



**North
Herts
Council**

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT
2023/2024**

Overview and Scrutiny Committee Vice-Chair's Foreword

I would like to thank all Members who served on the Committee this year; officers who were involved in preparation for our meetings, and both officers and members of Cabinet who presented reports.

It is an important step forward for us to have a dedicated, part-time Scrutiny Officer appointed to help us with our forward planning. I think that the role will allow us to expand our critical friend role in a non-political, supportive way.

This year we finally received the past Chair's report on the Lord Lister call to account, September 2022. The Harkness Court call to account was instigated and completed in 2023. The Chair's report for Harkness Court is now available.

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 responses that are helpful and challenging; both at the beginning and end of important decision cycles.

The Committee has set up a work programme which provides focused Member oversight, encourages open debate and seeks to achieve service improvement through effective policy development and meaningful policy and service change. The importance of Members being able to drill down into the detail of an aspect of the work programme is met within the Pentana and Ideagen software. Training materials for this are in preparation in time for the 2024 induction session.

Val Bryant

Vice-Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 2023-24

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 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 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 present reports from their relevant portfolio that were of interest to the Committee or to address specific issues.
- 5.2 Executive Members have taken leadership on presenting relevant reports to the Committee during this Civic Year, with Officer support being limited to answering specific or detailed questions.
- 5.3 Executive Members are also welcomed when attending meetings and encouraged to take part in the meeting when appropriate.
- 5.4 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 Hate Crimes in North Herts.
- 6.3 Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed [here](#).

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 2023.
- 7.2 Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed [here](#).

8. Statistics

- 8.1 In total, the Committee has considered 47 items at its scheduled meetings this year.
- 8.2 It has made 17 recommendations on 15 topics to Cabinet. At every meeting the Committee also considered the resolutions previously made, referrals onto Cabinet and their outcome and the work programme.
- 8.3 No written questions were submitted this year.

9. Task and Finish Groups

- 9.1 Following discussions with the Chair, Vice-Chair and lead Officers, it was agreed that, due to the length of time since the request to hold a Task and Finish Group on Communications Policy, it would no longer be suitable to proceed with this. It

was agreed that the policy itself would be reviewed by the Committee and then further monitored once the policy had been implemented.

- 9.2 Group Leaders have been provided with a document to circulate to their Members outlining the process and function of the Task and Finish Groups. This will allow groups to create a 'pool' of Members who have indicated they wish to sit on a future Task and Finish Group.

10. Public Participation

- 10.1 The scrutiny process is open to involvement by local people and the Committee encourages public participation.
- 10.2 Four 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 517 views. The average view duration of a recording was 8 minutes 51 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 In 2020 the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) undertook a review, the review report and Action Plan were agreed through Cabinet on 24 March 2020 and 23 June 2020, respectively. A follow up review was undertaken by different LGA CPC Peers during 2022 and a further LGA Peer Committee Support report was issued in January 2023 and a number of further recommendations were made.
- 11.2 Their initial findings included several recommendations which were first presented to the Committee as an Action Plan at the meeting on 20 June 2023 for consideration and was referred onto Cabinet to approve. The Action Plan was agreed by at the meeting on 27 June 2023.
- 11.3 Since this the Action Plan was approved, this have been presented throughout the year to the Committee for consideration at each meeting under the Work Programme item.
- 11.4 Some of the key recommendations included in the Action Plan were:
- To ensure effective training is provided for Members, as well as specific training to opposition Councillors.
 - To urgently fund and recruit a dedicated Scrutiny Officer.
 - To establish clear lines of questioning and associated processes.

- To develop clear reporting lines between Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny, including providing updates on referrals made.

12. Call to Account – Harkness Court

12.1 A Call to Account took place at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 7 November 2023, which looked at the Harkness Court Refurbishment undertaken by the Council.

12.2 The Officers involved in the Call to Account were:

12.2.1 Steve Crowley – Service Director – Enterprise

12.2.2 Nafees Parkar – Building Surveyor

12.3 No Members were requested to provide their account to the Committee.

12.4 A Chair's Report on the Call to Account was not provided before the end of the 2023/24 Civic Year and therefore the recommendations could not be considered by members of the Committee.

12.5 The Vice Chair for the Civic Year 2023/24 produced a report on this which was presented at the first meeting of the Committee in the Civic Year 2024/25. Further details on this Vice Chair's report, including the report itself, the Minutes from the meeting and the recording, can be found here: [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 18th June, 2024, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/agenda/2024/06/18/18th-June-2024-7.30pm)

12.6 Further details on the Call to Account, including documents presented, the Minutes from the meeting and the recording, can be found here: [Agenda for Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday, 7th November, 2023, 7.30 pm | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/agenda/2023/11/07/7th-November-2023-7.30pm).

13. Further Information and Membership

13.1 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)

13.2 Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2023/2024:

Members of the Committee:

Councillor Adam Compton

(Chair)

Councillor Val Bryant

(Vice-Chair)

Councillor David Levett

Councillor Matt Barnes

Councillor Clare Billing

Councillor Mick Debenham

Councillor Ian Moody

Councillor Nigel Mason

Councillor Ralph Muncer

Councillor Dominic Griffiths

Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason

Substitutes:

Councillor Daniel Allen
Councillor David Barnard
Councillor Raj Bhakar
Councillor Sam Collins

Councillor James Denselow
Councillor Lisa Nash
Councillor Sean Nolan
Councillor Mandi Tandi