



**North  
Herts**  
Council

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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE  
ANNUAL REPORT  
2024/2025**

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## Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair's Foreword

It has been a fascinating and productive year as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The change of administration in 2024, alongside the appointment of a dedicated Scrutiny Officer, created an opportunity for us to approach things a bit differently, and I am pleased with the progress we have made.

The adoption of the Scrutiny Charter has been a significant milestone in setting out how we do scrutiny at North Herts. The Charter embodies all that we are trying to achieve and sets out how we can interact with each other to achieve the best outcomes for our residents. I hope that the committee will continue to lean on its principles for many years to come.

Together we have driven a noticeable shift in favour of proactive scrutiny. The revival of portfolio / service area reviews has been a welcome innovation and has given the committee a more in-depth opportunity to understand and contribute than has previously been the case, at least in recent years.

I am thankful for the way in which our Cabinet members and Service Directors have engaged with the committee. It has been rewarding to see many of the committee's recommendations and debate contributions being sought out and taken up by our Executive members – including on key topics such as museum storage, digital transformation, waste mobilisation, decarbonisation, and a potential learner pool at Royston.

It is a testament to the committee that alongside this packed schedule, we have initiated the first task-and-finish group since the pandemic, on housing developer contributions to infrastructure – a topic which is so important to local people. Thank you to Cllr Muncer and others for taking this on. I look forward to seeing the group's recommendations.

It is important that the council continues to nurture key partnerships, and this year we welcomed the Herts and West Essex ICB for the first time, as well as Hertfordshire Constabulary. Scrutiny can play an important role here, to ensure that these organisations are delivering for our residents. The committee also held its first "call-in" for many years, with members engaging in good faith on an otherwise controversial topic.

I am extremely grateful to the members of the committee - including my dependable Vice-Chair Cllr Tyson - for their commitment and enthusiasm. In an unusually politicised year, together we have made great strides towards creating an apolitical space where the

administration's ideas and the council's performance can truly be put to the test. Throughout the year, you have been consistently well-prepared, made constructive contributions, and ultimately improved the work of the committee. I cannot ask for more than that.

Finally, we are of course indebted to Jeevan, our brilliant Scrutiny Officer – ably supported by James - for their dedication to the committee's programme. Without their determined behind-the-scenes efforts, we would not have achieved anything like the progress which has been made. Thank you both, for all that you have done, and please keep up the good work!

I expect that the coming year will see no let-up in the activity of the committee, with many big projects still in the pipeline and the twin challenges of financial sustainability and local government reorganisation looming large over all council decisions.

It is however time for me to pass on the baton, and I wish Cllr Winchester and Cllr Clayden the very best of luck.

**Matt Barnes**  
**Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 2024-25**

## 1) Overview and Scrutiny at North Hertfordshire Council

- a) The depth and breadth of the Council's work means that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee must use its resources efficiently and effectively 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.
  - Through briefings, verbal and written, provided to Members by Officers and Executive Members.

## 2) Methods of Scrutiny

- a) 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

- a) 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.
- b) There were two extraordinary meetings of the Committee this year.
- c) 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) Scrutiny Charter

- a) Following the Local Government Association Peer Review, a recommendation was made to develop and adopt a definition of what Scrutiny is at the Council.

- b) The Charter has been developed alongside publications from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny which provides best practice for scrutiny committees.
- c) The Scrutiny Charter was adopted unanimously at the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 3 September.
- d) Members are reminded of the Scrutiny Charter at each meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny to ensure that the meeting is conducted with independence, initiative and integrity, and the Charter is made available in full on the Council's intranet pages for Members.
- e) Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed [here](#).

## 5) Call-In

- a) 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.
- b) The following decision made by the Cabinet at its meeting of 11 February 2025 were called-in:
  - (i) Proposed Parking Tariffs for 2025-26
- c) The Call-In was considered by the Monitoring Officer and following submission of the Call-In Request form was considered valid due to not having had due regard for the individuals and communities served by North Herts Council and their consultation.
- d) The Call-In was accepted and considered at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on Tuesday 11 March 2025. Evidence was provided by the 5 Members who Called In the item that the decision was contrary to the principles of decision-making, as summarised in the Constitution at 4.8.23(b).
- e) The Executive Member for Planning and Transport was invited to attend the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to answer questions in respect of the decision made by the Cabinet.
- f) Following the Call-In the Overview and Scrutiny Committee made three recommendations to Cabinet:
  - Cabinet reconsiders the proposed on-street and off-street charging tariffs in Royston and Knebworth in light of the information received at the meeting.
  - Cabinet considers the increase in parking charges based on the updated modelling, specifically around the 4% increase in charges, where this had not been applied to all charges.

- Cabinet notes the importance of Overview and Scrutiny in supporting Cabinet in reaching robust policy decisions and works with the Chair of the Committee to effectively facilitate this.
- g) The recommendations were considered by Cabinet at their meeting at 7.30pm on Tuesday 18 March 2025.
- h) Details of the Overview and Scrutiny meeting at which the Call-In was presented can be viewed [here](#).
- i) Details of the Cabinet meeting at which the Call In recommendations were considered can be viewed [here](#).

## 6) Presentations by Executive Members

- a) The Committee invites Executive Members to speak on their portfolios and to present reports from their relevant portfolio that were of interest to the Committee or to address specific issues.
- b) 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.
- c) Executive Members are also welcomed when attending meetings and encouraged to take part in the meeting when appropriate.
- d) The Committee are grateful to the Executive Members for making presentations and attending meetings this year.

## 7) Crime & Disorder Scrutiny

- a) The Committee is also the Crime and Disorder Scrutiny Committee for North Hertfordshire which is required to meet at least once a year.
- b) The Committee chose this year to invite Hertfordshire Constabulary to discuss Youth Engagement and Crime Prevention in North Herts.
- c) Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed [here](#).

## 8) Herts and West Essex ICB

- a) The Herts and West Essex ICB were invited to provide an update on the challenges facing dentistry in North Herts.
- b) Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed [here](#).

## 9) Safeguarding

- a) The Committee continued to take a close interest in safeguarding matters and received its annual update on the Council's safeguarding performance in September 2024.
- b) Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed [here](#).

## 10) Statistics

- a) In total, the Committee has considered 40 items at its meetings this year.
- b) It has made 44 recommendations on 21 topics to Cabinet. At every meeting the Committee also considered the resolutions previously made, referrals onto Cabinet and their outcome and the work programme.
- c) No written questions were submitted this year.

## 11) Task and Finish Groups

- a) At its meeting on Tuesday 3 September 2024, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved that a Scrutiny Task and Finish Group should be established to investigate and ensure the Section 106 mechanism provides the best outcomes for communities in North Hertfordshire, prior to the adoption of the Local Plan.
- b) Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed [here](#).
- c) The draft Section 106 scoping document was discussed at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on Tuesday 12 November 2024.
- d) Details of the meeting at which this items was presented can be viewed [here](#).
- e) Background training in Section 106 Obligations and Planning Enforcement was provided to all Councillors on Monday 13 January, which was followed by a background paper on Section 106 Obligations was provided to Councillors on Thursday 20 January 2025.
- f) Group Leaders were asked to nominate members for the Task and Finish Group and 5 politically proportionate panel members were confirmed to undertake the investigation. These Members were Councillor Ruth Brown, Councillor Ian Mantle, Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason, Councillor Paul Ward, with Councillor Ralph Muncer elected as Chair of the Group.
- g) The Panels first meeting was an informal meeting on Wednesday 30 April 2025.

## 12) Public Participation

- a) The scrutiny process is open to involvement by local people and the Committee encourages public participation.



- b) No members of the public attended the Committee's meetings to make presentations this year.
- c) Although physical attendance at the actual meetings was extremely low, recordings of the meetings on YouTube have received a total of 752 views. The average view duration of a recording was 11 minutes 01 seconds.

Meeting	Views	Duration
18/06/24	86	15:50
02/07/24 (Extra)	161	09:06
03/09/24	68	09:13
12/11/24	106	14:28
07/01/25	123	05:53
04/02/25	59	12:55
11/03/25	100	07:45
06/05/25 (Extra)	49	11:49

- d) 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.

### 13) Peer Review 2022

- a) 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.
- b) 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.
- c) 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.
- d) 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.
- e) 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.
- f) These actions have been progressed over the civic year with all but one now being completed. The peer-to-peer training action has been sourced and is on hold until the commencement of the Civic Year of 2025/26 and when the Chair and Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny are appointed.

## 14) Call to Account

- a) The Call to Account process allows Members to scrutinise and review decisions made or actions taken in connection with any Councils functions. Members may request for Cabinet, Head of Paid Service and/or any appropriate Officer to provide an explanation of any matters within their remit, including but not limited to, explanation of:
- any particular decision or series of decisions
  - the extent to which the actions taken implement Council policy; and/or
  - their performance
- b) No Call to Accounts took place in Civic Year 24/25.

## 15) Further Information and Membership

- a) Further information about the work of scrutiny and contact details can be found [here](#)
- b) Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2024/2025:

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

Councillor Matt Barnes (Chair)  
Councillor Tom Tyson (Vice-Chair)  
Councillor Tina Bhartwas  
Councillor Jon Clayden  
Councillor Elizabeth Dennis  
Councillor Ralph Muncer  
Councillor Louise Peace  
Councillor Martin Prescott  
Councillor Laura Williams  
Councillor Claire Winchester  
Councillor Donna Wright  
Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason

### **Substitutes:**

Councillor David Barnard  
Councillor Clare Billing  
Councillor David Chalmers  
Councillor Emma Fernandes  
Councillor Keith Hoskins  
Councillor Sean Prendergast  
Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham  
Councillor Claire Strong