

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING
ON TUESDAY, 14TH JULY, 2020 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: David Levett (Chair), Kate Aspinwall (Vice-Chair), Val Bryant, Sam Collins, Terry Hone, Tony Hunter, Lisa Nash, Sue Ngwala, Adem Ruggiero-Cakir, Claire Strong and Tom Tyson*

In Attendance: *Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb (Leader of the Council), Anthony Roche (Managing Director), Ian Fullstone (Service Director - Regulatory), Jo Dufficy (Customer Services Manager), Sarah Kingsley (Communications Manager) and Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting Councillor Keith Hoskins.*

20 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Audio Recording – 6 seconds

The Chair welcomed everyone to this virtual Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online and advised that there was the opportunity for the public and press to listen and view proceedings.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager gave advice regarding the following:

Attendance

A roll call of Members and Officers was undertaken to ensure that they could hear and be heard.

Live Streaming

The meeting was being streamed live on the Council's You Tube channel. If live streaming failed the meeting would adjourn. If the live stream was unable to be restored within a reasonable period then the remaining business would be considered at later date.

If for any reason the meeting was not quorate an Officer would notify attendees by interjecting the meeting. The meeting would adjourn immediately. Once the meeting was quorate the meeting would resume. If connection could not be restored within a reasonable period, then the remaining business would be considered at a later date.

Only Members present for the entire debate and consideration of an item were entitled to vote. If technology fails for a Member during the debate and they rejoined the meeting, they would not be able to vote on that item.

If a Member dropped out of the meeting and was unable to connect an email had been sent to each Member with telephone options.

Noise interference

Electronic devices should be muted and all present should have the mute button on their tablet or computer activated when not speaking.

Rules of Debate

The raise hand button (located under participants) should be used to alert the Chair that you wish to speak. Please wait for the Chair to invite you to speak before doing so.

Voting

Voting would be undertaken using the Green tick for “Yes”, Red Cross for “No” and Blue Raise Hand for “abstain”, located in the participants section at the bottom of the screen. To enable the votes to be counted, votes should not be cleared until requested to do so.

Details of how Members voted will not be kept or minuted unless a Recorded Vote was requested or an individual requests that their vote be recorded, and it will not be heard or seen on the audio and YouTube recordings of the meeting.

The Chair, Councillor David Levett started the meeting proper.

21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 4 minutes 44 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jim McNally.

22 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 56 seconds

There was no other business notified.

23 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 5 minutes

- (1) The Chair welcomed everyone to this meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council policy this meeting was being audio recorded as well as filmed. The audio recordings would be available to view on Mod.gov and the film recording via the NHDC YouTube channel.
- (3) Members were reminded to make declarations of interest before an item, the detailed reminder about this and speaking rights was set out under Chair's Announcements on the agenda.

24 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 5 minutes 25 seconds

There were no presentations by members of the public.

25 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 28 seconds

The Chair advised that he had agreed, as Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, that an urgent report regarding Leisure Recovery following Covid-19 be considered by Cabinet.

26 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 51 seconds

Since the last meeting, no decisions had been called-in by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

27 PRESENTATION BY THE LEADER OF THE COUNCIL

Audio recording – 5 minutes 55 seconds

The Leader of the Council thanked the Chairman for the invitation to address the Committee and gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding progress in the last year, priorities going forward and responding to Covid-19 and drew attention to the following:

Progress in the last year

Highlights included that they had:

- Set out to be a more welcoming and inclusive Council;
- There was an effective joint administration of two parties;
- Included all Members, for example the workshop for the Council Plan;
- Overview and Scrutiny was an important critical friend to Cabinet;
- They had a positive partnership with Directors and staff;
- Turned around the Recycling and Waste performance and maintained the service to flats;
- Extended the reach of our community engagement including through expanded Town Talks and Community Surgeries;
- Continued work against modern slavery and around domestic abuse and safeguarding;
- Took seriously the Climate emergency and set up a Cabinet Panel which had made good progress drawing ideas from community;
- Instigated the Climate change Implementation Group to take ideas forward;
- Stepped up to needs of the pandemic and maintained services;
- Thank you to all our officers and staff.

Priorities going forward

- Continue the flexible response to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Review the Council Plan and Financial Strategy;
- Taking forward the Peer Challenge Action Plan;
- Look at ways to use technology where possible to do things differently;
- Working with Partners;
- Building back better with a green focus;
- Listening to our Black and Minority Ethnic staff to respond appropriately to Black Lives Matter;
- Get the NHDC Local Plan adopted;

- Working with other Districts and Boroughs in strategic planning;
- Supporting Strategic Planning in Northern E-W Corridor;
- Initiating Cabinet Panels on:
 - Community Engagement and Co-operative Development;
 - Housing and Strategic Planning.

Responding to Covid-19

- Holding weekly Leaders' online Meetings;
- Co-operating in Operation Shield and Sustain;
- Responded to the Government request to "do what it takes" and they will pay, although the payments will leave the Council short;
- LGA Surveys show that our residents value our response;
- Preparing for any local outbreaks;
- Reopening services whilst keeping safe
- Part of the Local Outbreak Plan Board which includes all District and Borough leaders
- Part of the Officers' Board and Environmental Health officers' group, which is led by Jim McManus – Director of Public Health

Latest data

- 236 Covid-19 cases in North Herts (26.2 per 10,000);
- 4,089 cases in Hertfordshire as a whole (34.4 per 10,000);
- 96 Covid-19 related deaths in North Herts (7.2 per 10,000);
- 1,055 deaths in Hertfordshire as a whole (8.9 per 10,000) being 51 in hospital, 40 in care homes and 5 in the community;
- NHDC was prepared for local outbreak;
- Provide a register of high-risk settings;
- NHDC to take part in contact tracing.

The following Members took part in the debate and asked questions:

- Councillor Sue Ngwala;
- Councillor Terry Hone;
- Councillor Tony Hunter;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor Sam Collins.

In response to questions the Leader of the Council advised that:

- As part of the Shaping Our Future programme, BAME staff would be asked to share their experience so that lessons could be learnt;
- Recruitment was anonymised up to interview stage;
- It was important to engage with all groups in the community;
- Worked hard to maintain as many services as possible whilst maintaining services and recompensed customers for the suspension of the brown bus service;
- Churchgate was on the agenda for the future;
- Currently share Building Control with other Districts and were always considering opportunities to work with other Districts;
- He was of the opinion that decisions regarding North Herts should remain in North Herts;
- There were many options for local government re-organisation and he would work hard to maintain the interests and safety of our residents.

The Deputy Chief Executive advised that:

- It took approximately 4 weeks to prepare the outside pools at a cost of £12,000. The daily cost per pool was £2,000 when open. If the pools had been kept in readiness to open the total costs would have been approximately £75,000 with no guarantee that they would be able to open;
- There would be a public announcement later in the week regarding protections being put in place in leisure centre to enable opening.

The Chair thanked the Leader of the Council for his presentation.

RESOLVED: That the Leader of the Council be requested to provide comparative National figures regarding Covid -19 to all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

28 RESOLUTIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Audio recording – 57 minutes 6 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager presented the report entitled Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and drew attention to the following:

- The resolutions marked as complete at the last meeting or duplicated had been removed;
- In respect of the Waste Task and Finish Group, the impact on all services of Covid-19 had resulted in a delay in the ability of officers to allocate time to draw up the scope;
- It was unlikely that this Task and Finish Group would take place until the Council was closer to a business as usual situation;
- A lot of thought was required regarding how to successfully engage with the community, particularly those who may not be familiar with IT;
- There was a possibility that the Local Plan examinations may take place remotely.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor David Levett.

In response to questions the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager advised that:

- The list of issues to be addressed at the Task and Finish Group on Waste was a starting point rather than an exhaustive list.

RESOLVED: That the report entitled Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review and comment on actions and feedback received regarding resolutions previously made.

29 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2020/21

Audio recording – 1 hour 2 minutes 56 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager presented the report entitled Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme together with the following appendices:

- Appendix A - Work Programme for Future Committee Meetings;
- Appendix B - Forward Plan for 26 June 2020;
- Appendix C - Corporate Peer Challenge Extracts from Action Plan.

She drew attention to the following:

- Appendix C was an extract from the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan of actions relating to Overview and Scrutiny;
- It was recommended that this extract is appended to the Work Programme report in future to:
 - Act as an aide memoire when considering the work programme;
 - Consider any actions that need further work;
 - Assess the effectiveness of changes made.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Claire Strong;

It was proposed that the Committee receive regular update regarding the Growth Board

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report entitled Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2020/21 be noted;
- (2) That the Committee consider the following items on the Forward Plan at the meeting due to be held on 8 September 2020:
 - Careline Future Provision;
 - Draft Design SPD;
- (3) That the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan Extract be appended to future work programme reports

REASON FOR DECISION: To allow the Committee to set a work programme which provides focussed Member oversight, encourages open debate and seeks to achieve service improvement through effective policy development and meaningful policy and service change.

30 THE COUNCIL'S PLAN FOR RECOVERY FOLLOWING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Audio recording – 1 hour 8 minutes 32 seconds

The Deputy Chief Executive gave a PowerPoint presentation regarding the Council's Plan for Recovery Following the Covid-19 Pandemic and drew attention to the following:

- The scale and nature of the had been unprecedented;
- That business as usual for our communities and the Council would not look the same in future;
- Business as usual was unlikely to be a smooth curve given the likelihood of second and perhaps third and fourth Covid-19 outbreaks requiring further periods of lockdown;
- Other external factors will affect the return to normal for example the EU Transition.

Countywide Emergency Response

- Was being led by Hertfordshire Local Resilience Forum (LRF), a partnership of over 60 organisations including the emergency services, local councils, health services and volunteers;
- The LRF linked to Central Government;
- There was a Countywide strategic recovery plan and the Chief Executive/Managing Director was the NHDC representative;
- They were petitioning Government for additional funding.

NHDC Emergency Response

- Full home working had been deployed within days, from 80 staff working from home pre Covid-19 to nearly 250 (275 max) post Covid-19;
- There had been development of paperless operations such as planning;
- Video conferencing and live streaming of council meetings had been introduced;
- There had been a 10% increase in benefits caseload;
- Business grants had been paid out as follows:
 - 2,004 business grants totalling £25.22m;
 - 213 discretionary business grants totalling £1.335m;
- All rough sleepers had been rehoused within the 24 hours notice given;
- 1,500 welfare calls had been made, 1,000 food parcels provided to local organisations and 7,000 letters sent by NHDC staff volunteers.

NHDC Recovery Response (so far)

- The focus was on resuming service delivery, in partnership with contractors where required;
- NHDC was working with partners to develop recovery plans such as SLL and leisure;
- Plans were being developed for re-opening DCO when appropriate;
- The North Herts Museum reopened on 4 July 2020;
- NHDC had worked closely with Hitchin Market to enable them to reopen on 2 June 2020;
- NHDC had worked with other authorities across the county, to develop approaches and with HCC to reopen high streets;
- A Local Outbreak Plan was in place.

Next Step - Recovery Plan Governance

- It had been agreed that a Recovery Plan Project Board would be instigated to;
 - Oversee and monitor delivery of the Recovery Plan;
 - Act on behalf of the Council to provide the necessary strategic guidance and direction;
 - Ensure effective project management arrangements are in place;
 - Ensure there was an effective risk management system in place and consider on-going risks;
 - Ensure sufficient and effective use of resources;
 - Ensure collaboration and integration, where appropriate, with other public and private sector recovery plans;
 - Advise on Member engagement as appropriate;
 - Have input to reports and present to appropriate committees.

Ideas for Building Back Better

- This time of disruption was being used to test and trial new and innovative ways of doing things;
- Recognise the community groups and look to their future;
- Get applications ready for central government funding opportunities;
- Recognise areas of opportunity and commercial growth;
- Recognise our role, less bureaucracy, off-setting of fees and charges;
- Get people back into the towns and establish confidence;
- Re-imagine the high street and set up 'meanwhile uses';
- Re-think economic growth, recognise that Business as Usual will be different for everyone.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Sam Collins;
- Councillor Terry Hone;
- Councillor Claire Strong.

In response to questions the Deputy Chief Executive advised that:

- A survey would be sent to all staff regarding their experiences working at home during the pandemic;
- If the number of people working from home could be increased it could potentially free up a floor of the building to let out or use for community or other use;
- The approach to homeworking has been to work with the staff rather than impose it on people;
- The amount of household waste was being monitored in light of more people working from home;
- The Licensing and Environmental Health Teams had been visiting premises who were selling take away alcohol. There was little that the Council could do about people who were drinking outside of licensed premises.

The Service Director – Regulatory advised that:

- At the end of January there were 93 people in temporary accommodation;
- Over lockdown there were approximately 15 more homeless clients than usual;
- The Government announced that night shelters should close and this involved helping a further 16 people;
- Whilst waiting for the Housing and Planning Bill to be passed by Government, it was for the District Council to make decisions regarding the use of tables and chairs and this would be in liaison with Hertfordshire County Council colleagues where it involved the highway and taking into account social distancing guidelines;
- The Council was looking at pedestrianisation opportunities;
- In respect of use of parking bays the Council was balancing priorities including disability bays, loading bays, social distancing and the needs of the businesses.

The Chair thanked the Deputy Chief Executive and Service Director – Regulatory for the presentation.

NB at 9.33pm the Chair announced that there would be a short comfort break. The meeting resumed at 9.41pm.

31 FULL YEAR UPDATE ON COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3CS)

Audio Recording – 2 hours 12 minutes 4 seconds

The Leader of the Council presented the information note entitled Full Year Update on Comments, Compliments and Complaints together with the following appendices:

- Appendix A – Dashboard;
- Appendix B - Breakdown by Service Area;
- Appendix C - Social Media Report.

He drew attention to the following:

- This was the full year update up to 31 March 2020;
- There had been a reduction in the number of 3Cs received compared to the previous year;
- 80 percent of complaints and 74 percent of compliments related to services delivered by contractors;
- It was important to listen to and learn from the feedback from customers;
- There were 16 stage 2 complaints received, 10 complaints were escalated to the ombudsman of which one was upheld.
- 74 percent of complaints were resolved within 10 days;
- It should be noted that the number of contacts was very high, however the number of these resulting in a complaint was very low;
- In respect of social media, most engagement was through Facebook and it was clear that this method should be the priority for communicating in a crisis.

The following Members asked questions and took part in the debate:

- Councillor David Levett;

In response to questions the Customer Services Manager advised that:

- The number of contacts relating to Urbaser related to the number of collections made;
- The number of contacts regarding leisure centres related to the number of visits;
- Compliment and complaint machines had been installed in leisure centres which had resulted in higher numbers of 3Cs.

RESOLVED: That the information note entitled Full Year Update on Comments, Compliments and Complaints be noted.

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep the Overview and Scrutiny Committee updated regarding Compliments, Comments and Complaints received regarding NHDC and its contractors.

32 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2019/20

Audio recording – 2 hours 11 minutes 30 seconds

The Chair advised that, due to the time, he would ask that Members consider the draft Annual Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2019//20 outside of the meeting and contact him with any suggested amendments.

The Annual Report would be presented to Council in September 2020.

33 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 2 hours 23 minutes 19 seconds

No questions had been submitted.

The meeting closed at 9.55 pm

Chair