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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER - DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH, SG6 3JF
ON TUESDAY, 24TH MARCH, 2026 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Claire Winchester (Chair), Jon Clayden (Vice-Chair), David Chalmers, Elizabeth Dennis, Dominic Griffiths, Ralph Muncer, Martin Prescott, Paul Ward and Vijaiya Poopalasingham (In place of Daniel Wright-Mason).*

In Attendance: *Isabelle Alajooz (Director - Governance and Monitoring Officer), Faith Churchill (PA - Director Governance), Ian Couper (Director - Resources), Steve Crowley (Director - Enterprise), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer), Jamie Graham (Democratic Services Apprentice), Jeevan Mann (Scrutiny Officer), Polly Simonds (Customer and Digital Project Manager), Nigel Smith (Director - Place) and Melanie Stimpson (Democratic Services Manager).*

Also Present: *Councillor Daniel Allen, as Executive Member for Governance, Councillor Ruth Brown, as a Member of the S106 Task and Finish Group, Councillor Val Bryant, as Leader of the Council, Councillor Sean Nolan, as Executive Member for Customer Experience, and Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, were in attendance.*

At the commencement of the meeting there were no members of the public.

64 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 31 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Tina Bhartwas, Sadie Billing, Cathy Brownjohn and Daniel Wright-Mason.

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

65 MINUTES - 3 FEBRUARY 2026

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 3 February 2026 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

66 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 30 seconds

There was no other business notified.

67 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.
- (5) The Chair informed Members that a Scrutiny Training and Work Programming Workshop for 2026/27 had been arranged for Tuesday 12 May 2026, and that they should try to attend, if available.

68 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 55 seconds

There was no public participation at this meeting.

69 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 57 seconds

There were no urgent or general exception items.

70 CALLED-IN ITEMS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 0 seconds

There were no called-in items.

71 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

Audio recording – 4 minutes 2 seconds

No questions were submitted by Members.

72 COUNCIL DELIVERY PLAN 2025-26 (Q3 UPDATE)

Audio recording – 4 minutes 6 seconds

N.B. Councillor Ralph Muncer left the Council Chamber at 19:36.

Councillor Val Bryant, as Leader of the Council, presented the report entitled 'Council Delivery Plan 2025-26 (Quarter 3 Update)' and advised that:

- The report provided the usual, regular updates on the Council Delivery Plan and its projects, Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and risks.
- Three projects had been completed, including the recently completed project entitled 'Engaging the Community on our Finances'.
- The Museum Collection Facility had been added to the plan as detailed at paragraph 8.2 of the report.
- Projects with an amber delivery status were outlined at paragraph 8.3.
- Actions to address KPIs with a red status had been set out at paragraph 8.5.
- Waste collection performance data was shown at paragraph 8.6, and officers were working with Veolia with to obtain the data for North Herts on this.
- Implementation of new KPIs into the Council Delivery Plan both in 2025-26 and 2026-27 had been described at paragraph 8.9.
- The Committee could specify areas that they would like to see more information on in the next monitoring report, as per recommendation 2.2 in the report.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Dominic Griffiths
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Claire Winchester

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant advised that:

- Data for North Herts on the KPI entitled 'Missed collections per 100,000 lifts (per month)' had been received and would be forwarded onto Members for information.
- The Customer Service Team communicated with other departments to identify where call demand spikes would occur ahead of time, and as a Council, they were trying to spread the delivery of projects and events to prevent peaks.
- Increased calls to the customer service centre were also caused by residents experiencing anxious events or to verify if communications from the Council were genuine.
- Three Member Workshops on the Churchgate project had been scheduled.
- A unitary authority would be able to pick up the new Local Plan as it was anticipated that it would be ready by March 2028.
- Big projects such as Churchgate and the Museum Collection Facility had precise timelines, which gave them confidence to deliver those, even with Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) taking place.

In response to questions, the Director – Resources advised that the error relating to Milestone 12 on page 38 of the report would be corrected to read 'Finalisation and adoption of the Local Plan'.

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

- The next report on Churchgate would be presented to Cabinet in June, but not Full Council. However, future reports on Churchgate would be considered at Full Council once delivery plans had been finalised and the project needed a budget approving.
- Feedback provided by Members at the Churchgate workshops would be taken forward.
- Churchgate was progressing well and professionals had been appointed to assist with the design stage.
- Churchgate was in its early stages and as they continued to carry out work, it was hoped that the risk would decrease as factors became more certain.
- The project plan for Churchgate would be shared with Members.
- Dates relating to the easements of land for the Leisure Centre Decarbonisation project would be clarified to Members at a later stage.

In response to questions, the Chair advised that the report on Churchgate would be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in June before going to Cabinet.

Councillor David Chalmers highlighted that the Council had several large projects underway, and that they would need to continue monitoring how these were being delivered alongside LGR and before the Council ceased to exist.

In response to Councillor David Chalmers, Councillor Val Bryant advised that they had a Council Plan in place, and they would continue working towards the targets within this.

In response to Councillor David Chalmers, Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham advised that they had robust processes in place to manage risks through this Committee and the Finance, Audit and Risk Committee, and the approved budget had committed to delivering projects on their respective timelines.

The Chair summarised discussions and outlined the importance of monitoring complex projects to ensure that they could all be achieved, and they would continue to do this going forward.

Councillor Jon Clayden proposed and Councillor Dominic Griffiths seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee provided comment on the Council Delivery Plan Quarter 2 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.

73 DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME UPDATE

Audio recording – 27 minutes 39 seconds

Councillor Val Bryant, as Leader of the Council, presented an Information Note entitled 'Digital Transformation Update' and advised that:

- The Digital Transformation Programme had accelerated significantly since the adoption of the Netcall platform and the Digital Strategy, which had been revised and shared with Members in January.
- Work had shifted from large scale bills to business process mapping, strengthening resilience, improving customer journeys and ensuring efficient processes ahead of Local Government Reorganisation.
- The programme continued to enhance visibility, transparency and accessibility by improving the digital front door for residents, while maintaining non-digital access routes.
- Grant funding from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund had been used to expand digital inclusion support provided by North Herts Centre for Voluntary Services, who provided skills training devices and Digital Champions to support digitally excluded residents. The remaining funding been used to create a temporary Digital Inclusion Officer position within the Council to analyse exclusion, improve customer journeys and strengthen accessibility across services.
- The Digital Team continued to build accessible, intuitive and compliant digital services supported by customer services insights and clear user guides.
- Major projects delivered such as the Garden Waste platform had reduced manual workload, and improved both accuracy and customer experience.
- Next steps included focusing on business process analysis, improving customer experience, maintaining transparency and ensuring alignment with strategic priorities.

In response to questions from Councillor Paul Ward, the Customer and Digital Project Manager advised that:

- Further updates to the Safety Advisory Group platform would make events more visible to Members through a read-only diary of upcoming events.
- The Co-Pilot Acceptable Use Policy had been signed off and could be shared with Members of the Committee after the meeting.

The Chair thanked Councillor Bryant and the Customer and Digital Project Manager for their presentation of the Information Note.

74 LEASE ON LETCHWORTH MULTI STOREY CAR PARK

Audio recording – 34 minutes 33 seconds

Councillor Sean Nolan, on behalf of the Executive Member for Enterprise, presented the report entitled 'Lease on Letchworth Multi Storey Car Park' and advised that:

- The report set out the surrender of the Letchworth Multi Storey Car Park lease, which would also be presented to Cabinet in April.
- The Martin Group were aiming to undertake a regeneration of the Garden Square Shopping Centre, and as part of this, they had contacted the Council to request a surrender of the lease.
- Negotiations between the Council and The Martin Group on the conditions of the surrender had been detailed at paragraph 8 of the report.
- It was estimated that surrendering the lease would provide a capital saving of £3.4M but could generate a revenue cost of £430,000 over 9 years.

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- Plans by The Martin Group to improve the car park included automatic number plate recognition, increased security, and opening the car park for 24 hours.
- Aspirations for residential parking within the car park would be accommodated as surveys undertaken by officers had demonstrated spare capacity.
- Members representing Letchworth wards who attended a briefing with officers had shown support for surrendering the lease, and no follow up questions were received from those that could not attend.
- Thoughts on the report were requested from the Committee before consideration by Cabinet.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Martin Prescott

In response to questions, Councillor Sean Nolan advised that:

- Parking tariffs had formed part of the negotiations with The Martin Group, and they had recognised the need for competitive pricing with nearby car parks.
- 24-hour parking would be thought to reduce commuter parking around the station where this had become an issue.
- If The Martin Group decided not to redevelop the shopping centre, this would not impact their surrender of the lease.

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

- The Martin Group would have to account for external factors such as tariffs in Council owned car parks and other car parks in the town when setting theirs.
- Season tickets and discounts for wider users of the car park had not been discussed with The Martin Group, but as they were a private company, it was speculated that they would investigate these options to encourage greater usage.
- Comments on the position of The Martin Group regarding the redevelopment could not be provided, but the surrender of the lease had been requested by them to facilitate residential parking, and the feasibility of this had been confirmed by officers.
- The Martin Group were aware of antisocial behaviour in the car park and had detailed additional security measures to address this with 24 hour opening times.

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

- Operating costs, revenue generated, and other values that the lease held such as parking provision for staff had been factored into the considerations and included in the report.
- The above factors were more helpful than using the asset value of the car park.

Councillor Martin Prescott advised that he agreed with the surrender of the lease, as the car park had never been profitable and there were concerns over the costs of repairs required, which would be at taxpayer expense. Additionally, The Martin Group would look to address the issues with antisocial behaviour and maintain parking provision for staff.

Councillor Martin Prescott proposed and Councillor Dominic Griffiths seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That Cabinet approve the surrender of the lease for the Letchworth Multi Storey Car Park.
- (2) That, subject to recommendation 1 above, delegated authority is granted to the Director – Enterprise in consultation with the Executive Member for Enterprise to negotiate and approve the details of any surrender in line with the broad principles in this report.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS: After undertaking a review of the current operation and long-term needs of this car park, the surrender of this lease provides a positive outcome to the Council and the conditions that have been negotiated ensure there will be improvements to the car park which will benefit the public and economic vitality of the town centre.

75 COUNCILLOR LEARNING AND DEVELOPMENT PROTOCOL

Audio recording – 55 minutes 25 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Executive Member for Governance, presented the report entitled ‘Councillor Learning and Development Protocol’ and advised that:

- The report would ensure the formalisation of Councillor learning and development arrangements, with a clear reporting and monitoring process in place.
- It was proposed to provide an annual report on compulsory training to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, which would detail the names of Members who had not completed the required training.
- It was important for Members to complete the compulsory training so that they understood processes and managed risk as there were legal requirements to complete it.
- Two sessions would be held in May for Members to complete their compulsory training, and they were required to attend at least one.
- Members could also complete their compulsory learning ahead of the sessions, but there would be a benefit to attending the sessions as Officers would be able to provide clarifications and support.
- The protocol had been introduced in 2019 and revised to include the processes to be followed when providing compulsory and non-compulsory training for Members.
- Dates for the Member sessions were in the report and had also been shared with Members via email.

N.B. Councillor Ralph Muncer returned to the Chamber at 20:30.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Paul Ward

In response to questions, Councillor Daniel Allen advised that:

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- Non-completion of mandatory training created issues with corporate governance and risk rather than with behaviour or conduct. Because of this, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were best placed to monitor this in their role to hold the authority to account on performance and risk management, rather than the Standards Committee.
- The report would not result in sanctions and would enable transparency and encourage improvement where needed, rather than being presented to the Standards Committee which could result in a quasi-disciplinary process.
- The proposal of naming Members had resulted from other encouragement measures for training being unsuccessful in achieving a 100% completion rate.
- It was understood that Members may have undertaken similar training in their professions or voluntary roles, but this did not negate the requirement to complete the mandatory training provided by the Council.

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

- It was within the Terms of Reference of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to govern the completion of mandatory training as failure to do so damaged the ability of the Council to operate safely, lawfully and legally. Whereas the Standards Committee governed the completion of Code of Conduct training.
- Completion of mandatory training was low, and there had to be accountability for this.
- Failure to complete compulsory training could also be reported to the Standards Committee as it was potentially a breach under Section 17 of the Code of Conduct.
- Paragraph 6.2.7(s) of the Constitution referenced the reasons for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee receiving the annual report instead of the Standards Committee, in terms of corporate risk.

In response to questions, Councillor Val Bryant, as Leader of the Council, advised that publishing a list of councillors who had not completed their training should encourage self-reflection and completion of the training.

In response to questions, the Democratic Services Manager advised that:

- They did not have details of the learning and development protocols of other authorities or whether any published names of councillors that had not completed their training. However, this was not relevant, and the protocol was a North Herts specific document, which should be considered on its own merits.
- It was noted that Group Leaders had endorsed the protocol.

Councillor Elizabeth Dennis highlighted that naming Members for not completing mandatory training would be inappropriate, unreasonable and an unnecessary measure as many Members undertook similar mandatory training in other roles they held, which meant that they were potentially overtrained.

Councillor Martin Prescott advised that Members should complete their training if they did not want to be named in the annual report.

Councillor Ralph Muncer advised that:

- Hertfordshire County Council did not mandate the completion of training, and this Council should also adopt the same approach.
- Members within his party were encouraged to complete the mandatory training, but a lot of them were exposed to the same training through their professions, and there should be a mechanism for them to be able to demonstrate this.

Councillor Paul Ward advised that:

- This protocol related to the personal conduct of councillors, and they should use the Code of Conduct and the Standards Committee to enforce this.
- The Code of Conduct could be amended within the Constitution to enforce this further.
- If the protocol was implemented, there would be a danger of creating a naming and shaming culture, which would further degrade the Code of Conduct process.

Councillor David Chalmers advised that he felt uncomfortable with this protocol and did not agree with publicly naming and shaming councillors, and undertaking this practice would represent a failure of the Council.

Councillor Ruth Brown advised that she would be withdrawing her endorsement for the protocol.

Councillor Claire Winchester advised that:

- There were new developments in the learning and development protocol such as in-person meetings with officer support.
- It was important to discuss the significance of Member training.
- Monitoring individual behaviour on training might be more relevant to the Standards Committee.
- If the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were to consider an annual report, training completion might need to be anonymised to see if the measures introduced had improved completion rates.

In response to additional points made by Councillor Elizabeth Dennis, the Democratic Services Manager advised that:

- The training provided by the Council included information on their reporting mechanisms, which was why they delivered their own training to Members.
- It was not unusual to undertake similar training for different roles as one training course might not be recognised by another organisation.
- The aim of the protocol was not to discipline Members, but to encourage them to complete their training, and any suggestions on how to encourage Members to do this were welcomed as the numerous attempts by Officers had not proved successful.

Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham advised that:

- Failure to complete training could result in the creation of corporate and safeguarding risk.
- Without accountability for Members who had not completed their training, the protocol would be similar to the current version without the proposed revisions.
- Non-compliance by individual councillors would feel more appropriate being dealt with by the Standards Committee, with a bigger picture report being presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Martin Prescott proposed and Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham seconded the amended recommendations, as follows:

- (1) That the Councillor Learning and Development Protocol, attached as Appendix A, be noted and endorsed with the following amendments:

Remove – ‘The report will detail the completion rate of required, compulsory training by Councillors and will detail those individuals who have not completed the specified training by the required date.’

Add – ‘The report presented to Overview and Scrutiny will be a high-level, annual report which will detail the completion rate of required, compulsory training. The Standards Committee will consider individual accountability, particularly in circumstances where Councillors repeatedly fail to attend mandatory training as this is likely to fall below the threshold of expected behaviours of Councillors.’

- (2) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled an ‘Annual Report on Councillor Training’ onto their Work Programme for future years.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Martin Prescott
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Paul Ward
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Dominic Griffiths

The following points were made as part of the debate:

- It should be publicly reported whether Members had completed their training as the public were entitled to know.
- There had not been sufficient consultation on the protocol and the Chairs of the Overview and Scrutiny and Standards Committees should have been consulted.
- Adding the protocol to the Work Programme would not be of benefit to the Committee as it did not add value.
- Many elements of the protocol were good such as the in-person Member training sessions.
- The Code of Conduct and Constitution should be strengthened to ensure that sanctions could be imposed by the Standards Committee on councillors that had not completed their mandatory training.
- Decisions taken in Community Forums and Committees were not made unsafe if Members had not completed their mandatory training.
- Training records could be included on the webpages for councillors.
- Risk should be placed on the councillor themselves rather than the authority if they had not completed their training, but it was acknowledged that this risk could never be fully removed.
- The Standards Committee and the Code of Conduct process had been used on multiple occasions to address complaints, and this protocol threatened the integrity of this process.
- Mutual recognition for training completed outside of the authority should be investigated to avoid repetition of training by Members.
- The protocol should be withdrawn and amended before being presented at a future Overview and Scrutiny or Standards Committee meeting.

- It was appreciated that a process was needed to improve training completion rates, but naming Members was not the right method for this.

In response to points raised in the debate, Councillor Val Bryant advised that Political Group Leaders had been consulted on the Learning and Development Protocol 3 weeks ago.

In response to a point raised by Councillor Daniel Allen, Councillor Ralph Muncer advised that implied consent had been given by officers on the protocol on behalf of him and Councillor Ruth Brown.

In response to an additional question from Councillor Dominic Griffiths, the Democratic Services Manager confirmed that the Member sessions on mandatory training would take place irrespective of the decision on the protocol.

Having been proposed and seconded, subject to the amendment, the motion was put to a vote, following which the vote was tied.

The Chair used their casting vote and, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Councillor Learning and Development Protocol, attached as Appendix A, be noted and endorsed with the following amendments:

Remove – ‘The report will detail the completion rate of required, compulsory training by Councillors and will detail those individuals who have not completed the specified training by the required date.’

Add – ‘The report presented to Overview and Scrutiny will be a high-level, annual report which will detail the completion rate of required, compulsory training. The Standards Committee will consider individual accountability, particularly in circumstances where Councillors repeatedly fail to attend mandatory training as this is likely to fall below the threshold of expected behaviours of Councillors.’

- (2) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee scheduled an ‘Annual Report on Councillor Training’ onto their Work Programme for future years.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure that the Councillor Learning and Development Protocol is current, relevant and includes clear reporting on the completion rate of compulsory Member Training with accountability.

N.B. Following the conclusion of the item, there was a break in proceedings and the meeting reconvened at 21.36. During the break, Councillors Dominic Griffiths and Martin Prescott left the Chamber and did not return.

76 REGULATION OF INVESTIGATORY POWERS ACT (‘RIPA’) ANNUAL REVIEW

Audio recording – 2 hours 5 minutes 21 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen, as Executive Member for Governance, presented the report entitled ‘Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (‘RIPA’) Update and Annual Review’ and advised that:

- The report provided the annual update on the use of powers by the Council under the RIPA, along with the latest outcome of the policy review.
- The Council had not used any of the RIPA powers in the last year, which reflected the cautious approach they took to only use them in exceptional circumstances.

- The amended policy gave several clarifications and updates on Member and Officer roles and responsibilities, guidance on online investigations into social media, and other areas, which were detailed in the report.

Councillor Paul Ward highlighted a formatting error with the flow chart on page 141 of the report.

Councillor Jon Clayden proposed and Councillor Paul Ward seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee noted the content of the report.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: The adoption of the amended RIPA Policy (Appendix A).

REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- (1) The Council is required to ensure it has an up-to-date, compliant and operationally usable RIPA framework that reflects current legislation and codes of practice and supports effective governance and assurance.
- (2) Approval of the updated policy reduces legal, regulatory and reputational risk, supports lawful enforcement activity where required, and strengthens transparency and democratic oversight.

77 SECTION 106 TASK AND FINISH GROUP REPORT

Audio recording – 2 hours 9 minutes 5 seconds

Councillor Ralph Muncer, as Chair of the Section 106 Task and Finish Group, presented the report entitled 'Section 106 Task and Finish Group Report' and advised that:

- The Local Plan adopted in 2022 would deliver 13,000 homes across the district, and reformed Government policies would only add to the burden to deliver housing.
- Communities deserved infrastructure that accompanied housing developments.
- The report provided a review of the current mechanism for S106 contributions, assessed whether it was fit for purpose and made recommendations to improve it.
- A disconnect between the Council and its communities on infrastructure priorities had been identified, and the recommendations would make communities feel that they were more involved.
- Other Members of the S106 Task and Finish Group, the Director – Place, Development and Conservation Manager, Hertfordshire County Council Officers, the Scrutiny Officer and the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager should be thanked for their support and contributions towards the group.
- S106 contributions was a broad policy area, and they had tried to address this through focused recommendations, that would deal with its issues directly.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Claire Winchester
- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor David Chalmers
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Paul Ward

In response to questions, Councillor Ralph Muncer advised that:

- Lessons could be learned from the workings of the group to help inform the workings of any future task and finish groups.
- It had been disappointing to see a lack of consultation responses, particularly from some parties like the NHS Integrated Care Board, therefore, unilateral engagement might be needed.
- It was accepted that the roles of Community Partnership Officers would have to be reprioritised to deliver the proposed recommendations as resourcing was an issue.
- S106 training in recommendation 3 could potentially be offered to Members as well, and communication reporting would keep them better informed about S106 funding.
- There was an organisational readiness and excitement to engage in this proposed new process, as it would have the potential to deliver real benefits to communities now and in the future. However, the focus of engagement as part of this had been with Senior Officers, who had highlighted concerns about resourcing, and it would be for Cabinet to consider whether this would be an appropriate use of Community Partnership Officers.
- Engagement had taken place with Community Partnership Officers. However, more work would be required to explore what the training provided would look like and that it would appropriately delivered to support Officers to feel confident in this proposal to support communities. This work would be explored further should the recommendations be adopted by Cabinet.
- This work would provide resilience to communities ahead of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), and a strong foundation for a new unitary authority to build upon.
- Chairs of Community Forums had not been consulted on the recommendations, but it had been decided that they would be the best place to consider community infrastructure priorities for unparished areas.
- Regulations for the S106 process could not be changed, therefore, the recommendations focused on simplifying the process for stakeholders and closing the gap between local authorities and the communities they served to deliver better outcomes.
- If recommendation 8 was approved, they could explore different ways of making the Government aware of this such as writing to Government Ministers.
- Recommendation 7 may not be fully achievable within current Government regulations, but it would aim to encourage more community engagement by developers and build on the Statement of Community Involvement.
- The response rate to the consultation had been disappointing, therefore, they had released it a second time to capture more views.
- It was hoped that this process would encourage more engagement on planning related consultations in the future if consultees could see that their views had been listened to through the recommendations.
- The lone developer response to the consultation, which suggested having a standardised S106 agreement template, had been noted, and could be considered by the Planning Team to make any improvements to the current process.

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

- The Planning Team were pleased with the recommendations that had been put forward, and they were already investigating the implementation of some of them through the Local Plan review and other mechanisms.
- They were also investigating how they would work with Parish Councils under the new plan making system to help them submit Neighbourhood Priority Statements.
- Pre-application engagement by developers could not be mandated, but they could explore tools to encourage this, such as through a Development Charter.
- The Local Plan and its underpinning evidence meant that developers were not liable to pay S106 contributions for developments of 9 homes or less, but a viability assessment had been commissioned to investigate the possibility of this in the Local Plan review.

In response to questions, Councillor Donna Wright, as Executive Member for Place, advised that the recommendations set out clear, practical measures that could improve how S106 contributions were managed by increasing transparency and community involvement.

In response to questions, Councillor Paul Ward advised that:

- It had been concluded that improving the current S106 contributions mechanism would be more beneficial than replacing it with the Community Infrastructure Levy.
- Recommendations 1-4 would increase transparency of the mechanism, improve skills for those involved, and better prepare stakeholders to respond with their priorities.
- Recommendation 7 had been formed not only to improve community engagement by developers, but also to improve the outcomes from it by ensuring that developers demonstrated how they had considered the feedback from it in their applications.

In response to questions, Councillor Ruth Brown advised that:

- Community Partnership Officers understood communities and could act as a conduit between the Council, Parish Councils and communities where there was a disconnect.
- Timing and community priorities were the main issues with the current S106 mechanism.
- Good community engagement by developers should be recognised through an award mechanism to promote good practice, even if it could not be mandated.

Councillor Ralph Muncer proposed and Councillor Jon Clayden seconded the recommendations in the report.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Elizabeth Dennis
- Councillor Vijaiya Poopalasingham
- Councillor Jon Clayden
- Councillor Ralph Muncer
- Councillor Claire Winchester

The following points were made as part of the debate:

- An additional recommendation should be included for councillors to be trained, empowered and supported to work alongside Community Partnership Officers on the S106 mechanism.
- Councillors should be engaging with community groups already and be provided with S106 training to fulfil their roles.
- Recommendations 2 and 3 should be undertaken with caution as corporate risk would materialise as advice given by Community Partnerships Officers on S106 applications would be open to scrutiny, therefore, the feasibility of this should be properly investigated.
- A response from the Community Partnership Team to the recommendations should be provided before any decisions were taken by Cabinet.
- It was unclear whether Community Forums were the right place to consider S106 contributions, and their Chairs should be consulted.
- Recommendation 1 would ensure that projects could be quickly identified in the S106 process.
- S106 training for Parish Councils would mean less reliance on Community Partnership Officers to help them respond to S106 consultation forms.
- Recommendation 2 had been made after seeking advice from several sources and considering other alternatives.
- Additional resources to better support communities would be strongly welcomed.

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- Recommendation 4 was an easy win and would improve the transparency of the S106 mechanism.
- It was acknowledged that recommendations 7 and 8 were needed and made sense, but it would be hard to fully implement them, and they might have little impact if they could not be made mandatory.

In response to points raised in the debate, Councillor Val Bryant, as Leader of the Council, advised that there would be elections to a shadow authority in 14 months, the budget for 2026/27 had already been approved, and the Executive Member for Governance had not been consulted on the recommendations, therefore, there would be drawbacks in implementing them.

In response to points raised by Councillor Val Bryant, Councillor Ralph Muncer advised that:

- Planning applications would continue to be submitted to the Council up until April 2028, and communities would continue to suffer if they did not act now.
- It was acknowledged that there would be challenges in implementing the recommendations.
- Senior Officers had been consulted on the recommendations to ensure that they would be deliverable.
- Although Executive Members had not been consulted on the recommendations, there would be an opportunity for them to consider the report and its recommendations at the next Cabinet meeting.

Councillor Claire Winchester summarised the discussions and outlined that:

- Upskilling Community Partnership Officers, Councillors and other staff to support S106 applications had been discussed, but they should be aware of the capacity of Community Partnership Officers, who should be consulted on the feasibility of changing their roles.
- Chairs of Community Forums should be consulted on how lists for Community Infrastructure Priorities would be drawn up as these were important.
- It was noted that the budget for the next financial year had been set, and that the Council would cease to exist in two years, but the work undertaken by the S106 Task and Finish Group had been important and could be carried forward to a new unitary authority.
- Better communication and transparency around the S106 process was vital, and work on this was encouraged.
- While recommendations 7 and 8 were less achievable, it was understood why they had been formed.

Having been proposed and seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- (1) Noted the content of the report and its recommendations.
- (2) Provided comment on the proposed recommendations and confirmed which recommendations were to be recommended to Cabinet.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: That recommendations 1-8, as detailed in Appendix A to the report, be considered by Cabinet.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee the opportunity to scrutinise the s106 Task and Finish Group report and to consider which recommendations should be considered by Cabinet.

78 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORK PROGRAMME

Audio recording – 3 hours 20 minutes 11 seconds

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

- Decisions from the previous meeting were attached at Appendix C to the report.
- The recommendations from the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge Follow Up report had been approved at the Cabinet meeting on 17 February 2026.
- A recommendation to note the Decisions and Monitoring Tracker had been missed out of the report but would be incorporated into the report for the next meeting.
- The Work Programme had been attached at Appendix A, and Members were encouraged to provide questions to officers on reports ahead of meetings.
- The most recent Forward Plan published on 13 March was attached at Appendix B.
- Scrutiny Training, which would include Work Programme development for the 2026/27 Civic Year, would take place on 12 May 2026.

Councillor Jon Clayden proposed and Councillor Paul Ward seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee prioritised topics for inclusion in the Work Programme attached as Appendix A and, where appropriate, determined 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, suggested a list of items to be considered at its meetings in the coming civic year.
- (3) That the Committee noted the Decisions and Monitoring Tracker, attached as Appendix C to the report.

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 effectively 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 10.55 pm

Chair