

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**



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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2017 - 2018**

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## **Foreword from the Chair**

At the end of the last civic year I reflected on an Overview & Scrutiny committee containing thoughtful and insightful commentators, who effectively balanced a supportive and challenging interrogation of the executive decisions of the Council. However, I still encouraged the members to bring boldness, and a deeper understanding of the impact of decisions, to 2017/18.

The success of this approach was never more apparent than through the scrutiny of the new waste contract where a single item meeting was arranged, only to be followed by a call-in of the subsequent executive decision. The depth and integrity of the scrutiny, from across the political demographic, yet again showed the committee to be focused and clear in its desire to provide only the best services for the residents of North Hertfordshire.

Not all proposals were supported by the committee as a whole - and therefore were not recorded as formal recommendations - but there is no doubt that the quality of the discussions will have been absorbed by the Executive and our work will continue to impact on the decision-making process of the Council.

We are very proud that twenty-six members of the public attended the committee's meetings this year with some making valuable contributions to our process. This is an area where we can always do better and so this should be a priority for the committee in 2018/19.

I would once again like to extend my thanks to each member of the committee for their support and to each officer and executive members who attended and added value to our work.

Special thanks to my vice-chairman Steve Hemingway, scrutiny officer, Brendan Sullivan, and clerk Hilary Dineen, who provided the appropriate support and challenge to me in my role as the Chairman.

We are looking forward to a 2018/19 civic year containing even more supportive scrutiny of the Council's decisions, a reflected Task & Finish group structure, and a deep interrogation of some key decisions and projects undertaken by the authority and its leadership.

Cllr Cathryn Henry  
Chairman

## **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 in order to scrutinise as many topics as possible 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;
- 1.2 This year, the Committee has continued to put more emphasis on its overview function while still continuing its scrutiny role. Its Committee meetings sought to take a more strategic view of the Council's work while still examining the Executive's major decisions.

## **2. Meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

- 2.1 There were six scheduled meetings this year at which the Committee considered a range of topics including scrutinising key decisions going to Cabinet, checking whether the Council has met its performance indicators as well as reviewing other issues which the Committee has decided would benefit from closer scrutiny. The Committee held an additional meeting in advance of Cabinet meeting which was expressly convened to consider the Council's proposed waste contract. At that meeting detailed consideration was given to all of the reports which Cabinet subsequently received (see 2.3.5 below)
- 2.2 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 Cabinet 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.
- 2.3 Call-In
- 2.3.1 The call in process allows the Chairman 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.

2.3.2 The Committee can ask the Executive to reconsider it or can refer it to Council.

2.3.3 This year the Committee called in Cabinet's decision to change its Waste Management Contract and commence a Shared Service for Waste and Street Cleansing and at the same time commence charging for the collection of Green Waste.

2.3.4 On 9 October 2017 an additional meeting was called with a single focus for its agenda – that being the new waste contract. This meeting made a recommendation to Cabinet that, in respect of the proposal to charge for the collection of Green Waste, Cabinet give due weight to the feedback from the public consultation.

2.3.5 Following a decision by Cabinet to introduce a chargeable waste service, the decision was called-in and a meeting was held on 9 November 2017 at which it was resolved, following a recorded vote, that no further action be taken.

#### 2.4 Presentations by Executive Members.

2.4.1 The Committee decided not to continue its previous practice of inviting Executive Members to speak regarding their portfolios on a rolling basis. They decided that the Committee would rather invite Executive Members only to address specific issues or to present reports that were of interest to the Committee. The Committee are grateful to the following Executive Members for making presentations this year:

- Councillor Jane Gray
- Councillor Bernard Lovewell
- Councillor Michael Weeks

#### 2.5 Crime & Disorder Scrutiny

2.5.1 The Committee is also the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee for North Hertfordshire which is required to meet at least once a year. The Committee was grateful to Chief Inspector Julie Wheatley of Hertfordshire Constabulary who attended the Committee in December to talk about the work of the police in the district. CI Julie Wheatley is responsible for Neighbourhood Policing across North Hertfordshire and has Chaired the Community Safety Partnership since mid 2016.

## 2.6 Safeguarding

2.6.1 The Committee continued to take a close interest in safeguarding matters and received its annual update on the Council's safeguarding performance in September 2017.

## 2.7 Statistics

2.7.1 In total, the Committee has considered 29 items in its meetings this year. It has made 4 recommendations on 3 topics to Cabinet. Where the Committee supported the recommendations no onward recommendations were made to Cabinet

2.7.2 One written question was asked by Members during the year. This question related to the identification of access problems to new developments.

## **3. Task and Finish Groups in 2017/18**

3.1 Task and finish groups are an opportunity for members to scrutinise a topic in much more depth than is possible in a single Committee meeting. They recommend improvements to the Council's performance which are then considered by Cabinet.

3.2 The Committee held a debate regarding the value of Task and Finish Groups and whether the recommendations resulting from them added value to the work of Cabinet and the Council

3.3 The Committee decided not to undertake any further Task and Finish Groups until such time as it could be ascertained how best to act as a critical friend and support Cabinet in their decision making. To this end a workshop is being developed for all members of Overview and Scrutiny and Cabinet to discuss the best way forward to ensure that the outcomes add value.

## 3.4 The Council's Management of Larger Projects

3.4.1 This TFG's remit was to review the effectiveness of the Council's management of its larger projects.

3.4.2 It considered a range of projects between September 2016 and February 2017 and considered the report of the T&F Group in June 2017. The Committee raised queries in relation to a number of matters in that report and these were responded to by the T&F Group.

## **4. Future Task and Finish Groups**

- 4.1 The Committee has prioritised the following topics for 2018/19:
- Consultation;
  - Impact of the Grants Policy Review;
  - Section 106 Funding.
- 4.2 The Committee decided that the following topics be kept in reserve:
- The Urban/Rural Divide;
  - The value for money of NHDC's Document Centre;
  - Balancing cost savings against possible environmental impacts.
- 4.3 The Committee has undertaken to look at the Hitchin Town Hall and Museum project once it has finished.

## **5. Public Participation**

- 5.1 The scrutiny process is open to involvement by local people and the Committee encourages public participation.
- 5.2 Approximately 26 members of the public attended the Committee's meetings this year.
- 5.3 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.

## **6. Further Information and Membership**

### **6.1 Further information**

- 6.1.1 Further details 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-committee>

## 6.2 Membership

### 6.2.1 Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2017 – 2018

#### **Members of the Committee**

Cllr Cathryn Henry (Chairman)  
Cllr Steve Hemingway (Vice-Chairman)  
Cllr Ian Albert  
Cllr Clare Billing  
Cllr John Booth  
Cllr Bill Davidson  
Cllr Steve Deakin-Davies  
Cllr Elizabeth Dennis  
Cllr Jean Green  
Cllr Steve Jarvis  
Cllr Ben Lewis  
Cllr Gerald Morris  
Cllr Michael Muir  
Cllr Janine Paterson  
Cllr Frank Radcliffe  
Cllr Valentine Shanley

#### **Substitutes**

Cllr John Bishop  
Cllr Paul Clark  
Cllr Simon Harwood  
Cllr Terry Hone  
Cllr Paul Marment  
Cllr Mike Rice  
Cllr Adrian Smith  
Cllr Martin Stears-Handscomb