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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 6TH JANUARY, 2026 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Claire Winchester (Chair), Jon Clayden (Vice-Chair), Sadie Billing, David Chalmers, Elizabeth Dennis, Ralph Muncer, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Martin Prescott and Paul Ward.*

In Attendance: *Anne Banner (Benefits Manager), Faith Churchill (Democratic Services Apprentice), Steve Cobb (Licensing and Community Safety Manager), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Jeevan Mann (Scrutiny Officer) and Robert Orchard (Culture and Facilities Services Manager).*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting there were no members of the public present.*

Councillor Ian Albert as Executive Member for Resources, Councillor Mick Debenham as Executive Member for Regulatory, and Councillor Tamsin Thomas as Executive member for Enterprise were in attendance.

Chief Inspector Sarah Gilbertson, Police Sergeant Taranvir Gill and Police Constable Lewis Thompson from Hertfordshire Constabulary were also in attendance.

38 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 29 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tina Bhartwas, Dominic Griffiths and Daniel Wright-Mason.

Having given due notice, Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham substituted for Councillor Wright-Mason.

39 MINUTES - 11 NOVEMBER 2025

Audio Recording – 1 minute 53 seconds

Councillor Claire Winchester, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Jon Clayden seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 11 November be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

40 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 30 seconds

There was no other business notified.

41 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 34 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (3) The Chair advised that for the purposes of clarification clause 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution does not apply to this meeting.
- (4) The Chair reminded Members of the adopted North Herts Scrutiny Charter and the need to ensure that the meeting was conducted with independence, initiative and integrity. The full Charter was available to Members via the Scrutiny Intranet pages.

42 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 42 seconds

There was no public participation at this meeting.

43 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 46 seconds

No urgent or general exception items were received.

44 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 50 seconds

There had been no called-in items.

45 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 54 seconds

No questions had been submitted by Members.

46 CRIME AND DISORDER MATTERS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 2 seconds

CI Sarah Gilbertson, PS Taranvir Gill and PC Lewis Thompson from Hertfordshire Constabulary gave a presentation on crime against the LGBTQ+ Community in North Herts and advised that:

- North Herts Police comprised the Response Team which dealt primarily with 999 calls and the Neighbourhood Team which worked with the public and external partners like the Council to set long-term neighbourhood priorities and needs.
- There were four Police Sergeants in the Neighbourhood Team assigned to Royston, Letchworth, Hitchin and the Community Safety Unit, which addressed hate crime.
- A High Court ruling in 2025 deemed participation of Northumbria Police at the Newcastle Pride Parade to be unlawful as it breached the Police duty of impartiality. Because of

this, Hertfordshire Constabulary had undertaken an assessment of how they supported the community at events.

- Tackling inequality and discrimination remained priorities for them, however, they would not be able to actively participate in events going forward.
- They had attended North Herts Pride Day to give advice on safeguarding, reporting hate crime and to have general engagement with the public.
- They met regularly with the LGBTQ+ Society at North Herts College to gain an understanding of issues among the younger generation. The meetings were also used to provide students and teachers with more information on reporting hate crimes and how their investigations were carried out.
- Presentations had also been given to schools to address specific issues when reported.
- There had been a 12.9% increase in hate crime reported across North Herts in 2025 compared to the previous year. It was speculated that this was partly due to their increased engagement with the community on reporting hate crimes.
- A spike in hate crime reports during the summer months was thought to be due to more outdoor social activities and events taking place at that time of year.
- There had also been an increase in non-crime hate incident reports in 2025 on the previous year. However, 11.5% less hate crime incidents had been solved compared to the previous year.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Sadie Billing
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis

In response to questions, Hertfordshire Constabulary representatives advised that:

- Non-crime hate incidents would continue to be recorded until they received further guidance that stated otherwise.
- Public trust and confidence were key to support the LGBTQ+ Community, hence why they had an officer that was focused on hate crime within their team.
- Increases in hate crime reporting and reporting of violence against women and girls were seen as positive as there had been a lack of public trust to report these in the past.
- They were following the guidance set after the High Court ruling, however, officers from Hertfordshire Constabulary would still be visible at pride events wearing pride lanyards.
- The LGBTQ+ Community were one of the most engaged communities in North Herts according to Herts Connected, and the High Court ruling had not impacted this.
- They had processes to decrease tensions before events took place such as undertaking a Community Tension Impact Assessment.
- Police Officers remained interested in local matters as members of their communities, including the LGBTQ+ Community.
- Hertfordshire Constabulary had a good relationship with schools and colleges in North Herts and openly discussed local issues with them to increase awareness.
- Trends had been seen with online abuse through social media, as well as hateful speech in schools, which they had worked to address.
- Work had been conducted with Muslim and Jewish communities to ensure that they were safeguarded against abuse arising from international events.
- Legality and conduct of stop searches were scrutinised by independent panels with public involvement.
- Victims of crime regardless of prosecution were eligible to access victim services provided by Hertfordshire Constabulary through Beacon Victim Care, and more vulnerable victims were eligible for enhanced support.

- Children that required additional support received it through safeguarding referrals to the Child and Young Persons Team.
- Teachers could act as appropriate adults to report crimes on behalf of children when confidentiality from family members was desired.
- Virtual meetings instead of face to face could take place if preferential to the victim.
- Victim feedback on Hertfordshire Constabulary was gathered through text messages that were sent to victims following the closure of an investigation.
- Mechanisms were in place to ensure that negative victim feedback was taken seriously and that failings could be learned from to inform future actions.
- Public trust could be gained through positive results for victims, which could lead to more hate crime reporting.
- Herts Connected used data from the National Census and other sources to inform them of the engagement levels with each demographic.
- Strategic reviews with officers of all levels were held to discuss engagement levels and hold them to account by setting targets.
- Engagement with the public was often face to face, however, they also utilised social media and their Corporate Communications Team to reach out and share success.
- The Sikh Community had been identified as an under-engaged demographic, however, one of their officers was from the Sikh Community which they would use as an opportunity to engage with them and promote representation in their workplace.
- Support from charities both online and based in North Herts was utilised where possible to support hate crime victims.
- A person could be a victim of multiple hate crimes and charges for separate offences would be sought in this situation.
- The best outcome was always sought for victims, and they had out of court powers at their disposal where victims did not desire to give evidence in court such as through conditional cautions or community resolutions.
- Community resolutions allowed victims to have conversations with offenders and in some cases, they would receive financial reparation or a written apology.
- Even when a victim did not want to progress a hate crime case, Police officers would always try to provide closure, and the details of the suspect were kept on record.
- There were several different ways to report hate crime such as through Herts Against Hate, online anonymously or to a trusted adult.
- Education and supporting partner organisations like Crucial Crew to visit schools were some of the strongest methods they could use to change the perceptions and realities about committing hate crimes against the LGBTQ+ Community.

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that Members should direct questions regarding the interpretation of the High Court ruling towards her as the Council representative on the Hertfordshire Police and Crime Panel.

Hertfordshire Constabulary representatives continued their presentation on cybercrime against the elderly and advised that:

- £1.3 billion had been lost to fraud in 2023, with a significant proportion of that linked to cyber-enabled crime.
- The older adult demographic had been identified as the highest risk group of cyber-enabled crime
- Phishing and investment scams were the most common cybercrimes reported by the elderly, with an average of £21,000 lost per victim.
- Romance scams targeting older adults had increased by 30% in 2023.
- Tech support scams where criminals pretended to be from a secure or trusted source were getting more common, and identity theft remained prevalent.
- They had a dedicated Fraud and Cyber Policy that was refreshed annually and contained four procedural aims to respond effectively to fraud and cybercrime.

- Action Fraud were the national lead police unit for fraud and cybercrime in the UK. They investigated cybercrime trends, and referred cybercrime cases to local forces such as Hertfordshire Constabulary, who had a Fraud Triage Manager responsible for reviewing these.
- An eastern region special operation unit dealt with higher value cybercrime.
- Calls from cybercrime victims were recorded and sent to the Fraud Triage Manager for review and were allocated depending on whether the crime was about to take place or had already happened and more lines of enquiry were needed.
- Banking Protocol was an agreement with several banks and building societies nationally where police officers would attend scenes of suspected fraud to have conversations with suspected victims before any funds were withdrawn.
- Reports from the National Fraud Intelligence Bureau sat within the London City Police and were issued to local forces if trends were spotted.
- Vulnerability to Fraud Notifications were sent to banks and buildings societies to identify residents that would be vulnerable to fraud to help the prevention of cybercrime.
- 742 engagements had taken place with members of the older adult demographic in Hertfordshire with the majority of those being on cyber awareness.
- Cybercrime education had been provided to the elderly by officers in libraries and care homes as they recognised that it was the key to prevention.
- Older adults were the second most engaged demographic according to Herts Connected. However, further engagement was still needed and more advice surgeries were planned for 2026.
- Beacon Victim Care, Trading Standards and Hertfordshire County Council Shared Anti-Fraud Service would also attend these surgeries.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Sadie Billing
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Paul Ward

In response to questions, Hertfordshire Constabulary representatives advised that:

- Members were encouraged to advise residents to call 101 if they were unsure of a situation and suspected the involvement of cybercrime.
- They would do everything in their power to prevent repeat cybercrime.
- The young person demographic was more engaged than the older adult demographic as detailed by Herts Connected.
- There was no indication that youths were more susceptible to cyber dependant crime in general, however, it was noted that they may be more susceptible to false purchasing.
- Significant law changes would be coming to the policing of social media platforms.
- Repeat cybercrime victims showed that something had gone wrong in the prevention process. The Vulnerability to Fraud Notification was designed to avoid this to put prevention measures in place like two-step authentication.
- Repeat victims of rogue traders were often seen where details of victims had been shared into a wider criminal network and other criminals had used these later on.
- Significant markers were placed onto addresses where cybercrime susceptible residents had been identified. This helped them to respond to 101 calls from neighbours urgently.
- Some funding had been given to them to install smart doorbells at addresses where cybercrime susceptible residents were identified.
- The biggest increase in romance cybercrime nationally took place during the COVID-19 pandemic with the most affected demographic being older adults.
- Members were encouraged to attend the scheduled library sessions in 2026.

- If Members knew of any cybercrime hotspots, they should contact them.
- All Police Officers were aware of Herts Connected and they ran social media campaigns to highlight its importance to the public. Registering for it was easy and they could track who had joined to allow them to promote it to those who had not.
- Communications sent through Herts Connected could be targeted towards relevant households.

Following the conclusion of this item, there was a break in proceedings and the meeting reconvened at 21.22. During the break, Councillor Martin Prescott left the Council Chamber and did not return.

47 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2025-26 (QUARTER 2 UPDATE)

Audio recording – 1 hour 52 minutes 6 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources presented the report entitled 'Council Delivery Plan 2025-26 (Quarter 2 Update)' and advised that:

- The report outlined the most recent update for the Council Delivery Plan (CDP) including Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and the associated risks.
- Members could access more detail on the CDP through Ideagen as detailed in paragraph 8.10 of the report.
- Two projects had been completed which were the King George V Skate Park in Hitchin and the implementation of the Waste and Street Cleansing Contract.
- Data on the KPI relating to missed bin collections per 100,000 lifts had been explained in paragraph 8.5.
- The five projects with an amber status were outlined in paragraph 8.2.
- Actions to address the KPIs with a red status had been set out in paragraph 8.4, although, the KPI relating to Careline Installations had seen a recent improvement.
- Proposed KPIs that would link more closely to the Council Plan in response to the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge report were detailed in paragraph 8.7.
- There was an error in Appendix A to the report as there had not yet been a further report on Churchgate to Full Council, which had been scheduled to happen on 4 December 2025.
- A full-time Project Manager had been appointed to the Churchgate project and several meetings had taken place before Christmas to explore development options.
- Work would continue to look at the project for housing options and the market, and the Churchgate Project Board had expressed desire to improve parking signage in Hitchin.
- A Member Briefing on Churchgate would take place in late January or early February to ensure transparency and to allow questions to be asked.
- Decisions on the future of Charnwood House would be made in due course once the documents from the Estates Team on an Expression of Interest exercise had been reviewed.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Claire Winchester

In response to questions, Councillor Ian Albert advised that:

- It was expected that the Churchgate update report, delayed from Full Council in December, would be presented to Full Council on 26 February 2026.

- A Churchgate Project Board meeting would take place on 20 January to finalise the position of the project before the Member Briefing and Full Council meeting.
- Investigation would take place into how Members received information about events in their area, specifically larger events that were supported by the Safety Advisory Group.
- Cabinet were responsible for the risks and mitigations within the Council Delivery Plan, and ultimately, its delivery.

In response to questions, Councillor Tamsin Thomas advised that extra time had been spent on Churchgate to ensure that a robust update would be provided at the Member Briefing and Full Council meeting.

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that:

- The CDP was not used to performance manage the Senior Leadership Team as some of the KPIs and project deadlines were set to be ambitious rather than easy to achieve. Instead, focus was given to why they were not met and the actions to address these.
- Missed bin collection data was recorded and verified by Veolia, however, this would be checked with the Waste Team to obtain further updates.
- CO₂ figures were produced annually and there was lots of data processing involved to produce these, however, this would be checked with the Climate Change and Sustainability Project Manager when the next set of data was due.
- The Customer Service Centre (CSC) provided a good training ground for new starters, particularly apprentices who were promoted to other internal roles which contributed to staff retention issues, but was positive for the Council.
- Results from the implementation of AI to phone lines to handle basic CSC enquiries had been positive and reduced the need for human intervention.
- An update on staff retention issues and the use of AI for phone lines would be obtained from the Customer and Digital Services Manager in due course.

Councillor Jon Clayden proposed and Councillor David Chalmers seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee:

- (1) Provided comment on the Council Delivery Plan Quarter 2 monitoring report.
- (2) Determined any project they want to receive more detail on, as part of the next monitoring report.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That Cabinet notes progress against Council projects and performance indicators, as set out in the Council Delivery Plan (Appendix A) and approves new milestones and changes to milestones.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: The Council Delivery Plan (CDP) monitoring reports provide the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and Cabinet, with an opportunity to monitor progress against the key Council projects, and understand any new issues, risks, or opportunities.

48 INFORMATION NOTE: MUSEUM COLLECTION FACILITY UPDATE

Audio recording – 2 hours 17 minutes 57 seconds

Councillor Tamsin Thomas, as Executive Member for Enterprise presented the Information Note entitled 'Museum Collection Facility Update' and advised that:

- There had been a need to address the long-term future of the museum collection facility.

- Members who had not already visited the existing facility were invited to do so.
- Failure to provide an adequate facility for the Museum collection would affect the accreditation of North Herts Museum and its ability to operate.
- The majority of the Museum collection was not currently on public display.
- Pressure on the existing facility would only increase as the Museum was the designated receiver for any finds in the district resulting from excavation, which would increase due to the surge in development arising from the Local Plan.
- The project had been delayed repeatedly at some cost. However, the acquisition of the new facility had been secured for significantly less than the £4M capital budget.
- A Project Board had been formed to oversee the project, which would be managed in line with the standard project management methodology.
- The facility would safeguard the accreditation of the Museum as well as the collection itself once complete.
- The purchase of the new facility took place in July 2025, and the lease to the current tenants had been extended to ensure the Council would receive an income stream while plans for the new facility were made.
- A summer exhibition had been held by the Museum to showcase artifacts in storage at the existing collection facility. Additionally, a monthly series had been launched in December to highlight more items in storage.
- A positive response had been received to an expression of interest on grant funding that would assist outreach efforts.
- Advanced negotiations were ongoing with a contractor that would provide Professional Technical Services to carry out the design work for the new facility.
- Project progress had been shown in the Gantt Chart displayed in Appendix 1 to the Information Note.
- Investigations into the moving process of the Museum collection were already underway, including an ascension strategy that would cover the addition and removal of collection artifacts as the collection was moved.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Jon Clayden

In response to questions, Councillor Tamsin Thomas advised that:

- Unlike the project at Harkness Court, this capital project had a Project Board with the Culture and Facilities Service Manager as the Project Manager and the Director – Enterprise as the Accountable Officer.
- Grant funding available was linked to public engagement projects which would present an opportunity for them to maximise public engagement through increasing awareness of the Museum, strengthening outreach to schools, and building their volunteer network.
- There were no concerns that Local Government Reorganisation would affect the project if its delivery remained on schedule. However, if enough progress had not been made, there would be concerns over the facility being redeployed to address other storage needs, subject to the decisions of the subsequent unitary authority.

In response to questions, the Culture and Facilities Service Manager advised that:

- The estimated cost of a long-leasehold at £2.5M – £2.7M had been correct.
- The capital budget for the project had been reduced to £3M and unforeseen costs in the design stage might cause the project to exceed this, but equally, savings might also be made to keep it within budget or take it below.
- The Design Team would be responsible for producing the technical specifications for the new facility which would inform the construction and renovation phase of the project.

The timeline on this was unconfirmed but if any progress on this was made before the next Committee meeting, it could be presented with the Enterprise Portfolio Update.

- Baseline project funding would guarantee the safeguarding of the collection from the existing facility to the new one, and any grant funding would help them to maximise the community and outreach benefits of the project.

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that there were intentions to place the project onto the Council Delivery Plan, therefore, Members would receive quarterly updates on the project and further update requests could be made by the Committee if necessary.

Councillor David Chalmers noted that it was encouraging to see plans for the new facility to be used as an asset to engage the community.

The Chair thanked Councillor Tamsin Thomas and the Culture and Facilities Service Manager for their verbal presentation.

49 EFFECTIVENESS OF COUNCIL TAX REDUCTION SCHEME AND PROPOSALS FOR 2026/27

Audio recording – 2 hours 37 minutes 32 seconds

Councillor Ian Albert, as Executive Member for Resources presented the report entitled 'The Council Tax Reduction Scheme (Effectiveness and Proposals for 2026/27)' and advised that:

- The history of Council Tax support offered to working age residents, including the introduction of a banded scheme in April 2023, was detailed in section 7.
- Regulations for Council Tax support relating to pension age residents were set by the Government rather than the Council.
- More detail on the current scheme, including an assessment of its effectiveness and affordability, had been provided at the beginning of section 8.
- An ideal Council Tax Reduction Scheme (CTRS) would provide support to those that needed it most, however, the report highlighted the difficulties in measuring its effectiveness.
- Disregards incorporated into the scheme were set out in paragraph in 8.2.
- The campaign by Marie Curie to prevent residents from dying in poverty and the actions that local authorities could take to address this through Council Tax reductions were described in paragraph 8.14.
- The differences between North Herts Council CTRS and the scheme offered by Manchester City Council as the exemplar authority for the campaign were described in paragraph 8.16.
- Marie Curie acknowledged that changes to the CTRS policy would take time to achieve due to the consultation required, however, they were yet to provide a response to the Council on their CTRS which provided up to a 100% Council Tax reduction for residents.
- Each threshold band would be uplifted by inflation as detailed in paragraph 8.19.
- The Council should be proud of their CTRS and the work of Officers.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Jon Clayden

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that:

- It was hoped that all residents who needed support were captured by the CTRS and that the proposed changes to the discretionary scheme would provide further stop gaps to ensure this.
- It was anticipated that changes to the discretionary scheme would have a negligible cost to the Council.
- Those that were in poverty due to income would qualify for the main scheme, and the discretionary scheme would provide support to those that were facing additional costs outside of their income.
- It was difficult to predict the financial impact to the Council of uplifting the bands versus keeping them the same, however, it was estimated that approximately the same number of residents would be eligible after the bands were uplifted without accounting for wider economic conditions.
- Keeping the Council Tax bands the same could mean that residents would receive less support with their Council Tax, however, this may also cause difficulties with collecting payments and result in more bad debts.
- The banded CTRS created less of an admin burden than the previous scheme as a change in circumstances was less likely to trigger a review.

In response to questions, the Benefits Manager advised that:

- Increased publicity of CTRS would be done through their website and engaging with customers to encourage promotion through word of mouth.
- The reduction in pension age residents using the CTRS when compared to working age residents was likely due to an increase in pensioner wealth in the district.
- Universal Credit payment data was received to calculate the claims of working age residents which made the process less onerous than before.

In response to questions, Councillor Ian Albert advised that:

- The Council worked with Age UK and other external organisations to publicise several initiatives including CTRS.
- Conversations would be held with officers to ensure that residents who contacted them about the CTRS were sufficiently signposted to all support provided by the Council and external organisations.
- Residents that were in low paying jobs were supported by the CTRS scheme.
- Recording the number of calls where residents reported that they could not afford their Council Tax would be investigated, in addition to the average level of CTRS discount from movement between bands.

Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham proposed and Councillor Sadie Billing seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- (1) Commented on the report and consider any further mechanisms that would provide data on the effectiveness of the Council Tax Reduction Scheme.
- (2) Provided comments on the recommendations to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) To agree to amend the Council Tax discretionary policy to include the support provided to residents with a terminal illness, with the wording detailed in paragraph 8.7, and
- (2) To approve changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme bands to reflect the impact of the inflation.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: To respond to the request from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and to consider changes for next year.

50 INFORMATION NOTE: COMMUNITY SAFETY OVERVIEW

Audio recording – 3 hours 2 minutes 39 seconds

Councillor Mick Debenham, as Executive Member for Regulatory presented the Information Note entitled 'Community Safety Overview' and advised that:

- The Community Safety Team were the first point of contact for sharing information with the Police and they represented the Council on the Joint Executive CCTV Partnership.
- Their duties covered a wide portfolio such as dealing with dog fouling, hate crime, unauthorised encampments and abandoned vehicles.
- Increased budget and resources had been given to their team which they had used to increase patrols in fly tipping hotspots, serve a record amount of Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs), conduct three successful prosecutions, and issue a closure order to a vape shop in Royston.
- Roll out of the Safety Charter for Women and Girls had taken place in pubs and extra safeguarding training had been provided to taxi drivers.
- Safety talks had been held in schools and they had worked with children to create videos for social media on the dangers of a variety of issues from drugs to cyber bullying.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham

In response to questions, the Licensing and Community Safety Manager advised that:

- They had been able to restructure within the team to allow two officers to focus primarily on fly tipping due to the extra funding, with another officer able to cover when necessary.
- The previous Police Sergeant for the Community Safety Unit in North Herts had been recruited to their team.
- School visits were key to capture the younger demographic and target prevention.
- Cross border fly tipping would be resolved through a targeted approach with local authorities in Bedfordshire.
- They were not as reliant on public reporting of fly tipping due to the additional resources they had to station Officers in hotspots, however, Members should reassure residents that fly tipping would be addressed if reports were made.
- When fly tipping was reported but not suspected by an officer after an assessment, a message would be sent to Veolia via the Admin Team for them to clear it. This took longer on private land as they did not have a duty to clear waste there.

- Fines that were given to fly tipping offenders in court were often less than the FPNs that would have been charged by the Council, therefore, there was a delicate balance in publicising these prosecutions.
- Hate crime had not been covered in their school visits as the Police already worked on this, but as one of their partners, they would include them on any future talks on hate crime that they planned to hold with schools.
- The Safety Charter had initially focused on towns, but this would be rolled out to pubs, restaurants and off licenses in rural communities.

In response to questions, Councillor Mick Debenham advised that:

- Fly tipping numbers for the previous year had already been exceeded just six months into the current year due to their targeted approach.
- They could investigate increasing communications relating to positive outcomes from fly tipping to encourage more reporting.
- The rollout of the Safety Charter for Women and Girls would be expanded from Hitchin to more towns and villages across North Herts.

In response to a question to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in the Information Note, The Chair expressed a preference for an Information Note on Community Safety to be presented annually to the Committee.

The Chair thanked Councillor Mick Debenham and the Licensing and Community Safety Manager for their verbal presentation.

51 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Audio recording – 3 hours 26 minutes 48 seconds

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report entitled 'Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2025-26' and advised that:

- Items on Digital Transformation, the Local Plan Review and an Enterprise Portfolio Update were scheduled for the next Committee meeting on 3 February.
- An item had been submitted through the Work Programme submission form on the inability to challenge the 1874 Road Naming Statute.
- The consultation on S106 contributions had finished and the next meeting of the S106 Task and Finish Group was scheduled for 29 January 2026 to finalise findings and recommendations. The final report would be presented at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 24 March.
- One referral on the Decisions and Monitoring Tracker had been presented to Cabinet on 19 November 2025 and been marked as completed.

Councillor Jon Clayden proposed and Councillor Ralph Muncer seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) that the Committee prioritises topics for inclusion in the Work Programme attached as Appendix A and, where appropriate, determines the high-level form and timing of scrutiny input.
- (2) That the Committee, having considered the most recent iteration of the Forward Plan, as attached at Appendix B, suggests a list of items to be considered at its meetings in the coming civic year.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To allow the Committee to set 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.
- (2) The need to observe Constitutional requirements and monitor the Forward Plan for appropriate items to scrutinise remains a key aspect of work programming.

The meeting closed at 11.00 pm

Chair

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