

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



DRAFT

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2020/2021



Introduction by the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

I have had the pleasure of chairing the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the second year in 2020/21.

This has been a difficult year for everyone. The Covid-19 Pandemic has had an enormous effect on everyone's lives. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been affected, as have all of the business of the Council.

We held our first virtual Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 16 June 2020 and the transition, although cumbersome in the early days, has been relatively smooth.

Following the recommendations of the Peer Review the number of Members on the Committee was reduced from 16 to 12 at Annual Council on 4 June 2020. These Members have continued to take a full, active and enthusiastic role in all of the virtual meetings.

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

I would like to acknowledge the work of Council Officers during a very difficult year, they have not only maintained essential services, but have volunteered for additional Covid related activities from delivering food parcels to supporting the NHS.

In these times of financial constraint, commercialism continues to be a major consideration for the Council and the Committee is receiving twice yearly reports from the Service Director – Commercial, although we acknowledge that, commercialism has taken a side step during the pandemic.

Cabinet have continued to be 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.

The Peer Review carried out in January 2020 provided some useful guidance for the future of the Committee including looking at not only what we consider, but how we do that. These recommendations are reviewed by the Committee on a regular basis.

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, the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager, Hilary Dineen, who undertakes the role of Scrutiny Officer and the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer, Anna Gouveia, who clerks this Committee.

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 six scheduled meetings this year, although the pandemic did result in cancellation and postponements

3.2 There was, early in the pandemic, one innovative "meeting" where the views of the Committee were sought via email. This ensured that the work of the Committee could continue in those particularly difficult early days of the pandemic.

3.3 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. 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 invite the Chief Inspector , Hertfordshire Constabulary to discuss:
- Policing during the pandemic;
 - Anti-social behaviour and crime during the pandemic
 - Domestic abuse during the pandemic;

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, XX items in its scheduled meetings this year. It has made X recommendations on X topics to Cabinet. At every meeting the Committee also considered the resolutions previously made and the work programme.
- 8.2 No written questions were submitted this year.

9. Task and Finish Groups

- 9.1 Due the pressures placed on officers to keep services operational during this difficult time as well as the additional work they have been undertaking to support the community, it was not possible to allocate the officer time required to undertake successful Task and Finish Group Reviews.
- 9.2 Members and Officers alike also had to adapt to new ways of working including all meetings being moved to Zoom, with all of the technological challenges that presented
- 9.3 The Committee has prioritised the following topics for 2021/22:
- The Waste contract – Tender and Contract;
 - The Waste Contract – Community Engagement.

10. Public Participation

- 10.1 The scrutiny process is open to involvement by local people and the Committee encourages public participation.
- 10.2 Approximately X members of the public attended the Committee's scheduled meetings this year.
- 10.3 Although attendance at the actual meetings was extremely low, it was pleasing to not that X people viewed the meetings live and X viewed the recording of the meetings at a later date
- 10.4 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.

11. Peer Review 2020

- 11.1 A peer review took place in January 2020.
- 11.2 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.
- 11.3 The Committee reviews these recommendations at each meeting and considers what has been complete and what actions could be taken in order to work towards those recommendations not yet complete

12. Further Information and Membership

12.1 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>

12.2 Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2020/2021:

Members of the Committee

Councillor David Levett (Chair)
Councillor Kate Aspinwall (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Val Bryant
Councillor Sam Collins
Councillor Terry Hone
Councillor Tony Hunter

Councillor Jim McNally
Councillor Lisa Nash
Councillor Sue Ngwala
Councillor Adem Ruggiero-Cakir
Councillor Claire Strong
Councillor Tom Tyson

Substitutes:

Councillor Clare Billing
Councillor Ruth Brown
Councillor Bill Davidson
Councillor Morgan Derbyshire

Councillor Gerald Morris
Councillor Sam North
Councillor Helen Oliver