz corridor and wider riverside walk proposals.

8.10. A range of design approaches and indicative cost options were prepared to help inform future design principles, public realm aspirations and budget considerations. Whilst the objective was not to fix the scheme design requirements, this work has assisted in establishing a clearer understanding of the scale and quality of the public realm which may be achievable as part of a future regeneration scheme.

8.11. See Background Paper: ‘Public Realm Assessment, Leonard Design, November 2025’.

8.12. **Planning and Design Parameters:**
Further design and massing work has been undertaken to better understand development constraints, site capacity and the potential scale and mix of development across the site, including the Portmill Lane car parks.

8.13. This work has helped refine the Council’s understanding of planning, heritage and viability considerations, including protected views, townscape impacts and the relationship with adjoining heritage assets, particularly St Mary’s Church. Please note that this assessment was carried out from the landowner perspective and therefore is not binding on the Council’s Local Planning Authority function.

8.14. See Background Paper ‘Churchgate Regeneration Zone Massing Diagrams’.

8.15. **Developer Brief and Governance:**
The Churchgate Project Board has undertaken a series of technical workshops examining potential delivery models, development risk, governance arrangements and the Council’s appetite for risk and return. This work has included engagement with other local authorities delivering similar mixed-use town centre regeneration schemes, alongside preliminary soft market testing with developers, investors, contractors and development managers.

8.16. The work undertaken has included consideration of a range of delivery approaches, including direct delivery and partnership models, together with the potential relationship between development risk, commercial return and the delivery of wider public realm and community benefits.

8.17. The feedback received consistently indicated that Hitchin is viewed as an attractive regeneration opportunity with strong underlying market interest. However, it also highlighted that the overall viability of the scheme remains finely balanced, and that further feasibility, due diligence and delivery planning work will be required before progressing towards any future delivery phase.

8.18. The soft market testing also reinforced the importance of identifying an appropriate commercial and partnership structure capable of supporting the Council’s wider regeneration ambitions whilst managing development risk appropriately.

8.19. See Background Paper ‘Churchgate Regeneration Zone - Soft Market Testing Brochure March 2026’.

8.20. Alongside this activity, the Council presented the opportunity at UKREiiF and subsequently commenced a Preliminary Market Engagement (PME) exercise to further test market appetite and inform the next stage of project development.

8.21. See Background Paper ‘NHDC01128038 - Churchgate Pre Market Engagement Questionnaire May 2025 and Hitchin Prospectus UKREiiF Breakfast Event, May 2026’

8.22. In parallel with this activity, the Council is developing the procurement strategy for the next stage of the project. Feedback received through the Preliminary Market Engagement exercise has indicated support for a single competitive procurement process structured around two distinct phases with a formal gateway between them.

This approach is intended to provide continuity throughout the development process, whilst ensuring that the Council retains appropriate governance, control and flexibility as the project progresses.

8.23. Under the proposed approach, the successful bidder would be appointed as the Council's regeneration partner through a single competitive procurement. The initial phase of the appointment would comprise of feasibility, viability, master-planning and delivery planning activities designed to refine the regeneration proposals, test commercial assumptions, assess development risk and inform the preferred delivery model. The scope of Stage 2 will be informed by the outputs of Stage 1, and determine whether the Council wishes to proceed onto Phase 2 or not. Phase 2 will include detailed development planning, delivery preparation, planning and consenting activities, development agreement support, implementation planning and other services required to support project delivery. Any progression beyond Phase 1 would remain subject to future Council approval, satisfactory performance of the appointed partner, confirmation of any necessary funding (i.e. setting a capital budget for the scheme) and compliance with the contractual gateway provisions established through the procurement.

8.24. Structuring the procurement in this way provides transparency to the market from the outset regarding the potential scope of the appointment, whilst avoiding unnecessary duplication of procurement activity should the Council determine that the project remains viable and appropriate to progress following completion of the feasibility phase. It also enables the Council to retain strategic oversight and decision-making at each key stage of the project. The procurement notices that will be required to be published will include an indication of the overall scheme value.

8.25. The Council is therefore seeking approval at this stage only for the funding required to undertake Phase 1 of the appointment. Approval of this report does not commit the Council to progressing to Phase 2, entering into a development agreement or implementing any regeneration scheme. Those matters will be the subject of separate reports and future Member decisions at the appropriate time. This approach mitigates against unnecessary expenditure if ultimately a viable and deliverable scheme cannot be identified.

8.26. See Background Paper 'Procurement Diagram' for a visual explanation of the above.

8.27. **Indicative Programme and Delivery Pathway**
The table below provides a high-level summary of the proposed next stages of the Churchgate Regeneration Zone project. It reflects the phased approach being taken by the Council to refine the emerging scheme, undertake further feasibility and delivery planning, and determine the most appropriate long-term delivery and partnership arrangements for the site.

8.28. The programme has been structured to ensure that future decisions are informed by robust technical, commercial and financial evidence, whilst enabling the Council to retain strategic oversight and manage risk proportionately as the project progresses.

8.29. The project team is aware of the potential implications of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and is actively factoring emerging governance requirements into programme planning and decision-making. The phased approach being adopted provides flexibility and clear decision points, enabling the Council to respond to future governance arrangements as relevant. Progressing this work now will also place the Council in a stronger position ahead of LGR, by reducing uncertainty and strengthening the evidence base for future decisions.

Mid 2026	**Mid-Late 2026**	**Late 2026-Early 2027**	**2027-2028**
Governance & Direction	(Phase 1) Partner Procurement for Feasibility Study	Delivery Planning Feasibility/De-risking Masterplanning & Concept Design (RIBA Stage 0-3) Viability Assessment Delivery Routes & Partnership Options Delivery Programme	(Phase 2, subject to gateway approval) Delivery route & long-term partner selection Detailed Masterplanning (RIBA Stage 4-6) Planning Strategy Development Agreement (pre-dvpt conditions, development obligations, 3rd Party agreements) Delivery & Implementation
Soft Market Testing Member engagement Pre-Market Engagement Cabinet/Council Approval	Competitive Procurement Partner Appointed	Feasibility/Delivery options tested Viability tested Development Agreement/Delivery Route tested	Planning Application Pre-Development & Mobilisation

8.30. **Procurement Approach**
As explained above, the procurement will be structured around two phases. Phase 1 will focus on feasibility, viability, deliverability and delivery planning, and Phase 2 will aim to provide detailed development planning, delivery preparation, planning and consenting activities, development agreement support, implementation planning and other services required to support project delivery. Any progression beyond Phase 1 will remain subject to future Member approval, satisfactory performance of the appointed partner, approval of any required funding and the contractual gateway arrangements established through

the procurement.

8.31. This approach reflects feedback received through the Preliminary Market Engagement exercise, which highlighted the importance of maintaining continuity and momentum whilst retaining appropriate governance, competition and Council control. Structuring the procurement in this manner provides transparency to the market regarding the potential scope of the appointment, maintains continuity throughout the project, avoids unnecessary duplication of procurement activity and enables the Council to retain strategic control through clearly defined decision gateways.

8.32. **Impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR):**
The Government is expected to announce decisions on future unitary structures before 16 July 2026 (meaning decisions would have been announced prior to the Full Council meeting taking place), with legal implementation following the approval of a Structural Changes Order (likely late 2026 or early 2027). Once in force, statutory Joint Committees - comprising County and District representatives - will be established to oversee LGR and prepare key governance frameworks. These Committees are advisory only and will cease when Shadow Authorities are formed. A voluntary Joint Committee may be established earlier, though no decision has been made yet

8.33. Elections to new Unitary Authorities are scheduled for May 2027. Newly elected Members will likely serve an initial five-year term, with the first year operating as a Shadow Authority alongside existing councils. Shadow Authorities will be decision making and will be tasked with agreeing the building blocks needed for running the new Unitary Authority (e.g.: constitution, code of conduct, interim statutory officer, budget for 2028/29 etc). A Section 24 direction will safeguard certain financial decisions by existing councils during this period, requiring Shadow Authority consent for significant transactions (e.g. major land disposals and high-value contracts). These controls are intended to protect the financial sustainability of the new authorities.

8.34. Routine operations are typically managed through “General Consent” arrangements. Given that the Churchgate project is a town centre regeneration scheme, irrespective of the route chosen for delivery one or more of the likely financial thresholds would be triggered and therefore any significant financial decisions between May 2027 and 31 March 2028 would require prior consent from the new Shadow Authority.

8.35. Overall, these arrangements should not present Members undue concern, and our aim is to continue to identify a viable and deliverable scheme for Churchgate that would also be viable and deliverable for the new Unitary Authority to proceed. Members are encouraged to ensure decisions taken now are sustainable and in the best long-term interests of the new council structures.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1. Under Section 4.3 of the Council’s Constitution, Full Council is responsible for approving the Council’s overall revenue and capital budgets and any changes to those budgets. Where additional funding is required beyond existing approved budgets, approval must therefore be obtained from Full Council.

9.2. The purpose of this report is to seek approval of the additional funding required to support the next phase of the Churchgate Regeneration Project, as detailed within the Part 2 report. Cabinet may make recommendations to Council in relation to budget matters in accordance with the Budget and Policy Framework Procedure Rules set out within Section 16 of the Constitution.

9.3. Subject to approval of the necessary funding, the Council intends to undertake a competitive procurement process in accordance with the Council's Contract Procurement Rules and all applicable procurement legislation. The procurement documentation will clearly define the scope of the phased appointment, the services to be delivered during each phase and the contractual gateway arrangements governing any progression beyond the initial feasibility phase.

9.4. Whilst the procurement is intended to cover both phases of the proposed appointment, this report seeks approval only for the funding required to undertake Phase 1. Any decision to progress beyond the initial phase, including approval of any development agreement, additional expenditure, land transaction or implementation of the regeneration scheme, will remain subject to future Member approval and the Council's constitutional decision-making requirements.

9.5. The Council has broad powers under section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 (the general power of competence) to undertake activities connected with the economic, social and environmental well-being of its area, including regeneration initiatives. The proposals contained within this report form part of the ongoing development and assessment of options for the regeneration of the Churchgate area and do not commit the Council to any future development scheme, delivery model or procurement outcome. Any future decisions relating to procurement, development agreements, land transactions or implementation of a regeneration scheme will be the subject of separate decision-making processes and reports as appropriate.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1. It is recognised that additional budget is required for this part of the project, and therefore this will be addressed within the Part 2 report.

10.2. This focus of this stage is feasibility, viability, deliverability and delivery planning. This means that it is revenue funding that is required. Future reports will focus on setting a capital budget for the scheme, subject to viability.

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. This project is closely monitored on the Council's Ideagen system and progress is reported via the Council Delivery Plan. The project team meet with the Performance & Risk Officer quarterly to reassess and discuss updates to the project. The levels of risk are assessed according to the project milestones and are reported to Committee regularly.

11.3. The reason for conducting the Pre-Market Engagement exercise is to derisk the project, ensuring that the Council are in control of the process and are appointing the most relevant developer to assist the team in the next phase. It will provide the Council with an important evidence base for future decisions and the next stage of work – a procurement strategy and scope of the next phase of feasibility work. The outcome will be robust evidence base and a clear recommendation on what can be delivered, how it can be delivered, and what the most appropriate route forward is within the constraints of the Council's risk appetite.

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.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. This report updates on the procurement approach to be followed. Depending on the value and scope of any procurement, Social Value will be considered and incorporated as relevant.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

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

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There are no known Human Resource impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 None.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 Development Principles, May 2025 – Page 541 of (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 16/06/2026 19:30

18.2 Churchgate Car Parking Assessment Findings, Markides, November 2025 – Page 656 of (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 16/06/2026 19:30

18.3 Community Provision Study, Leonard Design, November 2025 – Page 579 of (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 16/06/2026 19:30

18.4 Public Realm Assessment, Leonard Design, November 2025 – Page 621 of (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 16/06/2026 19:30

18.5 Churchgate Regeneration Zone Massing Diagrams – Page 675 of (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 16/06/2026 19:30

18.6 Churchgate Regeneration Zone Soft Market Testing Brochure, March 2026 – Page 677 of (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 16/06/2026 19:30

18.7 NHDC01128038 - Churchgate Pre Market Engagement Questionnaire, May 2025 – Page 683 of (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 16/06/2026 19:30

18.8 Hitchin Prospectus UKREiiF Breakfast Event, May 2026 – Page 693 of (Public Pack)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 16/06/2026 19:30

18.9 Procurement Diagram