



**North
Herts**
Council

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT
2022/2023**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair's Foreword

Firstly, I wish to thank all those members who served on the Committee this year, those officers involved in the preparation and support of our meetings and also to everyone else who made presentations to the Committee, presented reports or just came to observe.

The early part of the year was difficult due to a lack of resources to do everything we wished which was reflected in the comments of the Peer Review and has now been addressed in the action plan with a dedicated scrutiny officer being put into place which will hopefully enable the Committee to be more effective in the future.

For the first time O&S used its ability to have a "call to account" to address the issues and concerns raised relating to the Lord Lister hotel which was quite effective.

The Overview & Scrutiny function of Council should not be overlooked as acting as a 'critical friend' to the administration and we have been developing this aspect over the last couple of years.

With the changes to procedure over the last couple of years and the adoption of most of the recommendations of the Peer review adopted in an action plan I decided that it was time to hand over the reins to a new Chair to take the Committee forward and build on the progress we have made and have a fresh pair of eyes look at the way the Committee operates.

Thanks again to all those who I have worked with over the last few years as Chair of Overview and Scrutiny and wish you all the best for the future.

Cllr. David Levett
Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

1. Overview and Scrutiny at North Hertfordshire Council

1.1 The depth and breadth of the Council's work means that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must 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 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 respective 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 There was one extraordinary meeting of the Committee this year.

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 in general 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. The exception to this has been the Executive Member for Enterprise and Arts, who has attended on a rolling basis to provide an Enterprise Update since June 2022.
- 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 Executive Members for making presentations and attending meetings this year.

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 Hertfordshire Constabulary and North Herts Citizens Advice to discuss:
 - Anti-social behaviour in town centres.
 - The reporting and monitoring process behind anti-social behaviour issues.
 - Safe walking for women and girls.
 - Scams, with a focus on telephone scamming.

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 2022.

8. Statistics

- 8.1 In total, the Committee has considered 54 items at its scheduled meetings this year.
- 8.2 It has made 23 recommendations on 9 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 Ongoing resource implications because of staffing changes to the Committee Services Team had meant it was not possible to allocate the officer time required to undertake successful Task and Finish Group on Communication.

- 9.2 An email was sent to Group Leaders in December 2022 to request nominations for Members of the Task and Finish Group. As of March 2023, no nominations to the group have been received. Therefore, this will be retained on the Work Programme of the Committee and will be approached again in the 2023/24 Civic Year.

10. Public Participation

- 10.1 The scrutiny process is open to involvement by local people and the Committee encourages public participation.
- 10.2 Six members of the public attended the Committee's meetings to make presentations this year.
- 10.3 Although physical attendance at the actual meetings was extremely low, recordings of the meetings on YouTube have received a total of 392 views, with a mean average of 22 viewers watching live or on the day of the meeting. The average view duration of a recording was 11 minutes 53 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 2022

- 11.1 Until the new year the Committee had reviewed the recommendations made in the previous 2020 Peer Review at each meeting, to consider which had been completed and what actions could be taken in order to work towards those recommendations not yet complete. As the 2020 Peer Review had been completed since, this consideration had been removed from the agenda at the request of the Chair. The subsequent report from the Peers will be reviewed together with the action plan and considered and monitored by the Committee during 2023-24.
- 11.2 The updated Peer Review has not been presented to the Committee in the Civic Year 2022/23 and shall be brought for consideration and comments to the meeting in June 2023.

12. Further Information and Membership

12.1 Further information about the work of scrutiny and contact details can be found here: [Overview and Scrutiny | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/scrutiny)

12.2 Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2022/2023:

Members of the Committee:

Councillor David Levett (Chair)

Councillor Val Bryant (Vice
Chair)

Councillor Adam Compton

Councillor Alistair Willoughby

Councillor Carol Stanier

Councillor Claire Strong

Councillor Ian Moody

Councillor Nigel Mason

Councillor Phil Weeder

Councillor Raj Bhakar

Councillor Tamsin Thomas

Councillor Tony Hunter

Substitutes:

Councillor Lisa Nash

Councillor Morgan Derbyshire

Councillor Terry Hone

Councillor Simon Bloxham

Councillor Sean Nolan

Councillor Terry Tyler

Councillor Kay Tart