

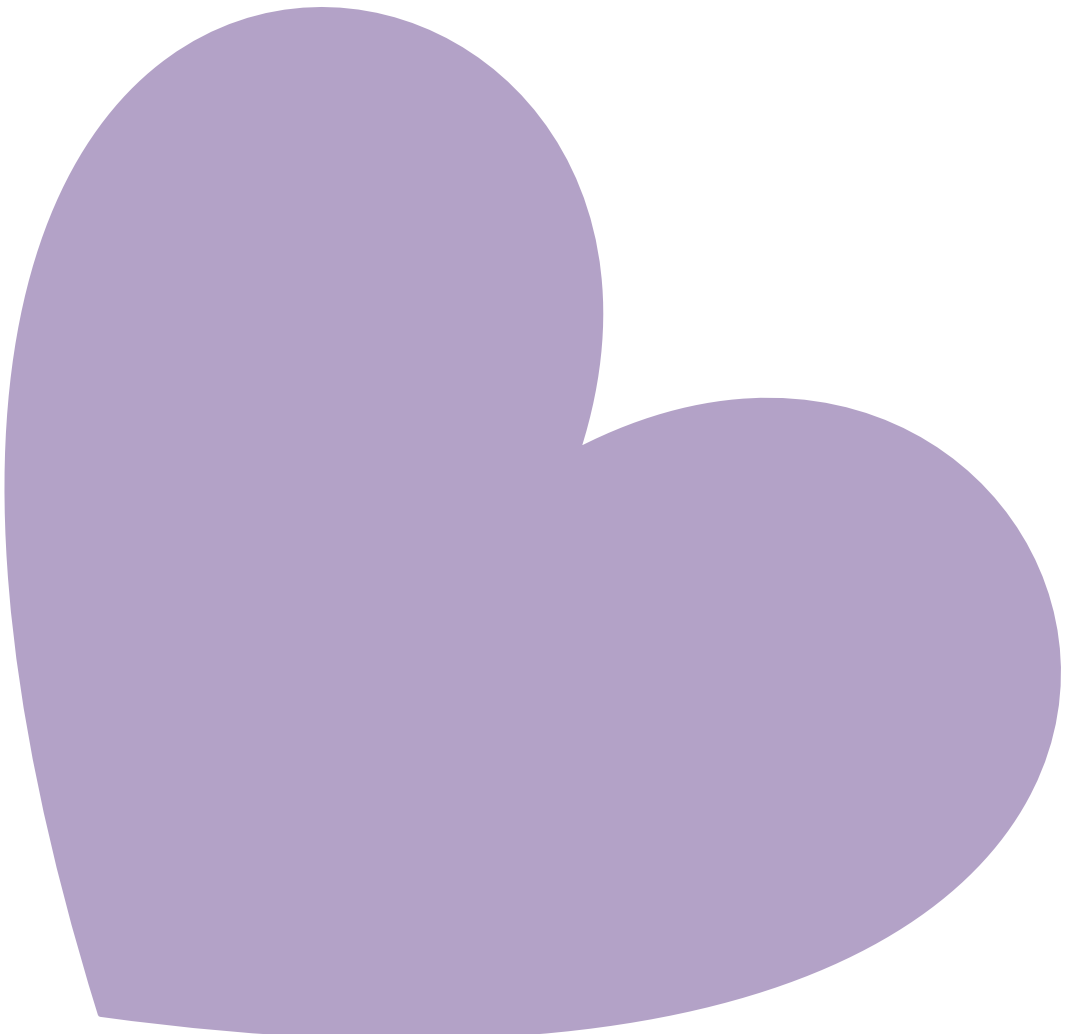


**North
Herts**
Council

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
ANNUAL REPORT
2025/2026**

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Overview and Scrutiny Committee Chair's Foreword

Reflecting on a year as Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, it's clear that we have done much of what we set out to achieve, although there is always scope to improve.

We have continued to work within the framework of our Scrutiny Charter, creating a space for open and apolitical discussions with meaningful and consequential results. I have been proud to be part of a truly cross-party body, and thankful for the astute and thoughtful participation from committee members and the constant support of my Vice Chair, Cllr Clayden.

At a time when this Council has a number of complex major projects underway, scrutiny is an essential process that makes decisions better, fairer and more robust. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee have provided significant insight across portfolios including Enterprise, Customers, Resources, Regulatory, Environment and Place.

This year, we took steps to ensure that Executive Members and Officers present reports as a united team, so that questions could be successfully fielded by the most appropriate person.



We presented a measured and evidence-based report and recommendations to Cabinet from the Task and Finish Group on

Section 106 contributions. I am grateful to members of this group for their commitment and focus on this important work, led by Cllr Muncer.

Although this Authority may not have the time to generate another Task and Finish project, we look to take our learnings into new authorities. As we move forwards, we aim to sharpen our focus and maximise our impact, whilst adapting to the changing situation in local government reorganisation.

In fulfilling our scrutiny function, we have benefited from co-operative working relationships with Directors and Officers. I greatly appreciate this engagement and clear commitment to working productively together. I hope we can continue to build mutually respectful relationships that support service improvement and champion good practice.

My deepest thanks go to the dedicated Officer team who facilitate this committee. Jeevan Mann, James Lovegrove and Robert Fillby have provided warm, unstinting and professional support that has made us a more effective team.

I look forward to continuing to contribute to the important work of Overview and Scrutiny, with full confidence in Cllr Clayden who takes on the Chair and the gavel for the next civic year.

Councillor Claire Winchester

Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 2025-26

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 no 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 2024.
- 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) No items were Called In for civic year 2025-26.

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 Crime against the LGBTQ+ community and Cybercrime against elderly residents.
- c) Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed [here](#).

8) Safeguarding

- a) The Committee continued to take a close interest in safeguarding matters and requested to receive its annual update on the Council's safeguarding performance in September 2025.



- b) The report was postponed in order to carry out work to update the format of the report, revisions of the training offer for both staff and councillors and the monitoring of completion of both the in person training and e-learning module, and develop a safeguarding handbook and one page reference sheet for the making of referrals.
- c) The updated report will be presented at Overview and Scrutiny in September 2026.

9) Statistics

- a) In total, the Committee has considered 30 items at its meetings this year.
- b) It has made 26 recommendations on 9 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.

10) 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, followed by its first formal meeting which took place on Wednesday 16 July 2025.
- h) The Panel concluded its business at its final meeting on Thursday 29 January 2026.
- i) Eight recommendations were identified as part of the Task and Finish group Consultation and presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on Tuesday 24th March 2026.
- j) Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed [here](#).
- k) The Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommended to cabinet to consider recommendations 1-8.
- l) Cabinet considered recommendations 1-8 at their meeting on Tuesday 14th April 2026.
- m) Details of the meeting at which this item was presented can be viewed [here](#).
- n) Cabinet tasked the Executive Member for Place and the Executive Member for Governance, together with relevant Officers, to further consider the recommendations and develop proposals for report to a future meeting of Cabinet.
- o) The Scrutiny Officer is developing a form to receive feedback regarding the Task and Finish Process. This will be circulated to Panel members and Officers who took part or contributed to the Task and Finish Group. Output from the form will be utilised to develop the Task and Finish Group process.



11) 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 750 views. The average view duration of a recording was 17 minutes 21 seconds.

Meeting	Views	Duration
10/06/25	111	08:25
09/09/25	140	31:18
11/11/25	114	15:44
06/01/26	135	13:07
03/02/26	107	16:43
24/03/26	143	18:54

- 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.

12) 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 25/26.

13) 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 2025/2026:

Members of the Committee:

Councillor Claire Winchester (Chair)
Councillor Jon Clayden (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Cathy Brownjohn
Councillor Daniel Wright-Mason
Councillor David Chalmers
Councillor Dominic Griffiths
Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
Councillor Martin Prescott
Councillor Paul Ward
Councillor Ralph Muncer
Councillor Sadie Billing
Councillor Tina Bhartwas

Substitutes:

Councillor Caroline McDonnell
Councillor Clare Strong
Councillor Matt Barnes
Councillor Sam Collins
Councillor Sarah Lucas
Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham