



**North
Herts**
Council

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT
2021/2022**

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 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 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 and all proceeded as planned, in person in the Council Chamber, making effective use of the facility for officer presentations to be delivered remotely.

3.2 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 Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg;
 - Councillor Sam Collins;
 - Councillor Judi Billing;

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 Sarah Pateman, Survivors Against Domestic Abuse to discuss:
 - The aims of the SADA service;
 - Training delivered to North Herts Council staff;
 - New refuge facilities
 - Referral statistics including detailed data from North Hertfordshire;
 - A Perpetrator support and rehabilitation programme

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 July 2021
- 7.2 The Committee took a particular interest in mental health, domestic abuse and related issues arising in connection with the pandemic, and praised the Council's work in partnership with local organisations to offer support to residents.

8. Statistics

- 8.1 In total, the Committee has considered 34 items at its scheduled meetings this year.
- 8.2 It has made 10 recommendations on 4 topics to Cabinet and 1 recommendation to Full Council. At every meeting the Committee also considered the resolutions previously made and the work programme.
- 8.3 No written questions were submitted this year.

9. Task and Finish Groups

- 9.1 The ongoing resource implications of the pandemic and recent staffing changes has meant it was not possible to allocate the officer time required to undertake successful Task and Finish Group Reviews, and owing to the length of time between the completion of those Task and Finish Groups and any proposed review it was not deemed a priority project.
- 9.2 Proposals for new Task and Finish Groups on topics including Communication and Engagement and the Waste Contract have been reviewed, in light of the continued pressures of COVID-19 and legal uncertainty around remote meetings regulations and work from home orders as they relate to Task and Finish Groups, and alternative avenues to progress these topics in 2022/23 are being considered.

10. Public Participation

- 10.1 The scrutiny process is open to involvement by local people and the Committee encourages public participation.
- 10.2 Three members of the public attended the Committee's scheduled meetings to make presentations this year.
- 10.3 Although attendance at the actual meetings was extremely low, recordings of the meetings on YouTube have received a total of 334 views, with an mean average of 21 viewers watching live or on the day of the meeting. The average view duration of a recording was 12 minutes 14 seconds.
- 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 2021/2022:

Members of the Committee:

Councillor David Levett (Chair)
Councillor Daniel Allen (Vice
Chair)
Councillor Kate Aspinwall
Councillor Mike Hughson
Councillor Tony Hunter
Councillor Nigel Mason

Councillor Jim McNally
Councillor Ian Moody
Councillor Lisa Nash
Councillor Carol Stanier
Councillor Claire Strong
Councillor Terry Tyler

Substitutes:

Councillor Clare Billing
Councillor Morgan Derbyshire
Councillor Terry Hone

Councillor Gerald Morris
Councillor Sam North
Councillor Kay Tart