

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH
ON TUESDAY, 13TH JULY, 2021 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: David Levett (Chair), Kate Aspinwall, Tony Hunter, Ian Moody, Lisa Nash, Sue Ngwala, Carol Stanier, Claire Strong, Clare Billing (In place of Nigel Mason) and Terry Hone (In place of Jim McNally)*

In Attendance: *Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community), Helen Rae (Community Health and Wellbeing Team Leader), Reuben Ayavoo (Policy and Community Engagement Manager), Chris Jeffery (Interim Customer Service Manager), Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and Anna Gouveia (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

18 WELCOME

Audio recording – 20 seconds

The Chair welcomed everyone to this Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting that was being held in the Council Chamber and advised that the meeting was being streamed live on the Council's YouTube channel and some Officers were joining online.

The Chair invited the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer to explain how proceedings would work.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer undertook a roll call of those officers joining the meeting online to ensure that they could hear and be heard and gave advice regarding the following:

- Rules of Debate;
- Voting; and
- Covid Risk Assessment Measures.

The Chair, Councillor David Levett, started the meeting proper.

19 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 2 minutes 9 seconds

Apologies for absence had been received from Councillors Nigel Mason, Jim McNally, Daniel Allen and Terry Tyler.

Having given due notice, Councillor Clare Billing advised that she would be substituting for Councillor Nigel Mason and Councillor Terry Hone advised that he would be substituting for Councillor Jim McNally.

20 MINUTES - 9 MARCH 2021

Audio Recording – 2 minutes 34 seconds

It was proposed by Councillor David Levett, seconded by Councillor Terry Hone and upon being put to the vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 9 March 2021 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

21 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 23 seconds

There was no other business notified.

22 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 27 seconds

- (1) The Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting was being audio recorded as well as filmed. The audio recording would be available on the Council's website and the film recording via the NHDC YouTube channel;
- (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 noted that this would be Hilary Dineen's last meeting as she was retiring in August and he thanked her again for all her hard work for the Committee.

23 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 4 minutes 14 seconds

There were no presentations by members of the public.

24 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 16 seconds

No urgent or general exception items had been received.

25 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 21 seconds.

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

26 RESOLUTIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Audio recording – 4 minutes 24 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager presented the report entitled Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and advised of one update as follows:

- Cabinet had considered the Community Lottery – New Policies item on 29 June and decided to postpone its decision on the recommendation to its next meeting on 20 July 2021, following which an update would be provided to the Committee.

Councillor David Levett proposed, Councillor Claire Strong seconded and upon being put to the vote it was:

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.

27 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Audio recording – 5 minutes 37 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;
- Appendix B - Forward Plan - 22 June 2021;
- Appendix C - Corporate Peer Challenge Extracts from Action Plan.

She drew attention to the following:

- settle had been invited to attend the next meeting but no response had yet been received, so she undertook to make enquiries to check the appropriate contact;
- In relation to the discussion on the recovery of Town Centres, Members were requested to email Committee Services with anyone they would like to attend this meeting;
- The Annual Review of Safeguarding was listed on the work programme for December but was coming to this meeting;
- The Crime and Disorder meeting was taking place in January 2022, and Members were requested to consider what they would like to discuss so that invitations to the Police and relevant parties could be sent out;
- The Forward Plan was attached at Appendix B and the only item which could be considered by the Committee was the Customer Service Strategy which was already on the Work Programme.

Councillor David Levett proposed, Councillor Ian Moody seconded and it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the report entitled Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2021/22 be noted;
- (2) That the recommendations of the Corporate Peer Challenge Action Plan be noted.

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.

28 ANNUAL SAFEGUARDING REPORT 20/2021

Audio recording 8 minutes 19 seconds

The Executive Member for Community Engagement introduced the report entitled Annual Safeguarding Report 20/2021.

She drew attention to the following:

- The Covid-19 pandemic had had a tremendous impact on the number of safeguarding cases of concern;
- In some significant areas the number of referrals had doubled, or more than doubled over the last year, e.g. domestic abuse referrals;
- Regular meetings to consider the situation had been held with the Police and Crime Commissioner and counterparts across the County throughout the pandemic.

The following Members asked questions and took part in debate:

- Councillor Clare Billing;
- Councillor Terry Hone;
- Councillor Tony Hunter;
- Councillor Kate Aspinwall;
- Councillor David Levett.

Comments included:

- Lockdown and the pandemic had increased mental health issues amongst many people and this was not likely to get any better in the short term;
- SADA did an outstanding job and it was good to hear NHDC was supporting them;
- Last time the report had been presented in December, lower reporting levels had been seen due to lockdown;
- Thanks were conveyed to officers for managing the changes brought about by the pandemic. The next 6 to 9 months would be pivotal and the level of referrals was uncertain so the Council would need to be ready to act quickly and flex resources as necessary;
- Safeguarding was acknowledged as being important to the community's recovery from Covid.

The Executive Member for Community Engagement responded to questions and comments as follows:

- NHDC has worked closely with and supported Stevenage Against Domestic Abuse (SADA).

The Community Health and Wellbeing Team Leader responded to questions and comments as follows:

- There were a variety of mental health services which vulnerable people in the community could be referred to, depending on their level of need, from psychiatric support to GPs and charities such as Mind;

- NHDC had carried out a successful pilot with SADA in 19/20 in which they picked up all the domestic abuse cases which were originating from the housing team and they were now taking domestic abuse cases from across the authority;
- NHDC had provided financial support for welfare packs;
- NHDC was trialling using SADA to support with modern day slavery cases;
- A number of teams across NHDC had become busier with the increase in referrals;
- Putting SADA in place had hugely increased case management and meant that NHDC had dedicated people managing cases, rather than teams such as housing having to manage alongside their other work;
- Reporting levels were still relatively low but these were expected to increase as more face-to-face meetings took place as lockdown was eased.

The Service Director – Legal and Community drew attention to potential funding from MHCLG which might be available for high level intervention pilots, following the Domestic Abuse Act which came into force in April 2021.

Councillor David Levett proposed, Councillor Kate Aspinwall seconded, and it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the annual report of progress made against the Council's fulfilment of the statutory duty to maintain an effective safeguarding function with regard to children be noted;
- (2) That the annual report of progress made against the Council's fulfilment of the statutory duty to maintain an effective safeguarding function with regard to adults at risk and the Authority's duties in relation to specific areas such as Prevent and counter terrorism, modern slavery and human trafficking and domestic abuse be noted;
- (3) That it be agreed that sufficient and robust processes are in place at NHDC for application and review of safeguarding processes, and that an annual review and presentation to this Committee should continue.

REASON FOR DECISION: To fulfil the statutory and lawful obligations within the approved budget and officer resources, and to ensure that a regular corporate review exists.

29 COMMUNITY GRANTS POLICY REVIEW, NHDC FUNDING CRITERIA HEALTH PROTECTION BOARD COMMUNITY USE, & REVIEW OF CABINET PANELS' TERM OF REFERENCE

Audio recording 27 minutes 40 seconds

The Executive Member for Community Engagement introduced the report entitled Community Grants Policy Review, NHDC Funding Criteria Health Protection Board Community Use, and Review of Cabinet Panels' Terms of Reference, together with the following appendices:

- Appendix A – Community Grants Criteria 2021
- Appendix B – NHDC-HPB Funding Protocol
- Appendix C – Terms of Reference of Community Grants Panel
- Appendix D – Cabinet Panel on Environment Terms of Reference
- Appendix E – Cabinet Panel Community Terms of Reference
- Appendix F – Cabinet Panel on Place Terms of Reference

She drew attention to the following:

- A review of the grants policy had been a priority since May 2019, with the aim of making it user-friendly and accessible while at the same time rigorous;

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- The nature of the way grants were distributed had changed during the pandemic as they became necessary for the survival of organisations as well as for community projects;
- Health Protection Board funding of £100,000 had been provided and a protocol for its distribution was proposed in Appendix B to the report;
- It was proposed that the District Wide Community Facilities Capital and Revenue Grants Panel Terms of Reference be updated to enable it to consider the NHDC/HPB funding applications and make recommendations to the Executive Member for Community Engagement;
- Amendments to the Grants Policy were being proposed to ensure that the demonstration of financial need was as rigorous as possible without being unfriendly or inaccessible, and to ensure that organisations were looking at a range of different funding sources in addition to NHDC.

The Service Director – Legal and Community drew attention to the following:

- Changes to the Terms of Reference of the Cabinet Panels were proposed to reflect the new portfolios and simplify the titles to 'Environment', 'Community' and 'Place';

The following Members asked questions and took part in debate:

- Councillor Carol Stanier;
- Councillor Tony Hunter;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Lisa Nash;
- Councillor Claire Strong.

Comments raised by Members included:

- NHDC had reviewed the grants policy initially to make it easier and clearer to apply for money via the grants system, but the proposed changes seemed to represent a significant tightening of the criteria;
- The wording of the proposed revision at Paragraph F should be re-considered as it appeared to exclude parish and town councils who could raise their precept;
- The comment at 8.2 which stated: 'Some organisations are able to raise funds through precepts, levies or other fund-raising activities', should be removed as it seemed to exclude parish and town councils;
- Cabinet could also be requested to consider removing the condition in the Community Grants Policy (2.1 A) - List of organisations eligible to apply for grants - referring to Parish, Town and Community Councils which stated 'on condition that the funding is for something that provides Additionality', as this could be interpreted as limiting applications from parish and town councils.

The Executive Member for Community Engagement responded to comments and questions as follows:

- During the pandemic, some organisations had been doing similar work, and so the additional benefit criteria was included to ensure grant applications were considered alongside existing provision by other organisations doing similar work, for example food provision;
- Discussions on how grant applications met the criteria would continue to take place between the Community Engagement Team, Members and the Area Committees;
- There was no intention to exclude parish councils.

The Policy and Community Engagement Manager drew attention to the following:

- The revisions were being proposed to make the most of the funding to stretch it further and make a real difference to those communities that had the greatest need;

- The revisions would enable a rigorous assessment of applications before taking them to Area Committees or District Panels but were not intended to be a barrier to accessing funding.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That the revision of the Grant Policy criteria as set out under section Two for eligibility of organisation (Appendix A) be reconsidered, with the view that Cabinet does not take forward the amendment to Paragraph F.
- (2) That the wording of the following revision of the Grant Policy criteria as set out under section Two for eligibility of organisation (Appendix A) for approval be reconsidered so that it is made clear that Parish, Town and Community Councils may continue to apply for grant funding and that the definition of 'Additionality' be made more clear:

Paragraph A Final Bullet Point - Parish, Town and Community Councils (on condition that the funding is for something that provides Additionality)

- That the definition of 'Additionality', as detailed in Paragraph G, be included in this bullet point.

Paragraph G – 'be able to demonstrate the award of the grant provides 'Additionality' to the service provision of the organisation (i.e. is innovative in nature and beyond the normal scope of the organisation's current activities):

- That the definition of 'Additionality' include clarification as to whether the provision of more of a service already provided would be eligible.

- (3) That Cabinet be requested to take into consideration all the comments made by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as listed in the Minutes of its meeting of 15 July 2021, before making its final decision on the revisions to the Grant Policy criteria;
- (4) That the Protocol for the NHDC / Health Protection Board Funding (Appendix B) and be requested to approve the amendments to the District Wide Community Facilities Capital & Revenue Grants Panel (Appendix C) be approved, and;
- (5) That the proposed amendments to the Cabinet Panels' Terms of Reference (Appendices D, E & F) be approved.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to comment on the report entitled Community Grants Policy Review, NHDC Funding Criteria Health Protection Board Community Use, and Review of Cabinet Panels' Terms of Reference prior to consideration by Cabinet.

30 FULL YEAR UPDATE ON COMPLIMENTS, COMMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3Cs) 2020-2021

Audio recording 48 minutes 55 seconds

The Leader of the Council introduced the Information Note entitled Full Year Update on Compliments, Comments and Complaints (3Cs) 2020-21, together with the following appendices:

- Appendix A – 3Cs Dashboard 2020 – 2021;
- Appendix B – Breakdown by Service Apr – Mar 2021;
- Appendix C.1 – Social Media Report Apr – Mar 2021 Key Points;
- Appendix C.2 – Social Media Report Apr – Mar 2021.

She drew attention to the following:

- There had been an overall decrease in comments and complaints, and an increase in compliments, in comparison to the previous year;
- It was acknowledged that the Covid-19 pandemic had impacted on the number of 3Cs received, particularly as some services such as the leisure centre had been closed for a time;
- The percentage of complaints resolved within 10 days had met the target of 80%;
- A total of 8 complaints had been referred to and resolved by the Local Government Ombudsman, with one upheld but no further action had been required.

The following Members took part in discussion:

- Councillor Claire Strong;
- Councillor David Levett.

Comments included:

- The Information Note should record the fact that 3Cs numbers were significantly down on the previous year due to the unusual circumstances of the Covid-19 pandemic, including the fact that some services had been closed for part of the year.

Councillor David Levett proposed, Councillor Terry Hone seconded, and it was:

RESOLVED: That the Information Note entitled Full Year Update on Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3Cs) and appendices be noted.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To update the Committee on the full year (2020/21) performance regarding the Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3Cs) received for the Council and the Contractors that provide services on the Council's behalf.

31 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 53 minutes 55 seconds

No questions had been submitted.

The meeting closed at 8.54 pm

Chair