

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, COUNCIL OFFICES,
GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY
ON TUESDAY, 24 JULY, 2018 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors Cathryn Henry (Chairman), Elizabeth Dennis-Harburg (Vice-Chairman), Ian Albert, Sam Collins, Steve Deakin-Davies, Jean Green, Steve Jarvis, Ben Lewis, Gerald Morris, Michael Muir, Oliver, Janine Paterson, Val Bryant (In place of Martin Stears-Handscomb) and Sue Ngwala (In place of Kate Aspinwall).*

In Attendance:

Jeanette Thompson (Service Director - Legal and Community), Reuben Ayavoo (Senior Policy Officer), Sarah Kingsley (Communications Manager), Jo Dufficy (Customer Services Manager), Kirstie Wilson (Temporary Scrutiny Officer) and Hilary Dineen (Acting Committee and Member Services Manager)

16 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Kate Aspinwall and Martin Stears-Handscomb.

Having giving due notice Councillor Sue Ngwala advised that she would be substituting for Councillor Kate Aspinwall.

Having giving due notice Councillor Val Bryant advised that she would be substituting for Councillor Martin Stears-Handscomb.

17 MINUTES - 12 JUNE 2018

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2018 were tabled. Members agreed that these should be agreed and signed at the next meeting

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting held on 12 June 2018 be agreed and signed at the next meeting.

18 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

No other business was submitted for consideration by the Committee.

19 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chairman welcomed Kirstie Wilson (Temporary Scrutiny Officer);
- (2) The Chairman thanked those who met earlier in the evening to discuss a Scope for a Waste Task and Finish Group;
- (3) The Chairman reminded those present that, in line with Council policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (4) The Chairman asked Members to speak into the microphones;

- (5) The Chairman 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.

20 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There were no presentations by members of the public.

21 URGENT AND GENERAL EXCEPTION ITEMS

No urgent or general exception items were received.

22 CALLED-IN ITEMS

No items had been called-in since the last meeting of the Committee.

23 CORPORATE PLAN 2019 - 2024 AND CORPORATE OBJECTIVES FOR 2019-2024

The Senior Policy Officer presented the report entitled Corporate Plan 2019 – 2024 and Corporate Objectives 2019 – 2024.

He advised that the Corporate Plan informed the Corporate Business Planning process.

Since the report was published, it had been amended and an updated version had been tabled.

Minor amendments had been made to the objectives as follows:

Objective 1

Ensure the phrase “disadvantaged people” is used consistently throughout.

Objective 2

To read “To promote sustainable growth both within and where it affects our district to ensure economic and social opportunities exist for our communities, whilst remaining mindful of our cultural and physical heritage.”

The Senior Policy Officer advised that the plan reflected changes in legislation, capacity of the authority, financial constraints, population changes and patterns and location of areas of deprivation.

The Corporate Plan, at Appendix A, recognised the daily activity that the Council undertook

The objectives had remained the same for the last 3-4 years, however the aim was to review and refresh the document for the 2019/20 new Civic year.

The current Corporate Plan was a living document and minor amendments had been made to the published and current Corporate Plan as follows:

Percentage of Household Waste sent for Reuse, Recycling and composting.

The target for 2018/19 had been reduced from 60% to 55%, as the 60% target was aspirational and, although in the future this might be achieved, recent forecasting indicated that performance this year would be lower.

Crime Figures

North Herts had moved from fourth to third lowest in the county.

Third Party reporting Centre

Clarity around what a third party reporting centre is.

CAB

The significant support that NHDC provides to CAB seeks to address the needs of those that live in areas of deprivation

Local Plan

The Submission Local Plan was subject to an extensive Examination in Public, potential sites were subject to individual and group representations made to the Inspector. The forthcoming Modifications put forward by the inspector will be subject to a further consultation process.

We recognise that tensions exist in creating opportunities for growth both to sustain the local population and to meet the growth aspirations of neighbours, including the impact on rail and road networks and the green and open spaces so important to our residents.

- We will review both existing and future green space provision.
- We will represent the authority with regard neighbours plans, policies and aspirations such as with the expansion of London Luton Airport, the growth envisaged within the Oxford/Milton Keynes/Cambridge Arc and London.

Go Local Policy

Expenditure under the Go Local Policy increased 16% to 38%

Town Centres

Acknowledgement of the challenges facing high street/town centre retail and Local plan – social housing provision

Commercialism

Appointment of the Service Director - Commercial in June to drive this agenda for the council.

The progression of the building control company (Herts Building Control)

Highlight of the excellent work of Careline and its expansion across the districts with 16,000 service users.

Areas of Deprivation

Added clarity to identify the areas of deprivation in North Herts.

Financial

Readiness for future reductions that could arise from Business rates retention models, fair funding and new homes bonus allocations.

Members were generally disappointed with the Corporate Plan and were concerned that the document appeared to be a list of past achievement rather than a forward facing aspirational document that included details of future plans and expressed concern that the document was just an amended version of last years Plan

A number of suggestions were made regarding items that should be included in the Corporate Plan including:

- How the Council will continue to address air quality issues across the District;
- Inclusion of aspirational targets rather than Targets that were achievable, so as to encourage improvement;
- More reference to supporting equality and diversity throughout North Herts including work undertaken with LGBT groups;
- More detail on how objectives and targets would be achieved;

- Acknowledgment of changing risks to employment opportunities in surrounding areas such as Stevenage;
- More detail regarding the issues that would have an impact on the organisation and its budget and how these would be overcome.

In response to questions the Service Director – Legal and Community confirmed that it was planned to refresh the Plan in time for the 2020 Civic Year and work would likely start in September 2018 regarding this that would include Member workshops and that the new document could potentially look very different.

Most Members felt strongly that the Corporate Plan was not fit for purpose and needed to be refreshed and there was lively debate as to the appropriate timing for this to happen, with some Members demanding an immediate rewrite, and that there should be more Member involvement, at an earlier stage, in the development of the Plan, possibly through a Member workshop.

Some Members commented that the Corporate Plan had not included some of the most important issues in past years, such as the retendering of the Waste Contract. Decision making was being led by financial issues rather than by this document. In response to a question the Senior Policy Officer advised that the drawing up of a brand new Plan would take a large amount of Officer time.

RESOLVED: That the report entitled Corporate Plan and Corporate Objectives 2019-2024 be noted.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET: The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers that the current Corporate Plan Document is a record of past achievements rather than a plan for the future, and that it should be revised to clearly set out plans to achieve Council's objectives.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Urges Cabinet to revise this Plan at the earliest opportunity.

REASON FOR DECISION: To consider the report entitled Corporate Plan and Corporate Objectives 2019-2024 prior to consideration by Cabinet.

24 INFORMATION NOTE - FULL YEAR UPDATE ON COMMENTS, COMPLIMENTS AND COMPLAINTS (3Cs)

The Committee received an information note entitled Full Year Update on Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3Cs).

The Customer Services Manager advised that this was the annual update regarding the 3Cs and drew attention to the following:

- The format of the report had changed 18 months ago and was a more visual style.
- The number of 3Cs had mostly decreased.
- In 2013/14, there had been a significant increase, but the numbers had steadily decreased since that time so that the level was now reasonably consistent.
- During 2017/18 there had been an increase in the number of comments, which was mainly regarding the planned changes to the waste service and the removal of dog waste bins.
- The leisure centres had received increased feedback following installation of feedback machines.
- All feedback was welcomed and encouraged.
- Complaints were usually responded to within 10 days.

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- Nine complaints were escalated to the Local Government Ombudsman,
- One complaint to the Local Government Ombudsman was upheld relating to Planning and Development, this had previously been reported to the Committee.
- Nationally the Local Ombudsman upheld 60 percent of complaints referred to them.

In response to queries and comments from Members, the Customer Service Manager advised that social media comments and complaints were not formally logged, although complaints were picked up and dealt with.

The Communications Manager advised that analytic data regarding social media use could be produced and there had been a significant increase in social media traffic recently.

Many of the social media posts were not making specific points or complaints, but were mainly people making their voice heard, which could not be recorded under 3Cs. However, if specific issues or complaints were made, the customer was asked to direct message the Council and the issue would then be taken forward and recorded.

A protocol regarding social media was being developed which would address issues such as:

- The Council is not available 24 hours a day to respond to social media enquiries and comments;
- What the Council would tolerate in terms of comments from users;
- How we would deal with comments and complaints

Members expressed concern that the comments, compliments and complaints made via social media were not included in the data and suggested that more sophisticated social media analytic applications should be invested in and utilised.

They were concerned that the protocol for recording comments and compliments seemed less stringent than that for recording complaints and that the protocols used for 3Cs should be reviewed to ensure they were fit for purpose whether the numbers of contacts were small or large.

Members noted that the complaints page on the NHDC website did not mention social media and suggested one of the methods of making a complaint to be by fax. They suggested that this page should be reviewed.

The Customer Services Manager advised that obtaining the right technology, including analytical capabilities, formed part of their future plans.

In response to further comments and questions the Customer Services Manager advised that:

- The web pages regarding complaints would be reviewed.
- The policy stated that third party complaints, such as those from Councillors, would not be recorded, although the customer would be contacted and, if they made a complaint directly, this would be recorded.

Members were concerned that complaints made on behalf of residents by Councillors were not recorded, as the public viewed Councillors as being the Council.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Executive Member be requested to consider obtaining the right technology to ensure that comments, compliments and complaints made via social media, as well as those received by other methods, are able to be analysed, progressed and recorded effectively;

- (2) That the Customer Services Manager be requested to review the NHDC website pages regarding complaints and update it as necessary.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider the full year update regarding Comments, Compliments and Complaints (3Cs).

25 A NEW APPROACH TO SERVICE PLANNING

The Service Manager – Legal and Community presented the report entitled A New Approach to Service Planning.

She advised that the Senior Management Team had reviewed the approach taken in regard to service planning and how this would be presented and agreed that there would be an overarching 4 year Service Delivery Plan with service areas providing input into individual service actions plans all of which would be updated annually.

The new Service Delivery Plan and Action Plans were available on the NHDC website

In response to queries from Members the Service Director –Legal and Community advised that the service action plans had been provided to SMT, who then included any corporate actions in those documents in the Service Plan, the service specific/operational items were then published as the Service Action Plans.

The Communications Manager advised that, as part of the service planning process, SMT considered that latest results of the District Wide Survey, specifically regarding how well informed people felt, whether NHDC consulted with people regarding what they want, whether NHDC engaged with local communities and whether NHDC fully consulted with people, all of which had received less positive results in this survey.

In response to the results of the District Wide Survey, the Communication Team were looking at using new channels of communication and would be introducing an Ebulletin service, where people can subscribe to specific topics, and a digital magazine.

Whilst awaiting the expected Task and Finish Group on Consultation, there had been an interim review of the Consultation Strategy which had considered:

- Staff awareness of the Consultation Strategy;
- How well consultations and feedback was publicised;
- Use of the Citizens Panel.

The Communications Manager further advised that she would be offering the Senior Managers Group a session regarding consultation that would remind Service Managers of the Consultation Strategy, what it is, what the principals are and how consultations should be carried out.

They were also considering how the Citizens Panel could be used more effectively and whether people would like to leave their email address so that feedback could be given on consultations that they had taken part in and the decision taken following that consultation.

Members asked who best the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could support and engage with the development of the Consultation Strategy.

The Communications Manager advised that, her main focus would be on developing the Citizens Panel as they were a group of willing volunteers who could provide a lit of useful information.

Members welcomed the introduction of an e-magazine and queried whether, once introduced, the printed magazine could then be discontinued.

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The Communications Manager informed Members that the number of editions of Outlook had been reduced and there were no plan to stop this paper magazine. Outlook was widely read and well received however it was acknowledged that not everyone read it and that it appealed to a specific demographic.

The purpose of the e-magazine was to reach audiences that were not already reading the magazine and would be much more community focussed. Social media users tended to be a different group of people from those already engaging with us.

Members commented that the list of activities at Section C of the Plan were not prioritised, nor were resources for these activities identified and in respect of service action plans, these appeared to be business as usual topics and again they were not prioritised.

They queried how many people were on the Citizens Panel and whether they were representative in age/gender/diversity etc to the residents of the District.

The Communications Manager advised that that historically the Citizens Panel was recruited when the District Wide Survey was undertaken and it was not representative of the District, however if the Citizens Panel were used more frequently, the limitations would have to be recognised.

The Service Director – Legal and Community agreed to feedback the comments regarding the prioritising of actions plans and that they need to consistent in their content.

In response to queries, the Service Director – Legal and Community advised that the Service Delivery Plan provided a link between the Corporate Plan and Medium Term Financial Strategy and the targets set with staff during Regular Performance Reviews. It was part of the 'golden thread' that linked the Council's priorities with the work of individual members of staff.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the new approach to service planning be noted;
- (2) That the interim review of the Council's Consultation Strategy be noted;
- (3) That the Committee requests that the review of the Consultation Strategy (see 2 above) be taken into account by the Task and Finish Group which considers the subject of Consultation.

REASONS FOR DECISION:

- (1) To ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is aware of the processes in place with the organisation in respect of service planning;
- (2) To inform the Overview and Scrutiny of the interim review of the Consultation Strategy prior to the Task and Finish Group on consultation which will of course produce its own recommendations in due course.

26 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

No questions had been submitted.

27 RESOLUTIONS OF THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

The Temporary Scrutiny Officer presented the report entitled Resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and drew attention to the following:

Complete Resolutions

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A number of resolutions had been marked as complete and would be removed for the next report.

Minute 111 – March 2017 - Resolutions Report –Task and Finish Groups

A training proposal had been received from the Centre for Public Scrutiny.

This consisted of a 2.5 hour training course for all Members and a suitable date for the delivery of the course was being sought.

Minute 31 – July 2017 – Resolutions Report for July 2017

A workshop was still in progress regarding improving relations between the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Cabinet.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the actions resulting from the resolutions of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be noted;
- (2) That the Temporary Scrutiny Officer be requested to canvass the Members of this Committee in order to ascertain the most appropriate date for the Centre of Public Scrutiny training course.

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to review and monitor the progress of resolutions made.

28 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2018/19

The Temporary Scrutiny Officer presented the report entitled Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme and drew attention to the following:

Topics to be scheduled

Paragraphs 8.4 and 8.5 of the report detailed topics that had yet to be scheduled into the work programme.

The Waste Contract

A small group of Members met before this meeting to develop a scope for a proposed Task and Finish Group on the new Waste Contract, this would be presented to the Committee at a late meeting.

The Service Manager – Waste and Recycling indicated at the meeting in June 2018 that she needed a bit of time to gather data and information and to let the contract settle down and it was now time to consider how and when the Waste Contract would be reviewed by the Committee.

Members acknowledged that the contract was not yet of a standard that warranted officers being taken from their duties to report to this Committee, yet there was a timing imperative, as a key officer was due to go on maternity leave and her input would be invaluable.

They were concerned that the Committee had the opportunity to establish whether there were ongoing problems and ask questions as to why they were ongoing.

Councillor Dennis-Harburg (Chair of the Task and Finish Scoping Group) advised that the group had been trying to identify the ongoing issues and prepare a list of questions that could be used as a basis for the Service Manager's report and presentation to the Committee in September. This initial review could then, if required be followed by a more detailed Task and Finish Group.

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Members agreed that the Service Manager – Waste and Recycling, the Executive Member for Waste, Recycling and Environment and a senior Manager from Urbaser should be invited to the September meeting of this Committee.

Members noted that the contract in East Herts was operating smoothly and the reasons for the differences between the areas should be identified.

They agreed that the September meeting should be, as far as possible, a single issue meeting, with scheduled business being moved to a late meeting.

Communications Strategy

The Chairman suggested that, rather than a Task and Finish Group on Consultation, volunteer Members of this Committee be requested to meet with the Communications Manager to advise on the Consultation Strategy and Citizens Panel.

The following Members volunteered:

Councillors Sam Collins, Steve Deakin-Davies and Sue Ngwala.

The group was asked to update the Committee once the work was complete.

Local Plan Modifications

The Service Director – Legal and Community advised that the Inspector did not anticipate coming back to the Council to request further documentation until mid September 2018 and was unlikely to go to Cabinet or Council in September 2018.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Work Programme be noted;
- (2) That the meeting due to be held on 18 September 2018 be, as far as possible, a single issue meeting focussing on the waste contract, with scheduled business being moved to a later meeting;
- (3) That the Waste Contract Scope be finalised and agreed by the scoping group in consultation with the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee;
- (4) That, in place of the proposed Task and Finish Group on Consultation, the Temporary Scrutiny Officer be requested to facilitate a meeting of Councillors Sam Collins, Steve Deakin - Davies and Sue Ngwala and the Communications Manager to discuss the Consultation Strategy and the Citizens Panel and that those Councillors be requested to report back to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee once the work is completed.
- (5) That the group considering the Consultation Strategy and Citizens Panel (see 4 above), be requested to take into consideration the Interim Review of that Strategy (see Minute 25(3))

REASON FOR DECISION: To enable the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to plan and carry out its workload efficiently and effectively.

The meeting closed at 10.10 pm

Chairman