

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2019 - 2020



Introduction by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

This is my first year as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and my first introduction to the Annual Report of the Committee.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members have taken a full, active and enthusiastic role in all of the meetings.

The role of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a critical friend is important to ensure good decision and policy making.

The reintroduction of Task and Finish Groups, with the Review of Hitchin Town Hall and District Museum demonstrated how the Committee can add value to the organisation and the decisions made, even if in retrospect.

In these times of financial constraint, commercialism is and will continue to be a major activity for the Council, The Committee has taken its first steps in reviewing the Council's plans in this area and must continue to do so throughout the coming years.

Cabinet have been receptive to the recommendations from this Committee and our aim should be to continue to be a critical friend to Cabinet by providing recommendations that are helpful, challenging and investigatory in the future.

The Peer Review carried out in January 2020 has provided some useful guidance for the future of the Committee including looking at not only what we consider, but how we do that

I would like to offer my thanks to the Committee for their support and engagement with the process and to the officers and Executive Members who attended to offer help with our deliberations.

I am extremely grateful for the support of Vice-Chair Kate Aspinwall and the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager, Hilary Dineen.

The Committee has many challenges ahead, which I am sure they will face with enthusiasm and good humour.

Councillor David Levett
Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Overview and Scrutiny in North Hertfordshire District Council

1.1 The depth and breadth of the Council's work means that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has to use its resources efficiently and effectively in order 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;

2. Methods of Scrutiny

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

- By considering reports from, and questioning officers 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 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

3.1 There were five scheduled meetings this year at which the Committee 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.

3.2 The meeting scheduled to take place in December 2019 was cancelled due to the snap General Election.

3.3 One special meeting was held on 23 October 2019 to consider the report of the Independent Chairman of the Review of Hitchin Town Hall and District Museum (see Section 9).

4. Call-In

4.1 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.

4.2 There have been no called in items this year.

5. Presentations by Executive Members

- 5.1 The Committee has continued with its decision not to invite Executive Members to speak on their portfolios on a rolling basis and to instead invite them only to address specific issues or to present reports that were of interest to the Committee.
- 5.2 Executive Members are also welcomed when attending meetings and encouraged to take part in the meeting when appropriate.
- 5.3 The Committee are grateful to the following Executive Members for making presentations and attending meetings this year:
 - Councillor Ian Albert;
 - Councillor Judi Billing;
 - Councillor Paul Clark;
 - Councillor Keith Hoskins;
 - Councillor Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg;
 - Councillor Martin Stears-Hanscomb

6. Crime & Disorder Scrutiny

- 6.1 The Committee is also the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee for North Hertfordshire which is required to meet at least once a year.
- 6.2 The Committee chose this year to consider the effects of knife crime and county lines on North Hertfordshire and was grateful to Chief Inspector Sally Phillips of Hertfordshire Constabulary who attended the Committee in January to talk about this aspect.

7. Safeguarding

- 7.1 The Committee continued to take a close interest in safeguarding matters and received its annual update on the Council's safeguarding performance in September 2019.
- 7.2 The Committee took an active role in encouraging Members to undertake relevant Safeguarding training.

8. Statistics

- 8.1 In total, the Committee has considered, 23 items in its scheduled meetings this year. It has made 5 recommendations on 4 topics to Cabinet. At every meeting the Committee also considered the resolutions previously made and the work programme.
- 8.2 The Committee also made 8 recommendations to Cabinet at the special meeting held on 23 October 2019. This was in addition to the 16 recommendations made by the Panel regarding the Review of Hitchin Town Hall and District Museum.
- 8.3 No written questions were submitted this year.

9. Task and Finish Groups in 2019/20

- 9.1 Task and finish groups are an opportunity for members to scrutinise a topic in much more depth than is possible in a single Committee meeting. They recommend improvements to the Council's performance which are then considered by Cabinet.
- 9.2 One Task and Finish Group, the Review of Hitchin Town Hall and District Museum Project took place in 2019/20.
- 9.3 It was agreed that an Independent Chairman would be appointed to this review, and following a selection procedure, Mr John Richardson was appointed to this position.
- 9.4 This was a detailed review that took place over several months and considered 14 written statements from witnesses and heard verbal evidence from 15 people over three days of public examination.
- 9.5 The Panel submitted a detailed report with 16 recommendations to a special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 23 October 2019 which was subsequently referred on to Cabinet together with an additional 8 recommendations from the Committee. All of these recommendations were accepted by Cabinet,
- 9.6 The Committee would like to thank the Independent Chairman and the Panel Members for their hard work and diligence during this difficult review.

Mr John Richardson (Independent Chairman);
Councillor Sam Collins;
Councillor Ian Moody;
Councillor Helen Oliver;
Councillor Valentine Shanley.

10. Future Task and Finish Groups

10.1 The Committee has prioritised the following topics for 2020/21:

- The Waste contract – Tender and Contract;
- The Waste Contract – Community Engagement.

10.2 Preparations for these Task and Finish Groups are underway.

11. Public Participation

- 11.1 The scrutiny process is open to involvement by local people and the Committee encourages public participation.
- 11.2 Approximately 28 members of the public attended the Committee's scheduled meetings this year.
- 11.3 There were an average of 18 members of the public at each of the three meetings of the Review of Hitchin Town Hall and District Museum.

11.4 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. Peer Review 2020

12.1 A peer review took place in January 2020.

12.2 They were asked to consider:

“How to conduct effective scrutiny with clear outcomes to benefit the political process.”

12.3 Their initial findings included:

- Executive Members should lead and be accountable for decisions;
- Meetings should be focused with fewer agenda items;
- Membership of the O&S committee is perceived to be too large;
- All scrutiny members to complete formal scrutiny training;
- Use the task and finish programme to support early involvement with policy making;
- Review finish time and location of the meeting;
- Clarify the governance arrangements between O&S and Cabinet Panels;
- Ensure forward work plan includes scrutiny of external partners and contractors.

13. Further Information and Membership

13.1 Further information about the work of scrutiny and contact details can be found at:

<https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-and-democracy/overview-and-scrutiny>

13.2 Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2019/20:

Members of the Committee

Councillor David Levett (Chair)	Councillor Gerald Morris
Councillor Kate Aspinwall (Vice-Chair)	Councillor Lisa Nash
Councillor Val Bryant	Councillor Sue Ngwala
Councillor Sam Collins	Councillor Helen Oliver
Councillor George Davies	Councillor Adem Ruggiero-Cakir
Councillor Terry Hone	Councillor Carol Stanier
Councillor Tony Hunter	Councillor Claire Strong
Councillor Jim McNally	Councillor Tom Tyson

Substitutes

Councillor Ruth Brown

Councillor Bill Davidson

Councillor Morgan Derbyshire

Councillor Simon Harwood

Councillor Ian Mantle

Councillor Sam North

Councillor Kay Tart